

**Catholic Parish of St Edmund King and Martyr, Godalming  
with St Joseph, Milford**

**Revised Parish Plan – Proposal for comment**

Divine Renovation (DR) has borne good fruit for the parish. Many have spoken of how it has helped generate some momentum and change, and made them feel more a part of vibrant community. Since the parish embarked on Divine Renovation our Bishop, Richard has set out a pastoral plan which places, as he puts it, prayer, formation and mission as core to the proclamation of our one subject, “The Word who is Life”, Jesus Christ. In what follows I hope to indicate how we might continue to take advantage of the principles of Divine Renovation and of the opportunities presented by our Bishop’s pastoral plan, and be faithful to our calling in a (post-)Covid world.

The prayer that goes with Bishop Richard’s plan applies as much to our parish as it does to the Diocese as a whole, and embodies its vision:

*Lord, the Word who is Life.  
May all the people of our Diocese grow in openness to the power of the Holy Spirit,  
so that through a growth in understanding and courage, and truly open to your call,  
we may bear powerful witness to all around us,  
for you are Lord for ever and ever. Amen.*

Recently Bishop Richard has also started to articulate a vision of what a parish might look like, and what follows remains work in progress:

*May our parishes be communities of saints where the liturgy is always recognised as an encounter with the wonder of heaven, where people and clergy, fed by the Word Who is Life, bring that life into every moment of their lives and into every encounter with every other person, where young people grow in deep love for the Gospel, for the Sacramental Life of the Church in and prayer leading them to spread the Gospel, calling others into relationship with Christ.*

The accent on “life” in all this presents us with an opportunity to be more clearly outward facing in our headline. It is *life*, in all its fullness, that we offer, or rather that God allows to be found through us. While the Body of Christ is indeed what we should be, I think a focus on life takes us further on still with a focus on what we (or rather God) offers to *all*.

Looking at the parish and its life through the lens of prayer, formation and mission will, I hope, make it easier to see how each person’s gifts and service fit into a plan and easier to work fruitfully with the parishes around us and in communion with our bishop. I hope it will also identify other opportunities that may help engage other parts of the parish in its mission that don’t seem to have been engaged so far by DR, making us more effective in responding to our call to make disciples of all the nations. I believe that DR should continue to inform our work in the parish and is visible in what follows, even if it seems to cede headline space to “Prayer, Formation and Mission” and “the Word who is Life”. In DR terms, what I hope to do here is to help us live fruitfully the balance and interrelationship between holiness and mission.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Mallon, Divine Renovation: *Beyond the Parish*, p. 47.

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**What are some of the themes and values I might use in speaking about our parish and our life together?<sup>2</sup>**

*“I came that they may have life and have it abundantly”*

In our parish, Jesus Christ calls and forms his disciples, everyday saints, who are filled with the abundant life that he showers on them and whose joy is made complete as they call others to share that same life.

This means that we will be a community of people who:  
are serious about their desire to grow in holiness;  
nourish ourselves on the God who gives himself to us in the Church;  
celebrate the liturgy worthily and well;  
recognise and value the diversity of gifts and listen to a variety of voices;  
live our Baptism in each part of our lives and bring each part of our lives to the Eucharist;  
work with all people of good will  
and especially those for whom Jesus is the Way, the Truth and the Life;  
welcome anyone who, like us, is thirsting for God’s gift of life;  
share in the work of the God of mercy and compassion;  
speak about the cause for the hope that is within us.

**What about the current parish vision?**

It is clear that the parish vision statement is widely supported and these things are usually the fruit of prayer, discussion and discernment. It rightly reflects Fr David’s vision and while I don’t think what I’ve set out is all that different in substance I would call on a different set of images to talk about our parish – who we are and who we are called to become. I don’t suggest we change it at the moment, but perhaps we might see how our thinking develops as we emerge from the effects of the current pandemic.

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<sup>2</sup> I’ve written this section in terms of how I see it. I don’t want to presume at this point that this is how we might speak as a parish, though I offer it for prayerful consideration.

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**The life and work of the parish through the lens of Prayer, Formation and Mission.<sup>3</sup>**

**PRAYER**

The **Sunday liturgy** is central and for that reason must be celebrated fruitfully – as an encounter with the person of Jesus Christ. Since it is foretaste and promise of the wedding banquet of heaven it ought, in some way, to evoke a sense of presence, of something special going on. It is not enough that it is just done. The following contribute to this: a sense of being welcomed and expected; a sense of being part of one of the communities of the community of the parish; the proclamation of the Word of God as something alive and active<sup>4</sup>; homilies and presiding which help those present (including visitors) to enter more deeply into what is going on; music which cries from deep within our being; well celebrated rites<sup>5</sup>; a space which has a sense of being the house of God and the house of the people of God.

