

Bishop's Consultation – Roman Catholic Diocese of East Anglia

QUESTIONS RELATING TO FUTURE PASTORAL PROVISION AND MISSION STRATEGY

DISCUSSION DOCUMENT – Collating a response from St Laurence's Parish

Below are questions posed to parishes in the Diocese of East Anglia by Bishop Peter. The bishop would like parishes to respond by the end of January 2025 to inform the Diocesan strategy, due to be published in 2026. The key issue that this strategy seeks to address is how pastoral provision can develop given the shortage of priests and aging clerical population in the Diocese.

Members of the St Laurence's Parish Pastoral Council (PPC) met in December to discuss the questions and formulate some initial thoughts. These are outlined below. We are now asking anyone in the Parish with an interest in participating to submit their comments either by email to ppc@saintlaurence.org.uk or in writing to the Parish Office marked "Bishop's Consultation" by 15 January, 2025. Please note that, as we need to collate a single Parish response, we would be grateful if parishioners could submit short comments only on each question, highlighting their key thoughts and/or their support for/concerns about comments already made.

Question 1: How do you think parish structures and practices need to evolve to best serve the mission of the Church, that is, sharing the Gospel in a society which is forgetting its Christian roots more and more? You will need to reflect both on how your Parish Community has changed over the past twenty-five years and what it realistically might look like in ten years' time, with the help of the document sent with these questions.

Thoughts from the St Laurence's PPC group:

- Fostering lay involvement was our major theme. Given the shortage of priests, it is imperative that development of roles undertaken by lay people becomes a priority now, rather than waiting until the situation is more acute.
- We noted that some of the steps we have taken at St Laurence's because of our Synodal process (e.g., establishing a PPC and core teams to organise Parish life) are very much in this spirit of supporting lay involvement. At St Laurence's we need to 'bed these in' and find ways to extend them. Across the Diocese, it would be good to share best practices.
- Many examples of lay involvement in ministry and mission are currently undertaken in small and in some cases hugely committed ways by a few people, in some cases sporadically. St Laurence's would benefit from appointing a salaried Pastoral Assistant to organise, coordinate, support, and seek out appropriate training when required, for lay members of the parish who are willing to undertake responsibility for ministry. It would be good to learn from experience of similar roles elsewhere.
- Regular practice of lay-led prayer and worship could be established. It would be helpful to train some Extraordinary Ministers of the Eucharist to lead Eucharistic services, for example. Lay people could be invited to be more involved within liturgical celebrations to demonstrate that their contribution is valued. For example, contributing insights, testimony, or invitations to faith development during the celebration, perhaps as part of the homily, rather than 'tagged on' at the end of Mass.

- Local groups should be encouraged for discussion or whatever forms of prayer and/or study in which people express a desire to engage. In St Laurence's which is a relatively large parish, this might include at a village or neighbourhood level.
- As the development of ministry and mission in the Church is such an important matter, prayer for guidance could become an established practice.
- Over the last twenty years many changes have had an impact on our Parish; for example, it now includes many more people from diverse cultural backgrounds. This is an enrichment as well as a challenge and thought needs to be given to how to reflect this diversity better in Parish life and worship. Society has changed also, and we need to recognise that our young people are bombarded with messages and values that challenge our traditions and values. Consideration needs to be given to how we can meet people where they are and demonstrate to them, perhaps most effectively through our example, that faith enriches life and brings joy and fulfilment. The provision of youth camps and activities has been fruitful in other contexts and other denominations.
- There needs to be an acknowledgement that many people feel at odds with the Church – within the community, people who are lapsed and the wider society – our aim should be to establish an atmosphere that suggests it is a good thing to question and express disquiet, with a view to entering into fruitful dialogue with a view to mission.

Question 2: How can we foster and sustain a deeper personal relationship with Christ within the communion of the Church, both in your local parish and as a part of the diocese? What can be done to ensure that young and old alike can better live their everyday lives as 'intentional' disciples, that is followers of Jesus Christ who embrace His teaching and become capable of sharing a living Catholic faith with others?

Thoughts from the St Laurence's PPC group:

- Continuing education of adult parishioners could enrich their understanding, deepen their faith and enable them to talk about our faith with understanding, using suitable vocabulary and approach which could contribute to the Church's mission. Thought needs to be given about how to engage more people in continuing faith support and development. At St Laurence's, following the Sycamore programme was fruitful but only a few people were involved. A parish retreat is being planned for 2025 and it would be good for it to become a regular feature of parish life.
- Engaging in ecumenical cooperation, joint prayer, action and dialogue would also be a helpful practice in supporting and developing faith as well as providing a united Christian witness in the local area. It was felt that there should be a presence of Catholic ministers, priests and/or lay in ecumenical gatherings and activities in their locality.
- It might be useful to reassess, in relation to the Church's mission, the practice of moving First Communion preparation into the parish and away from the school. While it could be said to play a part in integrating families into the parish and supporting them to maintain their attendance, doing it in school might be a way of reaching out to families in the wider community who do not regularly attend Church but with whom discussion about faith might arise in their home from talk about the preparation experienced in

school as well as conversations with staff. There is a concern that the current arrangements in our relatively large Parish also result in a very large parish group that makes the practicalities of catechesis harder, while not making best use of the resources of our school and removing a key element of its Catholic education.

Question 3: Being realistic about our resources, both human and financial, what concrete steps do you think should be taken in your parish to address present and future needs? You should think about:

- **How the diocese, your neighbouring parishes, and the different congregations within your own parish (those who attend the different Masses that are celebrated) can help you overcome challenges and create opportunities.**
- **How individual members of your Parish Community can be appropriately enabled to contribute to the demanding work of change and development.**

Thoughts from the St Laurence's PPC group:

- We welcome the idea of working more effectively in partnership with other parishes and sharing best practices. For example, the St Laurence's youth team has already, in recent years, taken a shared approach to catechesis with the team at Cambourne. However, we also see the personal relationships between priests and people and between the laity within a parish as essential building blocks of our communities of faith. These relationships are inevitably weakened in very large parishes. In any new arrangements, it is important to maintain communities of faith on a scale that works well in practice – we feel St Laurence's (700 Sunday worshippers) is currently at the upper end of this scale.
- It would be helpful to invest in training lay parishioners, or endorsing those with appropriate existing training, expertise or experience, to take greater responsibility for designated areas of parish life. For example – current and potential catechists could be equipped to support faith development in young people if they would like or need further training.
- If parishioners will be asked to take on greater responsibility for finance, it might be helpful to provide some appropriate training if required.
- A desire was expressed that there be more personal contact with the bishop, either through regular parish visits, perhaps every two years, in which he is able to take time to listen to and chat with parishioners and/or through a delegate visiting parishes more regularly. Parishioners need to be involved in discussion about the detail of any future plans within the diocese that will affect them, particularly any plans relating to groupings of parishes, as local knowledge of what is possible with regard to transport and venues would be essential for any changes to be effective.