

PARISH of SPRINGFIELD

Steward of The Gospel

Bishop Alan has hosted the first two training days for Stewards of the Gospel on Saturdays 21st May and 18th June 2016. These have been very good days and over 80 Stewards from around the diocese came together to hear about and discuss the project.

It was a process started with Prayer and Mass. God was placed firmly in the centre of everything and at the forefront of a journey that will take at least 2 years to complete.

We were told that this is a once in a generation opportunity for the laity to play a full and active role in determining the future of our diocese and how the gospel is to be proclaimed in Essex and East London.

There have already been lots of good ideas and discussions that were grounded in reality and prayerful hope. As we celebrate our diocese's centenary in 2017 we will also begin a new phase in the life of our Church.

Change is inevitable

No one was under any illusions that things will need to change. In my mind the phrase that "change is the only constant" kept creeping in!

Forecasts predict that by 2035 our diocese will be served by very slightly more than half of the current number of priests. We currently have 100 we will have between 50 and 55 by 2035.

Times change (internet/ social media/ mass communication/ demographics/ immigration/ transport etc etc) and the needs of the church change too. This project is one of discernment to find out what our church will look like in the years to come.

The word "discernment" is important. The Bishop and his Episcopal Vicars and the priesthood and the laity will all work at discerning new ways for us to be the Church of the future, to discern how our Church will look in the future and how it will proclaim the gospel afresh in our time.

A discernment process presupposes that no decisions have yet been taken about these things. That is important. Nothing is yet decided and everything is possible.

All the Stewards left knowing that they were about to embark on a lot of work designed to help us to discern together what the way forward should be. The more people we can involve in this the better.

Formation

As Stewards of the Gospel we are going through a formation process and that will continue at further meeting days. Having met a lot of very competent dedicated people on the first day I shall approach the future dates with confidence that the prayers, brains and commitment will be present to make this work. All of us will value your prayerful support for the work we are doing.

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Administration

A good discernment process will need to be based on good information that is known to lots of people. The Stewards cannot and must not do this on their own. So from early September until the end of November we will need to work with parishioners to collate information and to simultaneously learn about ourselves and our parish and then share this with others. The Stewards will co-ordinate the gathering of information and the completion of a questionnaire for the diocese but it is vitally important for as many people in our parish to have a say and to make a contribution. It is as important that we learn and reflect as we collate information as it is for us to get good information to combine with the information from the other parishes.

A Plan for our Parish

In Springfield we are fortunate that having just restructured our Parish Parochial Council we have a body that is well placed to oversee the work of me (as our Steward) and those who will help me in the tasks to come.

It is my suggestion that we establish a new working group (3 people plus Fr Nick and me) to serve for 2 years to work with me on all aspects of the discernment process. To begin with that will involve telling parishioners what is going on, gathering information and making it possible for as many people as possible to have a say or ask questions. This Working Group will keep in close contact with the PPC through regular reports from me as our Steward of the Gospel and I hope it will offer advice on how we might improve what we are doing throughout the process.

The Working Group will work closely with the Communications Group and the Finance Committee. Given that this is about primarily about Evangelism I think it should also work with the Group that is working on ways that we can deepen our faith.

If you have not already looked at the new website for our diocese can I suggest that you do so in order to see what Bishop Alan and others are saying about this process of discernment.

<http://www.dioceseofbrentwood.net/departments/evangelisation/stewards-of-the-gospel/>

It is not the intention that the Stewards of the Gospel do this on their own. With that in mind and conscious that we have a new PPC that is up and running and which will necessarily be involved in this work I am hoping that 3 people will volunteer to help me specifically with this discernment process. Next weekend I will say a bit more of what will be required but it will not be onerous and it will be worthwhile.

Throughout this process anyone can communicate with me about it and I hope you will. There will be set occasions when we can talk but at any time please talk to me if you have ideas or comments, or if you would prefer you can email me on stevenwebb52@gmail.com

Thank you.

Steven Webb