

THE IMPACT AND MANAGEMENT OF CHANGE IN OUR LOCAL PARISHES

PARISH LIFE IN THE PAST

The Glossop area is steeped in historical traditions and none more so than in our local catholic parishes. Each has its own identity, customs and cultures which have been recorded in many separate books, pamphlets, photographs, displays and historical exhibitions through many decades. They make reference to its priests, nuns, benefactors, fundraisers, specific sodalities of male (Blessed Sacrament Guild) female (Holy Family Confraternity, Children of Mary, and the Ladies Guild) SVP, Life society, Choirs and youth groups (scouts, guides, cubs, brownies and specific youth clubs.) They write of parish special events like processions, social committees, cricket and football teams, pantomimes and dramatic societies. They tell of the roles of parish stalwarts with each era providing a different group of men, women and children whose support and energy vitalised parish life so that it forged ahead. There was a strong feeling of belonging to and love for our own parishes and at times the presence of parish rivalries and competitiveness.

IMPACT OF CHANGES IN OUR SOCIETY

Any discussions with those over 50 will see happy reminiscences of what it meant to belong to your local parish and schools and an admission that that there has been a seismic change in our local perceptions of parish life. Many parishes have tried to come to terms with the impact of the changes in society and how they have impinged on parish life. Each generation in the last decades has experienced changes. Our approach needs to change because our culture has changed. **If we are seeking to create a greater connection with our Catholic mission it should not be just because there are falling numbers attending Sunday mass and a decline in the number of priests to serve our existing parishes but because it is the necessary way forward.**

OUR CATHOLIC MISSION

Our mission is to lead people into a relationship with Jesus. We have become more in love with method rather than mission. If we only expect people to attend mass on Sundays then that is all they will do. How often have parishes asked the question why have people stopped coming to church in the last 10

years and had that question answered very clearly. We need to be the Church not just go to church. We need to challenge people to serve and provide them with a clear pathway to involvement. The world has changed. Church attendance has become a fringe activity. All welcome means nothing because if we did not attend church we would not know that or choose to go in without knowing what awaits us. Even regular church attenders are often irregular in their attendance. Many have not lost their faith but just attend less often. This has become worse since the pandemic but the obligation to attend Sunday mass had become a declining trend over recent years.

A MASSIVE CHANGE IN CULTURE

People have greater affluence and so more options. Children and their activities often dominate so Sunday football teams or horse riding interferes with church attendance and parents choose sport rather than church. People travel out to places and when not at home don't tend to attend church. There are many blended and single parents which may affect how they think the church views them. The on-line church seems here to stay whether you take part or not. The cultural disappearance of guilt has gone which was present in earlier generations. The hell and damnation threat suffered in the past no longer has a place in the Church.

People often look less to church leaders to grow their spirituality and more to other options and more often everything is searched for on line before we do anything. Today people don't seem to find any direct benefit from attending church and even those who love the church may be don't find the value in being there every week. If you value attendance over engagement then you will see declining attendance. There has been this massive culture shift. If our church leaders fail to recognise this and change rapidly enough to respond to the shifts that are happening then we will decline further. We must have honest conversations about faith, doubt and deconstruction. We need our culture of apathy to become a passionate culture excited for the Gospel.

OUR LOCAL PARISHES

If the Church is to survive in our area then we must not love our model more than our mission. If our mission was to travel then our method would have changed over the years through the different methods of improving transport.

As our mission is to lead people into a relationship with God we have to develop some empathy with those who do not attend regularly or who have lapsed, as well as those regular attenders who may feel themselves disengaged or disenchanted by the current diet offered in our parishes .We need to develop and implement a good outreach strategy that works. We need to be the Church not just go to church. We need to embrace technology opportunities for communication links and virtual worship if appropriate. We need to challenge people to serve and provide them with a clear pathway to involvement. We should focus all programmes around our mission. All need to be engaged in different ways but with the same goal. Preach action not knowledge

Let us try using Active Language

Be active in our Community-connect with groups- become a Christian in worship and in practical terms across all generations

Serve-join our mission-volunteers from all generations

Invite-Bring a friend or one who you know feels marginalised within all generations

Donate -as able and sensible not always financial awareness of all generations.

We need to understand that the potential to gain is greater than the potential to lose. Be innovative in our ideas and apply them in our action plans. In some ways make it uncomfortable to stay disengaged but by persuasion.

THE WAY FORWARD-NEXT STEPS

ISSUES FROM THE GREEN SHEET

Para 1. This is a Diocesan wide exercise to create larger parishes by amalgamating smaller ones and some places of worship will close.

Para 2. This covers our local scenario but no mention is made of the Immaculate Conception Broadbottom.Is that going against history and tradition and is linked with Marple or New Mills? There are currently 4 parishes in name and when the merger was proposed of St Charles and

Broadbottom it was objected to by the Immaculate Conception on financial grounds. It may be the Catholic Church in Longdendale but they are separate pastoral parishes with separate councils. There is not considerable crossover of parishioners but limited but there is cooperation and joint invitations taken up. All Saints and St Marys are already amalgamated. If it was one parish administration might well be streamlined but there would be no ability to make decisions by area places of worship. It would need to be a large full scale parish council not a pastoral one.

Para 3. The mass centre at St Margaret's School has already closed.

The largest budget costs must come from the maintaining our buildings and supporting our places of worship. The one priest would presumably say masses in all places of worship aided by a deacon. Could this be maintained? There would need to be increased roles for parishioners. Where are the real savings apart from the priest? What would priests and parishioners think of these two statements?

1. Most priests don't expect the laity to be leaders but followers.
2. Most Catholics don't want to take on leadership roles.

Might it involve salaried employees?

Para 4 This looks like a gun to the head. Parishioners support for the proposal is essential if it is to be successful. They want parishioners to come up the way it should be implemented to minimise our concerns BUT then say it is the only viable and sustainable way forward. Are there viable alternatives?

A proposal of this type is only worth discussing if an action plan was drawn up for consideration in relation to these changes and how they would be implemented.

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