

Introduction:

Since the publication of the diocesan Vision Document, “Shaping our Future” in Autumn 2018, the parishes of Basildon, Billericay and Wickford have been working together to produce a pastoral plan which will guide our parishes and help shape our future working relationship as a parish partnership.

In order to come up with a pastoral plan which is both realistic and practical, we have divided this report into five key areas:

-Discipleship and Formation

-Liturgy and Prayer

-Evangelisation and Mission

-Welcome and Fellowship

-Youth and Schools

For each of these areas a sub committee consisting of clergy and Stewards of the Gospel has been tasked with reviewing what we currently have within our three parishes and what we aim to achieve as we work more closely together in the future.

Our Vision: Growing Together in Faith and Love

Our vision as a parish partnership is summed up in the joint parish partnership Mission Statement: “Growing Together in Faith and Love”

We are committed to working together to offer experiences of worship, welcome and conversation through which all of the people in our parishes can encounter God and grow in their relationships with Him and with each other.

Our Organisation:

The three parishes have agreed that we will remain as separate parishes with separate Parish Pastoral Councils working side-by-side in a more co-operative manner. The clergy in the three parishes will continue to meet regularly to pray together and to discuss matters of common interest.

With regard to deanery boundaries, currently Billericay and Wickford fall under the Brentwood Deanery whereas Basildon is part of the South Essex Deanery.

In order to increase the co-operation between our parishes we would propose that the Basildon Team Ministry should become part of a reconstituted Brentwood Deanery.

Our Aim:

Guided by our joint Mission Statement: “Growing Together in Faith and Love”, our aim is to have excellent liturgies, especially in the areas of homilies, music and welcome. We aim to create a faith formation programme for all parishioners which is focused on deepening our personal relationship with Jesus Christ and helping create intentional disciples. We desire to

be more outgoing by actively finding, inviting and welcoming those who are infrequently at church and those who do not currently go at all. We will continue to reach out to our schools, the elderly, the marginalised and work with other local organisations in the service of all in the community. We will seek new opportunities to evangelise and to spread the good news of Jesus Christ to those we meet. We also commit ourselves to having a collaborative vision which will be embraced by all the members of our parishes to enable the proposals in this pastoral plan to be implemented in full. This collaborative vision will entail us moving from a mentality where each parish focuses on their own wants and needs to one of shared fellowship, community and partnership.

Discipleship and Formation:

Introduction: “Go therefore and make disciples”

Often referred to as “the Great Commission”, Jesus’ words to the apostles before He left them for the last time to return back to His Father make it abundantly clear to them what their priority should be. He declares: “All power in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go, therefore, and make disciples of all the nations, baptising them in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, yes, until the end of time.”¹

If we want a definition of what a disciple is, perhaps the best description within a Christian context is this: “someone who has had a life-changing experience of God and made the decision to surrender and follow Him.”²

At the heart of this decision to become a disciple is an encounter with Jesus Christ which then leads a person into a personal relationship with the Father in the power of the Holy Spirit. But in order for this to happen, our parishes need to be places which purposefully create opportunities for encounters that lead both to individual and to collective transformation in Jesus Christ.

What we currently have within our three parishes:

We already have a number of groups and initiatives which help form discipleship.

In **Our Lady and All Saints, Basildon** there is the Legion of Mary and the Knights of St Columba, there is a Charismatic Prayer Group, Compline by candlelight which is said during the Lent and Advent seasons, Lenten Stations of the Cross, Communal Reconciliation Service during Lent and Advent, Rosary before weekday Mass and Morning Prayer before Mass. Regular Healing Masses followed by a shared meal and a parish Bereavement Group.

At the **Most Holy Redeemer, Billericay**, there is a Parish Leadership Team which meets with the Parish Priest once a month, there is an annual Time and Talents weekend when parishioners are encouraged to complete a form to join groups and organisations within the parish, there is an active Catenian Group, Padre Pio group, Days of Recollection held during Lent and Advent for Readers, Welcomers and Extraordinary Ministers of Communion, an Alpha Course which ran in Autumn 2018 and the parish has been in active discussion with Adele Angel, the Executive Co-ordinator of the diocesan Vicariate for Evangelisation to explore opportunities for training and formation.

