

## The Bishop reflects on The Diocesan Pastoral Council

“The Diocesan Pastoral Council met for the first time on Saturday, 10 May, at St Paul’s College, Burgess Hill. A basic priority was to get to know one another in some way: very few people there seemed to know many other people, as you might expect from a group coming from a diocese as extensive as this. People could have been cautious and reserved, coming together like this for the first time, but they weren’t, and a friendly and positive atmosphere was generated very quickly, helped by the chair, Adam Simon from Weybridge.

### The people

One of the questions asked was from the youngest of the group from Crawley. She asked if the names had simply been pulled from a hat. The answer was no, that each one there had been recommended by their Deanery clergy, and then had been selected by me in a way that tried to achieve a balance of age, gender, experience and interests. Her response was very appropriate: “So we were called by name?”

### The agenda

After an opening liturgy from Hand in Hand and introductions, Katrina Avery, the Diocesan Pastoral Team Co-ordinator, gave a brief introduction to where such a Pastoral Council sits in a diocese, referring to a number of Church documents. Then the members were asked to reflect on a first question: ‘What are the signs of the times in A&B at the moment?’ The suggestion was that each person should make a personal reflection, rather than discuss it in groups, and this was probably a much more productive exercise. The question was divided into three parts.

### Today’s World

The picture of today’s world is a very challenging one, if not even negative; insecurity, apathy, conflict, greed and consumerism, poverty and the pace of life seem to be the dominant characteristics of our society, alongside a constant awareness of our fragile environment. Many are ‘disengaged’ and have lost their way. This is a real challenge to the Church.

### The mission of the diocese: its priorities

Inevitably, with an eye to the future, young people featured largely in people’s response to this question. As in previous consultations, adult formation also featured significantly. One of the more surprising areas of response, however, was the notion of ‘inclusiveness’; there was a call for parishes where people could feel welcome, comfortable, nurtured and supported, with particular reference to the disaffected and ‘lapsed’, people with disabilities and older people. Loneliness and isolation featured also.

'Imagine one thing..'

A predominant element of this area of response was optimism and energy; people wanted to see a more confident and lively Church, a Church more engaged with community and with other faiths. People wanted a liturgy that was more engaging, with better preaching and music, a Church offering better formation and education – can we not have a sense of excitement about our common vision?

What next?

The most important question of the day was, perhaps, do we want to meet again? The unanimous reaction was yes. The Pastoral Council has got off to a good, positive and enthusiastic start, and we are particularly blessed by the quality of the people on it. So how do we make our Church more inclusive, and how will we generate that excitement?"