

# Final Report of the Formation Working Group

## Parish Faith Formation

### A process of accompaniment as faith matures

#### Introduction

From his discussions around the diocese, Bishop Richard has identified prayer, mission and formation as the three main themes for renewal within Arundel and Brighton. Taking up these themes, which corresponded with his initial impressions in Guildford, Mgr. Tony sought an initial review of how they functioned in the parish.

This report on formation reflects the dialogue between a small group of parishioners from across the parish. All have some experience as catechists and some have experience of formation at diocesan and national level. The intention was to offer an appraisal of what formation entails, what we are already doing and what we should aim to be doing going forward. It is not intended that this report and the preliminary framework, which accompanies it, should be the final word. It is strongly recommended that before the parish embarks on any major development it engages in a period of parish wide discernment which allows us to avoid factionalism, benefit from the insights of all the faithful, and discern the direction in which the Holy Spirit is guiding us.

#### Faith Formation

Echoing his predecessors, Pope Francis has called for the Church to be outward looking, to focus on mission. Moving the Church from maintenance to mission has become the focus of much work in many dioceses including our own. If we in Guildford are to respond to this initiative then we must acknowledge what Pope Paul VI said in his Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* back in 1975 and re-evaluation our values, interests and thinking, in fact everything that informs how we see the world and act in the world. Even those of us who have spent our entire lives in contact with the Gospel need to 'deepen, consolidate and nourish' our faith, and allow it to mature. This then is the aim of parish faith formation. It is about creating mature, responsible Christians, who are able to bear witness to the hope that is in them (1 Peter 3:15) through word and deed. It is a process of continual renewal and conversion. A preliminary definition of formation might be 'life-long accompaniment as faith matures'.

It is worth noting at the outset that it is God that does the forming. We are only his instruments. We must take care that we do not set limits on God's work by trying to make it fit into our own preconceptions. Consequently, formation should always be rooted in prayer, and reflection on Scripture. Formation is essentially about forming disciples of Jesus Christ. In this we are obeying the commandment to 'make disciples of all nations; baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you....' (Mtt. 28:19-20). To be a disciple is to be one who learns. Formation helps us become life-long learners. If we are to become disciples, then we must grow in our knowledge and love of Jesus Christ and of our neighbours.

Formation tries to weave a number of strands into a complex whole. Our growth to mature faith is nurtured by a community of faith to which we can really belong and to which we offer our individual gifts and talents. It is strengthened by Sacraments, liturgy and personal prayer. It involves the whole of our lives not just what happens at church. It informs how we deal with life's joys and sorrows. It begins with the youngest and continues throughout our lives. It provides support for families and for single people and those with diverse orientations and life styles.

The Synod of Bishops on the New Evangelization in 2012 was quite clear that the starting point for formation is Scripture and primarily the Gospel, which gives a person the opportunity of knowing Jesus. Formation is also about improving one's knowledge of doctrine, gaining the greatest benefit from liturgy, developing a capacity for prayer and contemplation, and inspiring a desire to witness to the faith through a commitment to the Church's social teaching.

## Formation in the Catholic Parish of Guildford

Across the parish we are already doing many things that play their part in formation. Participation in liturgical celebrations, Scripture study, serving as ministers, membership of various parish groups, charitable outreach etc. all help to form us as Christians. They help to make us who we are; to see the world through Catholic eyes. They help to form our consciences and sacramental imagination. It inspires us to witness to our faith by our lives. What people often feel is lacking is the language required to express what they know intuitively. We need this to give an account of the hope that is within us, to refute criticism, to inspire our young people and to make the Gospel available to those who have not heard it.

We need a well-planned and ongoing programme that meets the varied needs of all parishioners wherever they are on their journey of faith. We have elements of this such as Alpha, RCIA and occasional talks and workshops but, good though these are, they do not represent a coherent progressive program. What is required, if we are to move our parish out of maintenance mode and orientate it towards mission, is something much more comprehensive that is accessible to all people. A programme that draws together all that we already do and allows us to reflect on why we are doing it: a process of accompaniment as faith matures.

To develop and manage this process of accompaniment will require time and expertise and some of this may need to be funded. Trained volunteers will no doubt play their part but ensuring that the momentum of such a programme is not lost will require an ongoing commitment and may require the oversight of a paid co-ordinator. It is perhaps unsurprising that the area of formation that is currently most developed, namely the Youth Ministry, has an employee leading it. Resources will also be required and although some of the costs of these can be recouped from those involved in a given program it is important that no-one feels excluded for financial reasons.

The accompanying 'Preliminary Framework' is only offered as an indication of what a well-structured approach to formation would involve. It is not intended to be a blue print but a starting point for discussion and debate. The individual strands in the framework do not stand alone. They are each part of an integrated whole and as such there are obvious points of connection between them. Formation itself is clearly linked to mission, and prayer and liturgy, which are themselves formative. Again, there is clearly a need for integration between all these elements.

Consideration will need to be given to the parish structure and whether it is appropriate to our needs as the process of discernment unfolds. It will be important to be flexible and to allow what we want to achieve to determine our structure rather than the structure dictating what we can do.

There are a number of initiatives that could be taken immediately without prejudicing future development. These include:

- A structured course for all catechists (perhaps Discovery from the Faith Study Series).
- An annual outreach course offered free to anyone who want to attend (perhaps Alpha).
- A structured process of discernment leading to a whole parish gathering to launch a parish pastoral plan which incorporated formation and mission both firmly rooted in prayer and liturgy.

The members of the discussion group were:

Chris Richardson (Convener), Kate Carter (St Pius), Peter Charlwood (St Joseph's), Kelly Collins (St Mary's), Vicky Fulcher (St Edward's), Aseel Gilbert (St Joseph's & CPG), Peter Ward (St Edward's), John Williams (St Pius).

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