At **Our Lady of Good Counsel, Wickford** there are Lenten Stations of the Cross, Days of Recollection with a Marian theme, a Parish Pastoral Team, an annual Parish Pilgrimage which is well attended, 20 hours of adoration of the Blessed Sacrament every week, an Ecumenical Prayer Group and regular CAFÉ courses.

¹ Matthew 28: 18-20

² Father Simon Lobo quoted in “Unlocking Your Parish”, Ron Huntley & Father James Mallon P22

Aims, Initiatives, Objectives and Desired Outcomes:

Aim 1: To offer programmes that develop, form, nurture and educate parishioners.

We are committed as a parish partnership to providing comprehensive spiritual formation and leadership training for all the members of our parishes.

In particular we are committed to providing training and resources for the following groups:

- Catechists working in Toddler's and Children's Liturgy
- Adult leaders working with young people
- Existing Welcomers and Ushers and all of those who are interested in being involved in developing a comprehensive Ministry of Welcome within our parish partnership.
- Training for those who are discerning spiritual gifts and those who are interested in prayer ministry.

How we will achieve this aim:

Through discussion with Adele Angel, we have already facilitated a successful training evening for those who are involved in toddler's and children's liturgy. This training took place at the Most Holy Redeemer, Billericay but was advertised and was open to parishioners from all three parishes. There has also been a Readers Enrichment Day which was held at Our Lady of Good Counsel, Wickford.

Going forward, we will be actively seeking to provide more opportunities for training beginning with a training day on welcome/hospitality.

We will also extend the "Time and Talents" initiative to all of the parishes in the Parish Partnership in order to highlight what is available in our parishes and to recruit more volunteers.

Aim 2: To offer more opportunities for parishioners to deepen their faith and to grow closer to Christ.

We want to be able to offer a number of opportunities for parishioners within our parish partnership to grow in their faith and to encounter Jesus.

In particular we are committed to:

- Organising a joint parish mission to take place in 2020/2021 with a clear focus on discipleship.
- Establishing a joint Lent course which would be run across the three parishes.
- Holding joint Lent and Advent Reconciliation Services which will rotate around the three parishes.
- Exploring the possibility of holding a joint Alpha Course with a team made up of parishioners from the three parishes.

-Exploring the possibility of establishing small Faith Sharing groups to meet in parishioners' homes.

How we will achieve this aim:

-A group will be set up to facilitate the organisation of the parish mission and to identify a suitable speaker.

-The Lent course will begin in Lent 2020.

-Advertisements will go in the parish newsletters encouraging parishioners to join an Alpha team in order to run a joint Alpha course in autumn 2020.

Evangelisation and Mission

Introduction: “The Spirit of God has made His home in you”

At Pentecost we celebrate the coming of the Holy Spirit and with it the birth of the Church, the Body of Christ here on earth. Scripture tells us in the Acts of the Apostles how the Spirit fills the timid disciples with courage and removes barriers between people. On Trinity Sunday we hear again: One God, Three Persons, united in one love that has been poured into our hearts. Jesus leaves us His Spirit, we are reminded of how His love will help us grow in Faith, Hope and Love.

Evangelising today is not easy, indeed some people find it overwhelming. Family and friends who no longer attend Mass or have lost faith find it difficult to reconnect especially in our current society. The heart of the parish is the Sacraments but for most people attending Mass on a Sunday for an hour is all that they feel they need to do. We need to create a framework for Evangelisation that ordinary people can embrace with a clear vision of our future plans within the Parish Partnership.

People are often inspired by the work of others which encourages them to join in and be part of the bigger picture. So we ask the Holy Spirit to set our hearts on fire to evangelise our Parish family, and bring all the strands of our partnership plan together.

