

There does, however, come a time when difficult decisions have to be made and the likelihood of some fallout accepted. This is that time – we have plans for the future of the parish developing and which the diocese are helping us with. These need to be presented:

- For bringing the parish infrastructure together to make it a community parish hub orientated to mission.
- For the redecoration and refurbishment of the Church

This now necessitates that communities that use the Church decide if they wish to be fully part of this or not.

It also necessitates that people are now given tasks. If people wish to benefit from the Church, they have to be willing to be part of it – this of course must not be unduly burdensome and ideally suited to people's particular charisms.

All communities are facing similar problems – a decline in faith; the struggles of the youth to maintain their faith in a secular environment; the increasing demands of the world and its allure and finally economic hardship.

We need to provide support to all those struggling but as St Paul tells us especially those of the faith.

SUMMARY

At its heart the gospel journey is one of conversion of heart, anointing by the Holy Spirit and mission which is common to all baptised Christians throughout the world.. In our concrete situation to bring this about this will necessitate a common mission, catechesis, finance and governance.

WHAT NEXT?

- Most importantly, a chance for people's voices to be heard and to be able to respond – the Rule of Saint Benedict tells us every voice should be heard even those of the young.
- Then having heard the feedback, a plan and path for the parish going forward.



Dear Parishioners,

With the Baptism of Our Lord, the time of Epiphany draws to an end and whilst still in Christmastide until the feast of the Presentation of Our Lord on 2nd February, we return to ordinary time which bridges Christmas and Lent which starts this year later on 5th March, Ash Wednesday. We have two themes of this Jubilee Year – Hope and our journey as pilgrims, these two are very connected as hope is what draws us on in our journey. As a parish we have our own particular journey to our bicentenary in 2027.

As a parish we are reaching a crossroads where important decisions have to be made. Major work and renovation is needed on the Church and infrastructure so as to enable the parish to fulfil our call to mission emphasised by Bishop Patrick but also a direct mandate of Jesus. This involves not only a financial outlay which is of lesser importance but more importantly, a change in our attitude as Catholics.

As a parish there have been major changes over the last decade or more, with a more diverse community counting many different nationalities, tongues and cultures – and with the Syro-Malabar a different rite and structure. At the same time there are major increases in costs and burdens that the parish have to support.

What is the role of the parish and the parish priest in this? Simply put to be the boat which enables us safely to negotiate the journey. To provide the graces that come from the sacraments, especially the mass; to provide instruction in the faith – especially in prayer and the spiritual journey; to build community which mutually supports each other in the journey. The Parish Priest is to guide and oversee this journey and in particular to frame a vision for the local parish in the light of the Church as a whole and the local bishop in particular. I was reading a commentary on the rule of Saint Benedict and it had this phrase which resonated with me: “ To gather together equally committed adults for the journey through earthen darkness to the dazzling light that already flames in each of us but in a hidden place left for each of us to find.”



There is also an added urgency. The power of evil and the denial of Jesus in our society as a whole means there has been an erosion of morality, a great instability and the common feeling that only a divine intervention will bring about a conversion to Christ. At the same time God showers upon us greater graces than ever before. Mary is urging our conversion of heart and to make reparation for our sins and those of the whole world.

What is needed?

- A common vision and mission for our parish to fulfil our journey and mission with a greater turning to mission. “ The people perished for lack of a vision.” Proverbs 29:18 All communities and rites have this in common – mission in our local area.
- The necessary resources and help to enable this. If we provide our simple five loaves and two fishes, the Lord can multiply them.
- A common sharing of the burden that this will entail across all communities. There needs to be a common approach in catechesis, stewardship, financial support etc.– whilst allowing for different cultures and rites. Saint Mary’s cannot become a parish which is simply used by communities whilst lacking any commitment to its role in mission and with little concern for its viability. This is most clearly seen in the financial burden that is not shared equally. Whatever the differences we are One Church.
- If there is a collapse in society, this will be vital. Covid showed up many weaknesses in our ability to deal with the situation and maintain support and the sacraments. We need to be better organised for this possibility in the future.
- People willing to step up and make this happen. The small but vibrant integration committee are accomplishing a lot in this area but this work needs to be extended throughout the parish. Each Christian must remember that it is a precept of the Church that they contribute financially and in labour to the Church. I realise of course that the modern workplace and economic systems do not make this easy for families.
- We have so few counters, cleaners, catechists, extra-ordinary ministers of the eucharist. The burden is falling on an increasingly small group of people. Deacon Martyn and myself have tried appeals , requests, asking etc. So something has to change if we are to survive.

To have a common mission will necessitate a degree of compromise, an understanding that times have moved on and the future of Saint Mary’s has to be built around the changes that have happened. There has to be both a respect of the past and local tradition as well as a planning for the future. There has to be a realisation that it is at its core a parish of the Diocese of Nottingham and therefore, English and its culture are at its root, whilst encouraging and helping maintain the cultures of the people who come here and providing for those of a different rite. It is not easy to combine the two and it will require charity and understanding.

However, we have many more strengths than weaknesses. Visitors have commented on the vibrancy of the masses and the friendly atmosphere. We have many that provide support in the local community volunteering in the hospital, prison etc. We have many talented people in our community and we have many seeds that have been planted. We need to provide the conditions for them to grow and produce branches for the birds of the air. God has provided.

But we also have areas that we have to be honest about and face up to:

- Most importantly: Interior conversion and a desire for holiness - in particular an appreciation of the mass, confession, adoration and communal prayer.
- People are falling through the cracks – we don’t notice it but within our own parish community there is poverty and great burdens. Child poverty is in our schools.
- The parish has to be much more lay led and administered whilst maintaining the canonical role of the Parish Priest and keeping him free for the duties that only he can accomplish.

The gospel lessons:

- 1) It only requires a few committed people to change things – people committed first and foremost to holiness of life and then to mission. Anointing with the Holy Spirit is essential.
- 2) Many people find change difficult and it requires courage to put out into the deep.
- 3) The best change is slow and is often at first unnoticed.
- 4) Expect trials - trials, persecutions, divisions were all part of the Church from the very beginning.

