

You are Living Stones

Update—Advent 2012

What is the purpose of *You are Living Stones*?

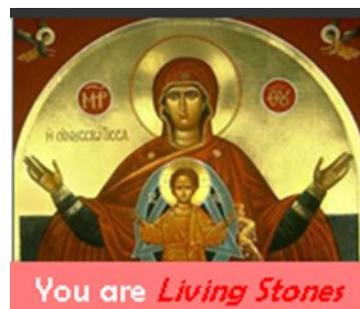
As Bishop Malcolm reminded us when we began this consultation, as members of Christ's Body, the Church, we are *all* living stones. This means that we all—priests, deacons, religious & parishioners—have a part to play in the Church's ministry of proclaiming the Word of God, celebrating the liturgy & the sacraments, and serving our brothers & sisters in the community in which we live. *You are Living Stones* has helped us to reflect on how we do this as the Catholic Church in the Diocese of Nottingham. There have been two key themes which have guided the consultation:

- **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.
- **Co-responsibility:** we all have an active part to play in preparing for the future, sharing our gifts and talents to build up the Body of Christ, and not simply waiting to be told what to do by the Bishop or parish priest.

What has come out of *You are Living Stones*?

You are Living Stones has involved every parish and deanery. Each has had its own model of consultation, developed at a local level to meet local needs. For example, some parishes have had meetings and others have had questionnaires. Most, but not all, reports have been submitted on a deanery-wide basis. Some of these reports have concentrated on structures, while some have looked primarily at ways of sharing gifts & resources. Most have been positive and practical, and show a willingness to prepare for a future that could be very different from the present. Some of the key conclusions which can be drawn from the report are:

1. A willingness for many people to accept that parishioners need to take on a more active role in their parish, and have an increasingly important part to play in building up the life of the Church and welcoming people into the parish community.
2. An acceptance that the age profile of priests is increasing at the same time that the number of priests working in the Diocese is decreasing, and will continue to do so over the next few years—this has important ramifications for the scheduling of Masses throughout the Diocese.
3. The importance of priests, deacons, religious and parishioners working together and sharing responsibility for their parish community, for example in building up active involvement by deacons and lay people in work previously undertaken mainly by priests and religious, e.g., school, prison, hospital & university chaplaincy.
4. A critical engagement by both priests & people with their own parishes, evaluating their strengths & weaknesses, and looking at how they can work together with neighbouring parishes.
5. Many smaller parishes in particular reported a natural apprehension at the thought of losing a resident parish priest, but an acceptance that it might have to happen and a willingness to adapt accordingly. Larger parishes will have to change as well, because we are all living stones!
6. Real and genuine thanksgiving for all the good work and community spirit that is found in our parishes, and gratitude for the hard work of our priests.
7. A desire to build on what we have already got, to be faithful to our heritage and to prepare properly for the future.



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Some facts about our Diocese:

The Diocese of Nottingham is the largest Diocese in England & Wales in terms of area. It currently consists of 108 parishes. We have over 150 places of worship and 85 maintained schools. Each parish is a community of believers with its own parish priest, even if it shares him with another parish. Here are some facts and figures to help us look at our past, present and future:

In 1993	In 2011	Projected figures:
112 parishes	108 parishes	2015
138 priests in active service:	94 priests in active service:	Best case: 80 priests Worst case: 62
75+ 3	75+ 12	2020
65+ 23	65+ 24	Best case: 72 Worst case: 44
55+ 43	55+ 28	
45+ 35	45+ 22	
35+ 22	35+ 8	
25+ 12	25+ 0	

How do we move forward?

- ◆ **Parishes will have to work together:** Neighbouring parishes will be called upon to support each other and share their catechetical, liturgical and social life.
- ◆ **Fewer parishes will have a resident priest:** A parish may have to share a priest with other parishes, and work together under his pastoral care; this is already happening in some places in our Diocese.
- ◆ **Parishes will merge together:** After a time of supporting each other and sharing resources, parishes may well merge together. This does not mean that their churches will have to close, but it will call for a new way of working together for the common good.
- ◆ **There will be fewer celebrations of Mass:** At the moment, the number of Masses being celebrated does not reflect the changing demography of Catholic life; as priests take on more responsibilities, Mass times will have to change, but we will do our best to guarantee at least one celebration of Sunday Mass in each church.
- ◆ **Some smaller parishes may have a resident priest with extra responsibilities:** A parish may have its own priest, but he only works there 'part time' because he has a diocesan responsibility or a chaplaincy.
- ◆ **Some parishes may be united in a 'team ministry':** A number of priests may live together in one presbytery to care for a large parish with more than one church.
- ◆ **Lay people will be called upon to be much more active in the life of the Church:** Parishioners will have a bigger role, for example, helping out at a practical or administrative level, or exercising ministry as a catechist, reader, extraordinary minister of Holy Communion or lay chaplain.
- ◆ **More work has to be done in evangelisation & catechesis:** There is a thirst for Jesus Christ and we have to work together joyfully to proclaim his Good News both within the Church and to the wider community. Our schools have a vital role to play in this.
- ◆ **We are a communion:** One of the key teachings of the Second Vatican Council is that the Church is a communion, at a universal, diocesan and parochial level. We are now being asked to live that communion as never before, with real generosity of spirit and openness to the joy and challenge of the Gospel.

What happens next?

Throughout the consultation, Bishop Malcolm has been keen for everyone to have an equal say in our common future—that is why *You are Living Stones* has been going on for some time. He will present a further discussion document in February 2013, which will be based on the findings of *You are Living Stones* and suggest ways in which parishes will be able to work more closely together. It will be designed to help us prepare for the future. This will be made available to everyone in the Diocese and posted on the diocesan website. There will then be a short period for further consultation, during which parishes and deaneries will be asked to make reasoned amendments, before any structural changes which are suggested begin to be implemented



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