What we currently have within our Parish Partnership:

Within our three parishes we already have a number of groups and initiatives which are involved with evangelisation and mission.

Basildon:

- ❖ Compline by Candlelight during Lent and Advent open to all
- ❖ Healing Mass followed by Lunch in the hall during Lent and Advent
- ❖ Field of Dreams during the summer open to all faiths and none
- ❖ Hall of Dreams fortnightly during term time open to all faiths and none
- ❖ Pilgrimages and days out
- ❖ Yearly trip to Walsingham
- ❖ Legion of Mary
- ❖ SVP
- ❖ KSC
- ❖ Sleep out by Confirmation candidates with sponsorship to the homeless
- ❖ Sponsored walk by the KSC to raise money for the BCCS
- ❖ Supporting the homeless by donating food in church food banks
- ❖ Feeding the homeless in Basildon town centre
- ❖ Helping people become debt free via Christians Against Poverty (CAP)
- ❖ Hospital Chaplaincy – including the MHU
- ❖ School choir visit to wards in Basildon hospital especially aimed at Dementia patients
- ❖ Carol singing in Basildon town centre promoting our church
- ❖ Journey in Faith Course (RCIA)

- ❖ Baptism Course
- ❖ Confirmation Course
- ❖ Bereavement coffee morning

Billericay:

- ❖ Catenian Association
- ❖ Visits to the sick and housebound and Care homes
- ❖ Billericay choir performances
- ❖ ALPHA Course
- ❖ RCIA
- ❖ Catholicism Course
- ❖ Children's Holiday Club

Wickford:

- ❖ Baptism Course
- ❖ Confirmation Course
- ❖ Social events.
- ❖ CAFE Course
- ❖ Pilgrimages
- ❖ Gateway Project: an ecumenical foodbank which is based at the Wickford Salvation Army

Our Aims for Evangelisation - New initiatives:

- ❖ Youth to be encouraged to participate in events organised by the BCYS
- ❖ Encourage parents from our schools to be more active in the church
- ❖ Have a speaker from our parish partnership present at schools open day
- ❖ Follow up after Baptism, First Holy Communion and Confirmation
- ❖ Seek opportunities to invite lapsed Catholics back to church
- ❖ Canvas new housing estates with leaflet advising nearest RC church
- ❖ Visit Nurseries – new mums may feel isolated and would possibly welcome a chat or reconnect with their faith
- ❖ Prayer cards handed out after funerals to let people know we will remember them in prayer and they are welcome to return regardless of faith
- ❖ Use of social media to promote church activities
- ❖ Special prayer events to promote vocations
- ❖ Mission to celebrate our new Partnership
- ❖ To step up our work with Caritas Social Justice
- ❖ Introduce a joint Marriage Preparation course for our parish partnership
- ❖ Every day Evangelising in the home and the work place to be encouraged

How we will achieve our aims:

We will continue with all our church Sacramental programmes, Children's Liturgy, Prayer groups etc. that are currently up and running well. We will invite people that we think have the gifts and talents to be part of this important next phase in our parish partnership and offer training and courses to attend. The more knowledge people have the better they are at answering questions. Parishioners are often inspired by the work of other people and this is a good form of evangelisation. We will work across the partnership to deliver new initiatives and strengthen those already existing.

- ❖ We will encourage our youth and parishioners to work together as one, not separate them.
- ❖ We will establish a working group to investigate the possibility of employing a Youth co-ordinator/Chaplain to work within our parish partnership and to liaise with schools in the partnership.
- ❖ We will explore the possibility of obtaining a mini bus to be able to offer transport for those who find it difficult to get to Mass. This also creates an opportunity for people to step up and car share
- ❖ Retreats for those involved in church duties
- ❖ Retreats for parishioners
- ❖ Show religious films on Saints lives or films which have a pertinent message in our church halls
- ❖ To organise a parish Mission to launch our partnership in 2020/2021 led by CAFE or Relit
- ❖ Communicate effectively to our parishes by regular updates in our Newsletters
- ❖ To actively seek to set up House groups/Connect groups within our parish partnership to meet for prayers or Mass at home. Possibly a statue to go to the hosting houses
- ❖ The Evangelisation team to meet on a regular basis to monitor and review the progress of our new initiatives and make appropriate recommendations.
- ❖ To support the Clergy as we move into a new chapter in the Diocese

