

Why Partnerships? – Some Key Messages

What do we mean by Partnership?

Bishop Séamus describes our Partnerships as:

'A group of parishes agreeing to work together, to share resources, both human and material, to become stronger and better equipped for furthering the Kingdom of God'.

Why have we established Partnerships?

The context

- The reduction in both the number of priests and worshippers makes our existing structures unsustainable into the future. We currently have around 33,000 church goers but this figure is declining by over 1,000 each year. Providentially the priest to church-goer ratio has remained substantially the same since 1980, hovering around the 1 to 350 figure. Sadly the increasing age profile of the clergy is matched by the increasing age profile of church goers. Putting in place wider geographical partnerships provides us with clear collaborative structures and communication channels which are more sustainable in the longer-term.

Some of the key reasons for partnerships

- It is right that we try to implement a plan that is Diocesan-wide. These arrangements offer an approach that works coherently across the whole Diocese yet allows each partnership to take account of its own local circumstances to arrive at the appropriate priorities and plans for that area.
- As most individual parishes lack the necessary resources on their own, sharing the gifts, talents and financial resources of a partnership can offer a new way forward. A wider area can put its resources at the service of more people

and support can be made available for smaller communities.

- Lay people can be formed and developed for the service of their partnership, and priests can be freed to concentrate on their essential calling.
- The number of buildings which we have is unsustainable into the future. Following a partnership level review, the number and use of buildings across an area can be addressed to realistically reflect the number of worshippers and the availability of clergy and lay leaders.
- Partnerships can maximise the opportunity for greater efficiency in areas such as administration, human resources, building maintenance and purchasing across a wider area.
- The word 'Partnership' itself allows for creative possibilities in that it is not tied up with old language or old structures. It encourages everyone to 'imagine new ways' of being Church.
- Leadership teams including priests, deacons and people can develop to help everyone deepen their understanding of what it means to be a witness to Jesus in our world today as missionary disciples.
- The potential for larger events and long-term joint activities than might be possible for one parish to undertake (e.g. a shared approach to outreach work, area-wide strategies to engage young people, joint celebrations and formation activity, social events across the whole partnership etc.)

The aim – to enable growth.