

Here you will find a brief synopsis from Bishop David of the main points he reflected on after his recent pastoral visit to the South Bucks Pastoral Area. Towards the end of last year, the bishop spent three months visiting, listening, and encouraging us in our various pastoral communities. We are used to seeing the bishop much more frequently in these days of easy transport and the bishop has certainly visited often in recent months (Pilgrims of Hope, Lent Station Mass) but pastoral visitations are an important element in the bishop's oversight for the Diocese. He 'sifts and heeds' and reflects on what he has experienced as he helps us move forward in faith and hope.

The bishop's reflections do challenge us, and also encourage us to work together as we use the resources that have been given to our parish communities over the years and as we seek to hand on these communities to those who follow us. Do read the bishop's reflections carefully and prayerfully and see if you can involve yourself more fully in your parish as we plan for the future and create lively Catholic communities in the coming years!

Mgr Seán Healy, Pastoral Area Dean
March 2024

SOUTH BUCKS PASTORAL AREA PASTORAL VISITATION

First of all, my sincere thanks to you all for the kindly welcome, warm hospitality and generosity during the weekends of the pastoral visits. Hopefully, having me around was not too burdensome. I thoroughly enjoyed being with you, the lovely meals we shared together; on two occasions, with parishioners. The visitations helped me to grow in my appreciation and affection towards you all.

I want to encourage you Fathers to look after yourselves and the parish houses. You deserve to be looked after and cared for. It is not a neglect of Gospel simplicity to exercise good stewardship and to make sure the presbytery is a homely place of some modest comfort for yourselves. Please do work with your finance committees, the diocesan COO and property office, to make improvements and make sure the house is warm and comfortable. The same might be said of the churches. Again, if there are needs or particular projects you have in mind to make the churches, especially the sanctuary, places of beauty and fit for liturgical celebration, don't be afraid to talk with the COO about making plans. Again, parish properties might need thinking through. I am thinking of the presbyteries at Great Missenden and St Wulstan's High Wycombe.

My overall sense is that you have good parish communities here in the South Bucks pastoral area. It is difficult to see everything in the course of a twenty-four hour period, but there were some fine examples of catechesis, social needs outreach, pastoral care, prayer and spirituality groups of one kind and another. I very much enjoyed the liturgical music available in this part of the Diocese.

There were some novel ideas for raising funds, for the parish and for various social needs. There may be more jams and chutneys for sale at the back of your churches than any other part of the Diocese. Also, there is an awareness of how elderly some communities are. What will this parishes look like in five and ten years time?

South Bucks proves to be a most interesting part of the Church in this country. Our parishes are very near to those in the Archdioceses of Westminster and Birmingham, the Dioceses of Portsmouth and Arundel and Brighton. There is some movement between the communities of these dioceses, and that makes for a most interesting dynamic at times. I hadn't appreciated this before the visitations. There is some fluidity between communities. On more than a few occasions, I met with people who were not strangers to me. I had met them in liturgies in other communities. This fluidity is something which is very much part of our ecclesial experience in these times. On some occasions this was because certain Mass times suited their family arrangements that weekend. On other occasions it was just because they fancied a change. This certainly got me thinking. For example, is it worth arranging some "confessional swaps" occasionally? There may be other ways in which parishes can cooperate together. It would be profitable to see how parishes may work together with catechetical programmes. The *Emmaus talks* seem to be successful. They are a wonderful expression of reflection on important teaching themes across the pastoral area.

The recent carol singing in High Wycombe was an excellent and non-too threatening idea. It involved doughnuts, handing out sheets with Christmas Service times and even some parishioners receiving some basic formation in answering any questions which may arise.

Another aspect of things, which gave me much food for thought, concerns the future of parishes and parish combinations. Chesham and Chesham Bois are hardly a mile from each other. We all hope Fr Dave and Fr Giacomo will be at Chesham for a number of years to come. What happens when they move on? Should we consider an alternative arrangement to the one in place presently? What about High Wycombe? Should there be a time when this becomes one parish with three churches? What happens to Bourne End when Sr Winifred steps back from her excellent pastoral role there? Should we be thinking about reducing our numbers of parishes to accommodate the coming times when there will be less clergy available for parish ministry.

It would be imprudent if we didn't think about the future. That said, I do not want to be trapped into any sense of despair or anxiety about this. Just now, I want to be very positive about what the Church is doing in this part of the Diocese. There is much to celebrate and give thanks for. I recognise a very certain and firm foundation to build upon. How do we take things forward? In this regard, I want to encourage you to reflect upon those three familiar words by now, communion, participation and mission. Perhaps through the agency of the Pastoral Area Council, we can begin some synodal conversations around building a consensus about what these things might look like here in South Bucks.