Liturgy & Prayer

Introduction

We recognise that the Mass is the most important and sacred act of worship. Accordingly, we wish to ensure a closer understanding of each parish to enable us to assist each other, where possible, and so become an exemplar of welcome, warmth and love to all who visit our churches.

As highlighted in our diocesan Vision Document “Shaping our Future”, in the context of evangelisation so often what we celebrate in our churches becomes a ‘shop window’ for our faith’.

This report lists the main areas considered and identifies in the form of schedules the existing arrangements and proposed changes for the future across the parishes:-

1. Main proposals and considerations.

Schedule 1: current weekend Masses

Schedule 1 (A) indicates the specific proposed changes to the Mass times.

Please note:

This schedule is intended for use ONLY as part of the final report that is going to the Bishop.

Schedule 2: current weekday Mass times, Sacrament of Reconciliation, Adoration;
(Proposed changes in red)

Schedule 3: current – other prayer & liturgy groups;
(Proposals in red)

Considerations and Proposals

Schedule 1: Weekend Masses:

It is considered that the present weekend Mass schedule is unsustainable.

Currently there are 12 Masses celebrated in our 3 parishes every weekend which are not required for the number of parishioners attending each Mass.

Bishop Alan wishes to ensure that each Parish Priest says no more than three Masses over each Saturday evening and Sunday in their parish (except in extenuating circumstances).

Accordingly, the subcommittee proposes that the current Masses be reduced from 12 (existing) to 9 when the number of priests in the partnership is reduced from 4 (current) to 3.

The specific changes to the Mass schedule across our parish partnership will be announced in the New Year once they have been approved by the diocese.

The committee has also taken into consideration that Our Lady & All Saints, Basildon has already experienced a reduction in Masses when the parishes of St Therese, St Basil's and Holy Trinity were formed into one parish.

Schedule 2: Weekday Mass times, Sacrament of Reconciliation, Adoration:

a) Consider the provision of one evening Mass per parish on a Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday.

At present, Most Holy Trinity and Our Lady of Good Counsel each have evening Mass on Tuesday

and Most Holy Trinity have Syro Malabar Mass once a month at 5pm Saturday.

b) A period of Adoration to be considered either at St Basil's or Most Holy Trinity during the week.

c) When the number of priests serving our parish partnership is reduced from 4 to 3 then there will be a further review of weekday Mass times to ensure that the weekday schedule is manageable for 3 priests.

Schedule 3: Other Liturgy and Prayer Groups – all Parishes:

1. In order to provide a comprehensive guide for parishioners, visitors and the general public it would be useful

- To produce coordinated Holy Week schedule and booklet across all Parishes **we aim to have this in place for Easter 2020;**
- b) Share and publish Liturgy and Prayer Group activities in all Parish newsletters **we aim to set up communication via each parish Secretary with a view to have this in place by Advent 2019;**

2. Further areas we feel important to review are:-

- c) Setting up a Legion of Mary group in each Parish;
- d) Setting up an SVP in each Parish
- e) Live video streaming of the Masses in our three parishes (currently this service is only available at Our Lady of Good Counsel, Wickford)

Feasibility of these will be considered with a view to introducing them by 2021;

3. At present we have one circle of the Catenian Association within the proposed parish partnership. The subcommittee proposes:-

- f) Consider extending Catenian outreach across partnership.

Feasibility to be undertaken by July 2020

Welcome and Fellowship.