**The Word of God** the “gift of the Father for the encounter with Jesus Christ”, especially when approached through *Lectio divina*. I believe this privileged opportunity for encounter is underplayed in DR and is central to some of its sources, such as *Aparecida*. It is the place in which Jesus Christ is present and speaks “heart to heart”. It follows the pattern of Jesus’s own calling and forming of disciples.<sup>6</sup> As St Jerome famously wrote, “Ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ”.

**Other opportunities for prayer.** Prayer and the lived relationship with the person of Christ is the foundation for all that we do. Through it the Holy Spirit dwells ever more in us, making us sharers in the Divine life and our work truly part of God’s plan and not our own. Without it, all that we do is in vain. Many of us will benefit from being formed more securely in the practice of prayer and from opportunities for guided prayer, retreats, intercessory prayer, Eucharistic adoration, pilgrimages, and other forms of popular piety. Prayer also has, in its own right, a missionary dimension as a place of encounter and as a place in which those Christ calls become curious, have their hearts touched and experience for themselves his life-giving words of love. It will be important that our Churches are open for prayer for at least some periods outside mass, both to support the prayer of the faithful and as places in which visitors might experience something new. The development of the retreat centre at Ladywell, will be a blessed resource for us here in Godalming.

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<sup>3</sup> Taking these as useful shorthand for grouping things, acknowledging that there is significant overlap between areas, particularly in sacramental preparation. As these areas are developed further and delivered we will need to ensure that all stages and states of life are included as best we can: young families, those in the world of work, the retired, the sick or housebound, migrants, adolescents and young adults, married couples, singles and widow and widowers. And clergy too!

<sup>4</sup> Including Children’s Liturgy.

<sup>5</sup> Including servers – an opportunity also to provide some follow-on post FHC.

<sup>6</sup> “This prayerful reading, when well practiced, leads to the encounter with Jesus-Master, to the knowledge of the mystery of Jesus-Messiah, to communion with Jesus-Son of God, and to the testimony of Jesus-Lord of the Universe.” *Aparecida*, 249. c.f. DR,38. See also John Paul II, *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 39; Benedict XVI, *Verbum Domini*, 86-87.

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### FORMATION

**Formation** There is a need and desire for opportunities to grow in deeper understanding of Jesus Christ and what he has revealed of God and his plan for us. Studies indicate and personal testimony confirms that people look elsewhere if there are not opportunities to be fed and nourished beyond the Sunday Eucharist when they seek it. Formation opportunities should include one off talks, short programmes of study and faith sharing groups. This deeper understanding is also necessary to serve more effectively as catechists in sacramental preparation or other forms of accompaniment, service and leadership. Some of these opportunities can be provided in the parish, but increasingly this might happen on a deanery or local basis.

**Sacramental Preparation** provides a key pastoral opportunity to call and form adults, and to support them in making their homes a place in which the Gospel is proclaimed and their children learn to live as part of the family of God. More can be said about marriage preparation but for the moment let's focus on two key aspects of family life

- **Baptism** preparation. For many years there has been a programme of preparation for Baptism which includes elements of welcome, catechesis and participation in the community (Rite of Welcome). The materials which support this are updated from time to time.
- **First Holy Communion** This is a particular opportunity and moment of grace. The parish already places its primary focus on the formation of parents, using the Growing Up Catholic resources. These, and the overall structure, are kept under review by the team, but the current blend, along with encouragement to participate in programmes like Alpha / Sycamore, seems to provide a good balance between helping the parents and supporting them in helping their children.
- **Confirmation** This requires a different approach from First Holy Communion and one which will support our young people through the essential adolescent re-appraisal of faith and help them to make a response to Christ rather than consigning him to their childhood, if he was part of that. The programme this year was based around Youth Alpha, but engagement is always difficult when motives are mixed. Confirmation preparation has always suffered from trying to make up for otherwise insufficient engagement with young people. I would consider the following:
  - A primary focus on building a fortnightly group for say age 13-17. (Year 9 up)
    - There might be relatively few wishing to participate in this, but they will be the ones whose faith is being stirred and for whom it is critical that we support their growth.
    - A lot of experience suggests that residential experiences and retreats (and the sort of events offered by Youth 2000, Damascus, Big Church Day Out, Red Shirts and World Youth Day) are central to their spiritual growth. But taking young people away requires that they know and trust you and vice-versa and that has to be built up locally over a period of time.
  - Possible linkage with other parishes for a sacramental preparation programme, doing our best with it, but accepting its limitations.

