

## Coventry and Nuneaton Visitation Opening.

I am pleased that the first visitation in the Southern Pastoral Area, is the Deanery of Coventry and Nuneaton. This is because for several months the Deanery has already been reflecting on how we might make our Diocesan vision, a reality.

I have attended Deanery meetings here in July and September when we had discussed the Diocesan Vision and how we might plan for the future of the Deanery. In fact, these discussions, led by Canon Tom, and with group of four priests leading the reflections, had been taking place much longer than that.

This visitation will affirm and encourage the good work that has already begun, and to seek to broaden the implementation of our Diocesan vision across the Deanery.

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.

Visiting each parish offers us an opportunity to affirm the life of the parish and celebrate the good which has enabled us to be so resilient throughout the last years, which have been very challenging. While each parish, seeks to implement the Diocesan Vision, working *"together co-responsibly in vibrant communities of faith, joyful in their service of God and neighbour,"* - 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.

The structure is not the end, but the structure must serve the end and ensure we are fit for mission. Please don't be anxious about this process. Change challenges us all and can disturb us all. The visitation is about listening and discerning the here and now and our future. We face the now and the future confident and joyful in our Saviour.

I am very confident and joyful in you, the People of God. That is the Lay faithful, Religious, Deacons and Priests of this Deanery. I am aware that there is a strong feeling that this is the best time for our discernment, listening, conversation and action - and I would underline action! There is a feeling that we need to implement this Diocesan vision, in a manner that is fitting for Coventry and Nuneaton. My role is to encourage, to accompany, to listen, to walk alongside and to champion the People of God in this Deanery!

My own thoughts are based upon the confidence that the Holy Spirit is with us, as it was just so, during the beginning of the Synodal journey, which is still continuing. I do not know what our conclusions will be, there is no predetermined plan or decisions, we approach this with the wisdom of deep reflection and preparation, but an openness to greater wisdom the Holy Spirit.

However, one insight from *Walking Together*, is that our decision **taking**, is based upon the strength of our decision **making**. By which I mean that we need to evolve as many people as possible across our parishes in the discernment and listening which enables us to have the best possible decision making – so that 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).

Archbishop Bernard did say, *'I would ask Canon Paul to say a few words about the Visitation and some of the practical details that it involves'*.

I've focused on the Visitation, because all of the Clergy are aware of the practical details – but it would be remiss of me not to mention:

- 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.
- I shall be visiting the majority of the Parishes, but as a Parish Priest myself, and wishing to spend the time in my own parish, I am grateful that Archbishop Bernard and our Vicar General, Canon Richard will also have the visiting the following Parishes:
  - Canon Richard will visit = St. Anne's Nuneaton and St. Joseph, Monks Kirby.
  - Archbishop Bernard will visit = St. Thomas More & St. Joseph the Worker, Coventry. St. John Vianney & Our Lady of the Assumption, Coventry. Our Lady of the Angels, Nuneaton.

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

27 September 2022