Introduction:

The welcome that people receive upon entering our church buildings says a lot about our faith communities. In St Paul's Letter to the Romans he declares: "Therefore welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God."³ A good first impression can make the difference in a person's spiritual formation and openness to our faith. As parish communities we must always present a welcoming face. We are the face of the Church, the face of Christ.⁴ Therefore we must do all that we can to engender a culture of hospitality and fellowship in our parishes.

In order for a culture of hospitality and welcome to take root in our parishes, it is not just a case of the greeters handing out Mass and Hymn books at the start of the Masses. Everyone has a role to play in fostering a culture of welcome, whether it is the Ushers ensuring that everyone is seated comfortably or parishioners being available to help facilitate car parking, especially at busy Masses. Many Churches have more than one entrance and so the Ushers should take on the responsibility of guiding parishioners to the appropriate entry points and to look out for any parishioners who have disabilities to ensure that their needs are met.

What we currently have in our parishes:

Within our three parishes we already have a number of groups and initiatives which help form discipleship.

In **Our Lady & All Saints, Basildon** coffee is served after all of the morning Masses in all three Churches. Welcomers and Ushers are present at all Masses in all three Churches.

At **Our Lady of Good Counsel, Wickford** there is a "blokes breakfast" each quarter which is provided to encourage more men to be involved in parish life. At the end of the Sunday Masses birthdays are also celebrated by name.

At the **Most Holy Redeemer, Billericay** there is an early morning weekday Mass during Lent and Advent which is followed by a simple breakfast in the Pastoral Centre afterwards. Parishioners are also encouraged at the beginning of the Sunday Masses during Lent and Advent to find somebody they don't know, find out their name and make a commitment to pray for them and their intentions during the Mass. For new parishioners, there is a visiting group of established parishioners who visit new parishioners in their homes and give them information about the parish.

Aims, Initiatives, Objectives and Desired Outcomes:

Aim 1: To offer training for existing Ushers in our parishes and to encourage new parishioners to join the Welcome Ministry

³ Romans 15: 7

⁴ Matthew 25: 35

How we will achieve this aim:

In order to raise the profile of hospitality and welcome within our three parishes we will arrange a training day for existing Ushers/Welcomers in our three parishes and for those who are interested in being part of this Ministry.

During this day the ministry of welcome will be explained and the role of Ushers in helping create a welcoming environment will be explored.

Once the training has finished we will:

-Give Ushers and Welcomers name badges or sashes so that they are easily identifiable at the Masses.

-Commission Ushers and Welcomers at the Sunday Masses so that parishioners are made aware of the importance of this Ministry.

-Provide on-going training and support.

Aim 2: To move towards giving out parish newsletters at the end of the Masses rather than at the beginning.

In order to encourage greater participation in the Masses and to create a more prayerful environment in our parishes we will commit to distributing parish newsletters at the end of the Masses rather than as people come into church.

How we will achieve this aim:

The three parishes will agree on a date for this to start. We will trial it for a month and then review its progress to see whether it is worth continuing with.

Aim 3: To encourage more young people and children to join the Welcome Rota

One of the ways in which we can encourage our children and young people to play a more active role in the life of our parishes is by getting them involved in existing ministries including the ministry of welcome.

How we will achieve this aim:

First Holy Communion children and Confirmation candidates will be encouraged as part of their preparation for the sacraments to take on the role of welcoming parishioners at the Sunday Masses. Young people from our parishes will be personally invited to attend the training day for Ushers and Welcomers.

Aim 4: To offer more opportunities for parishioners in our parishes to get to know each other.

If our parish partnership is to develop and to become a reality for our parishioners then fellowship will be fundamental in order to build connections between the different parish communities in Basildon, Billericay and Wickford.

How we will achieve this aim:

Currently some of the parishes have annual Parish Pilgrimages. We propose that every parish pilgrimage should be advertised in all three parish newsletters and parishioners from other parishes should be encouraged to go on them.

The Parish Social Committees which exist in our three parishes will be encouraged to meet and to plan their events in tandem so that all the committees are aware of what is happening in each parish and to avoid any clashes of dates.