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**The fellowship of a community** Conversion is a traumatic process, and one of God's great gifts to us is companions for our journey, and for the joys and sorrows of our lives in Christ. Our parish already has a number of such communities in which people are known and cared for such as prayer groups, the Elstead Mass Group, Bumps and Babes, St Edmund's School<sup>7</sup>, SVP, Catenians, Teams of Our Lady, and the recently formed Connect Group(s). These are at their strongest when their meetings include at least a small amount of prayer and formation, encouragement to exercise service or leadership in the group, and have an ethos of invitation and welcome for visitors and newcomers. Some parishes have tried Parish Family Groups to good effect, and others made use of neighbourhood groups.

**Recognising and nurturing the variety of gifts** It is appropriate to be open to discerning the particular gifts and suggestions for activity that may arise in the parish. It is part of our vision of church that not all activity is led from the top down, and wholly appropriate that our parish life has room for individuals or small groups to pursue other apostolic works as part of the wider mission of the Church. A healthy parish also encourages a culture of vocation, including to Holy Orders and to Religious Life.

### MISSION

There are elements of mission in many of the aspects of our parish life mentioned under prayer and formation, that contribute either to the building up for mission of the baptised or which themselves contribute directly to the opening of hearts and minds or the first steps of conversion. There are however, certain aspects that have a more overt missionary character.

**Alpha / Sycamore** Alpha provides a good tool for the proclamation of the Kerygma, the core of the Gospel. The elements of hospitality and welcome, production quality and opportunities for discussion contribute to its success. It should continue to play its part in contributing to our mission. Recently another programme, Sycamore, has been produced by Fr Stephen Wang, one of the most talented Catholic speakers of our day and currently London University Chaplain. It makes use of hospitality, welcome and discussion in the same way as Alpha and is also produced to a high standard. It covers, as one might expect, very similar material, but is more firmly rooted in the Catholic tradition and way of approaching things. It would be worth considering as a complement to Alpha, possibly running alternately.

### Charity, Dialogue and Witness

The work of **charity** – faithfulness to the most visible response to the Gospel command to love your neighbour – both proclaims the Gospel of mercy in tangible ways and provides a vital counter-narrative to the critical portrayal (sometimes deserved) of the Catholic and Christian community. Within our parish *LiveSimply*, LOAF, and the SVP, are examples of this. The Year of Mercy reminded us of the works of mercy and if they didn't receive much attention in the Jubilee Year may be worth revisiting.

The work of **dialogue** has a missionary quality and function. It mirrors the going into the marketplace of Jesus and Paul in the Areopagus. Amongst the works of dialogue in the parish we might consider Churches Together in Godalming, our links with Trinity Trust Team and with Civic Society as part of this.

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<sup>7</sup> Our Catholic Schools are key places of prayer, formation and mission for children of the parish, but it will be important that there are opportunities to nurture them within the parish too.

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Finally, there is the **personal witness and testimony** of each of the faithful, who to echo the old beer advert, reach the parts that others cannot reach. The visible living out of holiness, a Catholic Christian Faith, of deeply fulfilled lives, of service to the stranger, and of hope and courage in the inescapable adversity of life has always been and remains one of the most fundamental contributions to the mission of Christ, showing in every part of human society the possibility of life in abundance.

### **PARISH STRUCTURES**

#### **What sort of structure might we use?**

A number of areas of activity fall out of the plan and suggest something like the following. No role within it should feel like a life-sentence.

A **parish core team** to keep an eye on strategy and help balance priorities.

A **finance committee** to assist the parish priest in the administration of the temporal good of the parish (required by Canon Law and the principles of stewardship and transparency).

**Liturgy development and planning group** to reflect continually on how we might better celebrate the liturgy, especially Sunday mass and our music, and help its progressive development.

**Prayer & Spirituality network** to build and communicate opportunities for prayer and formation in prayer.

**Families & Children working group** (incl First Holy Communion and Children's Liturgy) to consider how to support and encourage families in which the faith is lived and practiced, and to support, encourage and evangelise those who come to the parish through the school or for sacramental preparation and who have not yet responded to their baptismal calling. May include also building relationships and opportunities with and around St Edmund's School and Parish Family Days. Strategies might include identifying and developing roles in the parish for children and young people such as serving, helping with children's liturgy, hospitality & welcome etc.

**Youth Working Group** to consider and help deliver opportunities for adolescents from families in which the faith is lived and practiced, and opportunities to accompany and evangelise those who come to the church through their school or seeking the sacrament of confirmation.

**Adult Formation network** to plan, communicate and deliver opportunities for adult formation, linking in with opportunities in the Deanery and the Diocese, in London and on-line, including **Alpha / Sycamore Team** to deliver Alpha / Sycamore say two or three times a year. Hopefully a rolling team. RCIA is probably best placed here, but has a significant role in providing the fellowship of a community.

**Caritas network** to link up the various forms of outreach for coordination and mutual support.

**Community link-up** some sort of structure to help link up the different communities within the parish, probably including pulling together teams for a termly parish social event.