

Blackfriars Partnership



A Letter from the Blackfriars Partnership

Father Shaun O'Neill our partnership dean writes:

I write to give you an update on the progress made by the new Blackfriars Partnership, what has been achieved, where we are going and to invite you to join us in our partnership's initiatives for 2018.

Earlier this year the Diocese developed the concept of partnerships; of adjacent parishes working together in spiritual development and with a shared organisation in order to help each other and to begin to better prepare for the expected shortage of priests and a reduction in the number of laity

Our vision is that in five years we will be able to say:

"Blackfriars has been built on the solid foundations of fifteen communities and parishes. We are working closely together in harmony and trust with an inclusive and expanded outlook to deliver the love of Jesus to everyone. The laity, especially the young adults, are leading the day to day running of Blackfriars so that priests and the laity can fulfill their baptismal calling to be missionary disciples".

This time something is happening, the representatives nominated by our priests from 14 parishes met in May to consider the ways forward. We decided that the development of trust is the most important factor in creating a partnership and we held an awayday with an external facilitator to foster free discussion, wipe away hidden agendas and identify the first priorities for us. Not surprisingly we identified Youth, Lay Leadership and Administration as the three areas, amongst nine that were discussed, that we could tackle together. Thus three sub groups each with a leader were formed that day.

The Youth sub group has met three times and is initially concentrating on the secondary school age group. Youth Sunday has been a particular highlight in several churches. The University Chaplaincy is heavily involved with this Youth sub group.

The Lay Leadership sub group has met three times and they continue to enthuse us to become missionary disciples in Blackfriars.

The administration sub group has met twice and has included the paid administrators and volunteer administrators in discussions about a review of administrative tasks and how to streamline them.

We have also created sub groups on Finance, on Liturgy and on Communications.

The Finance sub group has shared information and developed policies for working together. The Diocese has opened a Blackfriars bank account and a small partnership levy has been agreed so that our development work can progress.

In the development of our spirituality the Lay Leadership Group has organized a twenty-four hour prayer event in June at English Martyrs, a PDG workshop on vision and values facilitated by the Diocese at St Hilda's in November and is planning partnership events for 2018.

The Liturgy sub group organised a Partnership Advent Liturgy for everyone on December 7th at English Martyrs which I hope you all enjoyed.

The Partnership Development Group meets every month to review progress and develop plans and ideas, I am very grateful for this good group of volunteers who freely give of their time and who also have great experience.

We have all recognised the good work that is going on within the 14 parishes and it feels good to be building on these solid foundations. There are many volunteers already working and our task is to join their efforts together for the benefit of all. Our principle is to let ideas and creativity bubble up from the parishes and then to harness the benefits. Imagine, instead of every parish having to provide marriage preparation, baptism preparation and catechism courses separately, the partnership can put them on in a few centres.

All this requires good communication and we feel that you the parishioners need to be kept informed at all stages of the partnership development; the changes will affect you and although there have been items of partnership news in your newsletters we need to do more. Therefore there will be regular updates and our communication sub group is already developing a website to provide information about partnership matters and give links to parish websites.

There is no roadmap for partnership development and we have to trust in God and in each other, we have recognized the need for good governance. This will be provided by our priests who have the authority for their parishes. We held a working lunch with them on November 30th at which we discussed our progress and ideas. They have agreed our plans and will review them at six monthly meetings.

The PDG and the priests have recognized the need to review and rationalise mass provision across Blackfriars. This will be carried out carefully over the coming year.

So how do you find out what is happening and how do you join in, your parish representative on the PDG is Nigel Lightfoot, he is assisted by Catherine Armstrong and Alex Savlova, please contact them to find out more. We, the PDG commit to keeping you briefed through the newsletter, through parish activities and we will inform you as soon as the website is up and running.

God bless and I hope and pray you all have a Peaceful and Holy Christmas and New Year.