In Lent and Advent we will organise joint Reconciliation Services in our parishes attended by all the clergy and held in different venues on a rotating basis.

Youth & Schools

“To help children, boys & girls, young men and women and adults to know and to love the Lord ever more is one of the most beautiful educational adventures for it comprises the Church” Pope Francis⁵

Currently within our Parish Partnership we are blessed to have:

- ❖ Holy Communion Courses
- ❖ Confirmation Courses
- ❖ Youth Social Club -currently only in Billericay*
- ❖ Summer play scheme*
- ❖ Children’s Holiday Club at Billericay
- ❖ 3 Primary Schools and 1 Secondary School serving Nursery to Year 11
- ❖ Dedicated groups of Altar Servers
- ❖ Children’s Liturgy at designated Masses
- ❖ Animated Family Mass at Christmas (Basildon)
- ❖ Pupils animating Mass on Youth Sunday (Basildon)
- ❖ Joint Schools Carol Concert (3 Basildon Schools)
- ❖ School based ‘Going Forth Mass’ followed by Headteacher’s Tea celebration (Basildon)

*Both Basildon and Wickford have been forced to postpone these provisions since the termination of the Youth Co-ordinator

Aims, Initiatives, Objectives and Desired Outcomes:

Aim 1: To employ a shared Youth Co-ordinator in accordance with the recently published document ‘Employing a Parish Partnership Youth Co-ordinator’ from the Vicariate for Pastoral Formation

We would like to employ a Parish Partnership Youth Co-ordinator who would be given responsibility to oversee events, co-ordinate volunteer recruitment and training and be able to freely liaise with all three existing parishes.

How we will achieve this aim:

-We will establish a working group made up of adults and young people from our three parishes. This group will look at the feasibility of employing a Youth Co-ordinator and will begin the task of drawing up an outline job description.

-The working group will aim to complete its work by the end of 2019 when a presentation will then be made to the parish finance committees of the three parishes.

-If the proposal is accepted we will then begin the process of recruitment.

⁵ Pope Francis, “Christus Vivit” Post-Synodal Exhortation to Young People

Aim 2: To explore sharing a mini bus to allow our youth to meet and network This minibus would be shared between the three parishes and three of the Schools

How we will achieve this aim:

-Basildon parish will put together a proposal outlining the total cost of hiring a minibus per financial year.

-The parish finance committees will decide whether to support this proposal and will agree on how much they will contribute to the project.

-The minibus will be stored in Basildon but will be available to anyone who wishes to hire it from the three parishes.

Aim 3: To utilise the wonderful facility of Walsingham House and to offer a mini-mission for Youth with the help of Walsingham House

How we will achieve this aim:

-Catechists who are working with young people in our three parishes will meet together and will agree a date for a retreat at Walsingham House.

-The retreat will be advertised for young people within the parish partnership and will be led by the Walsingham House team.

Aim 4: To explore training in Youth Ministry and create a succession plan

How we will achieve this aim:

-Areas where training is required will be identified by Clergy and by catechists working with young people within the Parish Partnership.

-The Parish Partnership will contact the Brentwood Catholic Youth Service and Adele Angel to identify people who would be able to offer training.

-The training sessions will be advertised within the Parish Partnership and will be open to any parishioners who are interested in working with young people.

Aim 5: To promote and publicise Youth Events run by the Brentwood Catholic Youth Service and CYMFed.

How we will achieve this aim:

-Each parish will identify a parishioner who will act as a liaison between their parish and the Brentwood Catholic Youth Service.

-Events and activities will be advertised within the parish partnership and (where possible) grants will be made available to support young people in attending these events.

-The work of the BCYS will be promoted on National Youth Sunday in all three parishes.

Conclusion:

It is acknowledged that in order for this vision to be realised it will require a heavy financial commitment from all the parishes in the parish partnership. The parish finance committees will be given the task of scrutinising individual proposals and making the final decision on whether they are able to support these proposals.