

# *You are Living Stones*

Update—Autumn 2013

## **Why *You are Living Stones*?**

As members of God's family, we are *all* living stones, and each and every one of us has a vital part to play in the Church by proclaiming the Word of God (our prophetic mission), celebrating the liturgy & the sacraments (our priestly mission), and serving our brothers & sisters in the community in which we live (our kingly mission). *You are Living Stones* has helped us to think and pray about how we do this as the Church in our Diocese of Nottingham. But it is now time for us to begin putting our findings into practice across the Diocese.

## **The Consultation:**

Our consultation has been guided by two key themes:

- **Organic Development:** Development is always best when it is not forced from above, but when it comes naturally over time by people working together and growing in communion with one another. We see that already in our parishes, with different people taking on a variety of roles and responsibilities. We are now being asked to broaden that vision, with more communities coming together and working together for the glory of God and the common good.
- **Co-responsibility:** We all have an active part to play in our Church, sharing our gifts and talents to build up the Body of Christ. It is not only the Pope, the Bishop and our parish priest who are responsible for the life of the Church, Diocese and parish, but each one of us is called to live our Baptism by working together to proclaim the Kingdom of God and build up the Church.

*You are Living Stones* is not primarily about organisations but people, and the part that each parishioner is asked to play in the Church's life and mission, principally at a local level within our parishes and wider communities. Until now the emphasis has had to be the parochial structure of the Diocese—in other words, practicalities concerning priests, parishes, ministries and Mass times. However, since it is accepted by most that things cannot remain as they are, *You are Living Stones* needs to go beyond and deeper as it begins to be implemented. This means we need to think more carefully about *how* we live the Christian life, individually and in common, since our reflection on this question will help to prepare ourselves and our parishes for a very different future.

Bishop Malcolm has been keen for everyone to have an equal voice in preparing for our common future and he has been grateful to all those who have given his proposals careful prayer and thought. The proposals which were presented to your priests on 18th February formed the basis of further discussions at personal, parish, deanery and diocesan level.

Those proposals, as the Bishop made clear, were not set in stone and have been refined further. This coming November, following the next meeting of the Council of Priests, a revised set of proposals will be published on the diocesan website; your parish priest will be able to tell you when this has happened and will have copies for those who cannot yet access the internet. You will then be able to read these for yourselves and comment upon them, and each dean will be asked to organise a further open deanery meeting before the end of the year to which you will be invited.

At this meeting, those who attend will be asked to think about the specific proposals for the parishes within their deanery in the context of the questions overleaf.



# RENEWAL



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### Things to think about:

In order that *You are Living Stones* can be implemented across our Diocese, we will have to have an on-going conversation about the nature and role of our parish community and our own place within it. These questions can help us to do this:

- **How does my parish fit in to the proposed linking?** Once the revised proposals have been published, you will be able to have another say on which parishes could be linked. Even if a parish is not going to be formally linked with another parish, there are ways in which parishes can and should work and grow together, e.g., by sharing catechetical, liturgical and social functions. What gifts can my parish offer?
- **How do I fit into my parish community?** Each one of us is called to a deep personal holy communion with God and with one another. What does that mean for me? How am I called to live my Baptism? How is my faith formed? Do I have a specific ministry in the Church, as a priest, deacon, religious, catechist, reader, teacher, altar server, extraordinary minister of Holy Communion, visitor to the sick and housebound, lay chaplain, welcomer, sacristan, bookkeeper, etc.? Am I a member of a Catholic society, or another organisation which promotes the common good? How do I minister to others, with or without a formal role? What can I do? What can we as a parish community or deanery do together?
- **Is my parish a welcoming community?** Does my parish welcome newcomers, and do we respect one another's point of view? What can we do to ensure that our parish is open, hospitable and friendly? Do we leave things to others or do our bit? What is our message to young people, the sick, people who feel marginalised? Is our celebration of Mass uplifting? Do we sing up and speak out?
- **Does my parish think about what happens elsewhere in the Diocese, or do we think primarily of ourselves?** As we have seen throughout the consultation, it is difficult to draw a balance between larger rural parishes with relatively fewer parishioners and smaller urban parishes with a relatively high number of parishioners. What can my parish do to benefit the wider community, Catholic and civic? How does it fit in to the mission of the Church and the new evangelisation?
- **Is my parish a community in which the parishioners, religious, deacon and priest work in mutual trust and collaboration?** Do we rejoice in the different roles we have to play? Do we respect one another? Do we work together to enable each person to use their gifts for the benefit of the wider parish community in mature discipleship? Where do our priorities lie? Does my parish have a pastoral plan? What can I do to proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ?

By thinking about all these points, we can understand that *You are Living Stones* is not so much about structures but discipleship. Our parishes, chaplaincies and schools are real, live faith-filled communities, and each of us is asked to play our part in building up the life of our parish community—and to reach out to our neighbouring parish communities and to the wider world in which we live, particularly through our schools, Catholic social teaching and living the faith in our daily lives. Then we will truly be living stones built into a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God'.

### Finally...

*You are Living Stones* has already begun to be implemented. However, there will be no 'big bang', and whatever proposals emerge from this new round of diocesan-wide consultation will be implemented over time. Questions to do with Mass times, churches, parish linkings and the appointment of parish priests are always extremely sensitive and we have to recognise that different people have different expectations and points of view. However, Bishop Malcolm hopes that, after this round of consultation, we will have workable proposals which can guide us and be a point of reference for us, not just in terms of which parishes should work together on a more formal basis but how we live our Christian vocation in our parish communities and what the pastoral plan for our parishes is.



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