

Pastoral Message From Bishop Kieran to
Weybridge Deanery
To be read at all Masses on September 13-14, 2014

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I hope that many of you are already aware that I have asked the parishes in the Weybridge Deanery to look at how they might best be organised to serve the Catholic community in your part of the Diocese.

Like so many dioceses in the UK, the rest of Europe and the USA, the Diocese of Arundel & Brighton is in a situation where the number of priests being ordained is significantly smaller than the number reaching retirement age. This means, of course, that we will have to face a future with significantly fewer priests available to celebrate Mass and minister to our parishes. There is a particular urgency to this, as large numbers of those ordained in the 1960s and 70s are coming up for retirement; there are only 23 in parish ministry from those two decades.

Last year your Dean, Fr Rob Esdaile, approached me and suggested that Weybridge Deanery might run a process (*Weybridge Deanery – Looking to 2020*) which, following consultation across all the parishes, would propose a number of alternative strategies for me to consider.

Just as Pope Francis is asking regional Bishops' Conferences to define their needs, I am asking each parish and parishioner in the Deanery to take part in this process. It is important to state that at the moment I have no predetermined plan or preferred outcome; while previous diocesan projects like the 2010 document may offer a starting point, we are starting with a more or less blank page, and you, the clergy and people are genuinely being asked to consider and make your proposals.

As you do this, however, please recognise two things: the number of priests in the Deanery will certainly reduce, and secondly that you, the laity, will have to be more active in parish life and in promoting the Good News.

Each parish has representatives on the 'Advisory and Communication Group'¹ and this will make final recommendations to me, but they are first of all asking for your help in shaping the future. I hope that your parish will have meetings to explore the shape of things to come and that many of you will get involved in the various working groups looking at particular ways our existing communities can work together and share resources.

As your Bishop, I ask you to be part of this process. I also ask you to pray for an openness to this work and to embrace the changes that will have to emerge as opportunities for both building up the Church and strengthening our witness to Christ. And please keep in the forefront of your mind that this is not about a 'managed retreat' or 'downsizing', but is about being joyful servants of the Lord, as the pope invites us to be, and preparing for future mission in new ways. We cannot keep on going in the way we have been.

This Sunday we celebrate the Exaltation of the Holy Cross of Our Lord. May our hearts and the whole life of the Church be renewed by the Gospel we celebrate today: "God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son – that all might have eternal life. With my best wishes and prayers for you and your parishes. + Kieran

Please Think about this text, pray about it, discuss it! – and then consider the questions and suggestions on the adjacent slip

*How can this challenge help us to **grow in faith** both as individuals and as a community? And how can we equip ourselves to **witness to our faith** in the years ahead?*

You are warmly invited to to the St Erconwalds Looking to 2020 Forum to discuss Bishop Kieran's Message and our response on Sunday 5th October between 10.30am and 11.00am ie between the two masses. It will be held in the church.

**Weybridge Deanery – Looking to 2020:
Responding to Bishop Kieran’s Message**

1. *“The number of priests will certainly reduce, and you, the laity, will have to be more active in parish life and in promoting the Good News.”* How do I respond to this? Is it opportunity, or threat, or both?

2. What formation and support shall we need to prepare for change?

3. Any practical suggestions concerning how we could work together better as a parish and with other local parishes?

4. Anything that you need clarified?

If you can't make Sunday 5th October email your response to mail@sterconwalds.org.uk