

**KIDDERMINSTER & WORCESTER DEANERY LETTER APPOINTED TO BE READ ON THE
WEEKEND OF 2/3 MARCH 2024**

WORKING TOGETHER TO BUILD UP GOD'S KINGDOM

At a meeting at St George's in Worcester in the Autumn, three priests of our Deanery were questioned on their priesthood. Monsignors Patrick Kilgarriff and John Moran provided a perspective from the Archdiocese and Fr James Ipanye was able to share his experience as a priest from Nigeria.

The differences are clear: in this country we have many churches, many parishes but priests are getting older, more are retiring and few are being ordained. Contrast that with Nigeria where there are fewer churches, bigger parishes but a great number of priests. Theirs is a missionary Church. Ours is one which needs to revitalise its missionary zeal. At the meeting it was agreed we could not do that with current arrangements.

We are in the Kidderminster and Worcester Deanery. It has 16 parishes covering a wide area: from Little Malvern and Tenbury in the west, covering towns and the city of Worcester to Alcester and Bidford-on-Avon in Warwickshire to the east. We are enriched by the presence of the Sacred Heart Fathers at Droitwich and Benedictines at Little Malvern and Alcester, but the rest of our parishes are served by our own Archdiocese. The archdiocesan parishes have been arranged in four clusters, centred on Worcester, Kidderminster, Malvern and Evesham.

The average age of our parish priests is 71. The youngest is 66. All could be retired within ten years. We have no priestly ordinations this year. The number of Archdiocesan priests could half in the next ten to fifteen years.

In our world we are accustomed to change and often our parish has been the place where the status quo has been assured. But I am sure you can acknowledge that with the number of priests in our Archdiocese rapidly declining, now is the time for change. Whilst Pope Francis is discerning through the Synod what the will of the Holy Spirit is for the Universal Church, Archbishop Bernard has been discerning what the Holy Spirit wants for our Archdiocese.

That change is renewal: to reflect on what is being achieved successfully, and there is much to rejoice for, but also to acknowledge where change is necessary to be able to have vibrant parishes into the future, where the pastoral and sacramental needs of the People of God can be served by their clergy, but the people have an important

role, a co-responsible role, in ensuring that parishes are places where all can be at home, can be at one with God, can be supported through this life to the next.

To progress there will be collaboration between clergy and people. The Church is all of ours, we all through our baptism have a Royal Priesthood that invests in us a responsibility for the future of the Church.

The form of collaboration will be different for each cluster. That is because each cluster is different and it is important not to have "one size fits all" and you, the people, will be able to shape how your cluster will be established and be influential in the future of the Deanery. This may be through parish forums, parish councils, specific groups to cover aspects of parish life such as catechesis, liturgy or outreach. It will depend on your cluster and there is also the intention to have a Deanery Council with representatives from each cluster, the membership of which would be decided by the respective cluster. Its purpose is to work with the Dean and parish priests to coordinate effective working across the deanery and to grasp new challenges.

The Malvern Hills cluster includes the parishes of St Joseph's Malvern, St Wulstan's Little Malvern, and the joint parish of St Joseph's Upton and Our Lady and St Alphonsus Blackmore Park. As work is progressed, it is important to appreciate that which has been identified as the framework within which our work will take place, namely having joint sacramental preparation programs and spacing Mass times to make it easier for Mass cover for the priests of the cluster

The Wyre Forest cluster, is made up of St Ambrose, Kidderminster, St Wulstan, Stourport, Holy Family, Bewdley, St Mary's Harvington and Sacred Heart & Our Lady, Tenbury. Clearly all aspects of local church life and organization will have to be carefully considered to take account of the changed circumstances in which we find ourselves, not least the reduced number of clergy. There are challenges ahead but also opportunities. So let us all do our best to support each other.

The eastern cluster is made up of the parishes of Evesham, Broadway, Alcester, Bidford and Pershore. A first step will need to be the merging of the parishes of Evesham and Broadway, there will need to be clarification as soon as possible on how St Joseph the Worker at Bidford will be administered and Holy Redeemer will move into the cluster in due course.

The Worcester cluster will consist of St George's, Our Lady Queen of Peace and St Joseph's to be served from St George's. There will inevitably be changes to Mass times to ensure that there are viable and dynamic parishes but there is also an

opportunity with the cluster of continuing the work that has happened to work together as the Catholics of Worcester. Whilst St George's will inevitably be the centre for administration there will be the opportunity to work together on key areas of parish life. A joint outreach programme, developing closer ties between our catechists as one team to support both children and adults in formation and on-going spiritual development will be key to our future. We will aim to bring together volunteers so that we can maximise the effect of our parishes.

In the short-term the parishes will work closer together, but the aim is to create one parish, with three churches. In time we aim to have the St John Wall parish with the churches of St George, Our Lady Queen of Peace and St Joseph within it.

During 2024 we need to make progress across our deanery. I would like to think that before the year ends that we have the Deanery Council in position after all of the clusters have their own arrangements working well. We also need to ensure that the pace of change reflects the urgency of matters. We need to be able to prepare our Deanery for the challenges of the future. We can only do that with arrangements in place for the future.

It is our deanery. Let us take this opportunity to continue to build God's Kingdom here in our area. We all have our role to play.

Canon Brian McGinley, Dean of the Kidderminster and Worcester Deanery, and Bishop David Evans, Auxiliary Bishop for Birmingham and Worcestershire.

Appointed to be read at the churches and chapels of the Deanery of Kidderminster and Worcester at every Mass and Service of Word and Holy Communion on 2nd and 3rd of March 2024.