

**Minutes of the 'Way Forward Group' Meeting with Deacon David Cross from the Diocese and all the Group Leads from St. Margaret Clitherow and St. Paulinus Parishes**  
**Tuesday 27th September**  
**at**  
**St. Margaret Clitherow Meeting Room at 7pm after Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament at 6.45pm**

DF welcomed everybody and thanked DDC for attending. He outlined the plan for the meeting, for DDC to be allowed to speak and then receive questions from the floor. DF confirmed that an email with the update of progress at the WFG had been sent out to all parish leads. He thanked in advance KC and her team for the organisation of the meeting as well as MP, SE for taking the minutes and Fr. Kevin.

He then handed over to DCC.

DDC framed his talk by addressing the questions contained in a briefing document sent to him in advance by the WFG. Recognizing the serious nature of these questions DDC consulted Bishop Terry and the Vicar General Monsignor Canon Gerard Robinson with regard to the answers to bring to this meeting.

**Q1. Clear direction from the Diocese requested on how lay led services can be conducted.**

**DDC's response on behalf of the Diocese:** That having Mass with a priest strengthens the bonds of Jesus Christ and that this is a priority. The Bishop has said that our two parishes will get a priest 'in every likelihood' although later qualifying this is 'not 100% certain'. The Bishop has asked religious orders overseas to send priests and so far there are 6 in the Diocese and others on the way. The Vicar General said we need people involved in its running and should continue to strengthen parish structures around the parish priest. DDC said that the strategy for vocations needs to be developed in the Diocese. Married priests and women priests are being discussed at Synod level.

**Meeting response:** After working for a year on the Bishop's advice that we were to lose our priest, the general feeling was shock at this news but relief and excitement too, underlined by Fr. Kevin.

However, there was also surprise and concern felt by some that Fr. Kevin should have been told ahead of the meeting and demonstrated poor communication at Diocesan level. Dismay was also felt by members of the WFG who have been working hard to lay the foundations for a lay led parish as requested last year by the Bishop.

Further discussion followed. Whilst a new priest will be warmly welcomed, it was generally agreed, and held to be important, that the Diocese needs to ensure the new priest has a proper induction and works closely with the laity and the evolving structures we have in both parishes.

It was agreed that the work of the WFG should continue across both parishes to improve communication and team work. This exercise has helped the laity to better understand how things work and made both parishes stronger, bringing us together particularly after Covid.

Concern was raised about whether we are taking priests from overseas communities who need them. DDC assured us that, sometimes, it is a 2-way process to help foreign priests learn English, study for degrees and develop expertise and that they wouldn't be allowed to come to our Diocese unless there were surplus priests in their areas. Nevertheless, it

was agreed the Diocese should be thinking long-term about parishes and how they run themselves.

**Q2. Failure of the Diocese to provide guidelines on how lay led parishes might administer themselves within Diocesan structures.**

**DDC's response on behalf of the Diocese:** Everything a parish needs regarding contacts is in the Diocesan Directory. The team (which includes new faces) at the Curial Office can be contacted for questions and support. The Diocesan Solicitor is currently working on the Job Description and Person Specification for the role of Parish Admin. Officer. Relationships and communication are better than ever within the Curial office. Recently updated finance advice is contained in a green folder called the Parish Administration folder. This was produced some time ago and probably needs revision and updating. Thinking around updating this folder is in it's very early stages. Every parish is recommended by the Synod Contact group to have a Pastoral Parish Council. DDC has written a template for this to work alongside the priest's role and this template will be put before the Council of Priests in November. The strength of the parish is in the number of laity involved. 'Partnership and consensus building and Service to Altar, Word and Charity are the most important and spiritual conversations should happen where Jesus Christ works within us and through us'.

**Meeting response:** Nobody was aware of the existence of a Parish Admin folder. Are we the 'Early Church'? If people believed in Jesus Christ in the Holy Sacrament then our churches would be full.

**Q3. Growing unhappiness with the absence of leadership 'ex cathedra' (from the chair)**

**DDC's response on behalf of the Diocese:** Felt unable to comment on leadership in the Diocese however adding the Diocese "tends to function reactively rather than plan strategically".

**Q4. A clear timescale for transition was requested.**

**DDC's response on behalf of the Diocese:** The Diocese cannot clarify as much still depends on Fr. Kevin's retirement date.

DF thanked DDC for coming to talk to us. DF stated that we will continue to work on structures and getting more volunteers involved.

The WFG was thanked by GH for their work and the meeting applauded both DDC and the WFG.

The meeting concluded with a prayer and a blessing from Fr. Kevin.