

Coventry and Nuneaton Deanery Visitation 2022 – 2023.

The aim of the Visitation is twofold:

- To affirm and encourage the good work that has already begun across the Deanery.
- To broaden the implementation of our Diocesan vision.

At the opening meeting of the Visitation, Archbishop Bernard reminded us of our Diocesan Vision:

*We are called to be a Catholic diocese which is:
faithful to the mission entrusted to us by Jesus Christ
full of missionary disciples who work together co-responsibly
in vibrant communities of faith,
joyful in their service of God and neighbour.*

‘There are four areas that I am asking us all to focus on: Evangelisation, Formation, Liturgy and Worship and Social Outreach. During the Visitation we shall reflect on these four themes with the parish clergy, with the different parish groups and organisations that we hope to meet and with individual parishioners. It’s also important that young people and families are a particular area of focus for all that we do. The universal call to holiness finds its first expression within families and its first recruits among young people. Catholic education and our diocesan youth services play an important role in serving families and young people. The links between the family, the parish and the school are vital to ensure that the faith is handed on. Central to the diocesan vision is the faithful working together of clergy and parishioners. This is already a vital part of parish life, and we will witness many fruitful example of it during the Visitation weekends’.

‘We shall need formation for clergy and lay faithful to help us adapt to new patterns – not just of collaboration but also of being co-responsible for parish life, where decisions can be taken together for the good of the parish’s mission (and always respecting the provisions of Canon Law about pastoral care and the responsibilities of governance)’.

‘The return of the congregations to our parishes has been gradual and overall, we reckon that about two-thirds of parishioners have made the return for Sunday Mass in the parish church. We clearly have a challenge ahead to draw families and the more vulnerable older parishioners back to church. On a practical level that means that some parishes are also struggling financially with regular income down and expenditure due to rise because of the increase in fuel bills over the winter. At the same time clergy are very much aware of the financial difficulties facing parishioners over the coming months.

‘I’m aware that as we look at the life of the new deanery, we may need to face some difficult questions – questions about where our clergy are based in the future and the extent of their pastoral responsibilities, bearing in mind that our clergy numbers are predicted to be smaller in five years’ time. We need to look at the patterns of church-going – especially in urban settings where churches may be only a mile apart. Can we sustain that level of provision for very much longer or do we need to look again at how our church properties are used to support evangelisation and outreach?’

‘The Visitation must not be inward-looking – it must be a work of evangelisation in itself. It is not a distraction taking time and energy away from your parish priorities, but it is for noticing and encouraging all these good works – and finding and enabling ways of sharing them across the parish communities of the deanery’.

Alongside the vision and planning we have also been walking the Synodal Pathway. The findings of our parish discussions have already provided all the material for our diocesan report. But the material we have gathered across the Archdiocese is now helping us to plan for our own diocesan mission over the next five years. These weeks of Visitation will give us an opportunity to test the insights of the Synodal Pathway against your day-to-day experience of Catholic life.

Our Synodal Methodology will be of great assistance. You will remember, that as we are ‘*Walking Together*’, we invoked the Holy Spirit in prayer. We embraced active listening, and we discerned what the Holy Spirit was saying to us. You also produced dynamic and lively feedback. We learnt the importance of formation, inclusion, a place where everyone is welcome, of the need for active co-responsibility, to name just a few insights. Already we can see clearly that the outcomes of Synodal process and the diocesan vision dovetail. Listening to Holy Spirit has provided us with an initial direction of travel as we continue to walk with the Lord. The Spirit of listening and dialogue has enriched how we live and minister as Christ’s Church today. My intention is that the Visitations will continue that grace of listening to and discerning in a co-responsible manner the call of the Holy Spirit. I pray that we will continue to pray, listen, discern, and act, together under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

While each parish, seeks to implement the Diocesan Vision, we do not do this alone. In fact, the requirement to work ever closely together, is one of the major insights of the Clergy of the Deanery. This may require the formation of clusters of parishes which will enhance the work of Evangelisation, Formation, Liturgy and Worship and Social Outreach. One question we will ask, is how are we going to respond to these priorities and with which other three or four parishes are we going to unite in this work of being Christ in the world? Being Christ, across this Deanery. Parishes exist for mission to others, not for themselves. Parishes are called to work together to serve the Lord and society. Parishes will have to be creative in how they serve the Lord and society, today and in the future.

- Visitations will take place over a weekend, beginning on Saturday morning and concluding on Sunday afternoon.
- The aim is to meet as many people as possible. Meeting with groups or the parish as a whole are strongly encouraged.
- Given that the size of the Deanery has increased, the period of visitation has been extended – we begin today and will conclude with a Closing Meeting in early July 2023.

Finally, I ask that you keep the Visitation in your prayers, and that you may begin to prayerfully discern how the Visitation may support and affirm the life of your Parish and the Deanery as a whole.

Canon Paul Fitzpatrick
Episcopal Vicar for Coventry, Oxfordshire, and Warwickshire