

OVINGHAM

PARTNERSHIP
in the Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle

Our Lady and St. Cuthbert, Prudhoe ♦ Our Lady of Lourdes, Chopwell ♦ Ss. Mary and Thomas Aquinas, Stella
St. Agnes, Crawcrook ♦ St. Anne, Winlaton ♦ St. Joseph, Blaydon ♦ St. Joseph, Highfield

How the future may look

*A three-stage implementation plan for serving our
parishes into the future*



Foreword

Across the diocese Partnerships are looking at plans to help our communities to grow given the circumstances that they are facing.

The Ovingham Partnership priests and Partnership Development Group have considered how our parishes could be served in the coming years with fewer priests and deacons. This discussion has been going on since June 2018 and has also involved presenting our ideas to the Episcopal Council. We feel it is now time to share the proposed plan with everyone in the partnership.

We present it to you as a plan which we feel will work only with the support of you the parishioners. It may be that parts of the plan do not come into operation for some time, if ever, but we feel that by having such a plan we are taking a step towards being ready for the future. It is presented in three stages of which only stage one has a commencement date.

Father Adrian Tuckwell
Partnership Dean

Stage One – July 2019 (proposed)

The parish of Highfield would become one of shared responsibility between Fr J James and Fr A Tuckwell.

Fr James would remain as Parish Priest at this stage, have responsibility for the administration of the parish, for St Joseph's School and the First Holy Communion programme, which is shared with Chopwell. Administration would continue as at present (Highfield, Chopwell, Crawcrook) until stage two.

Fr Tuckwell would have pastoral and all other sacramental responsibility.

The immediate implication of this would mean that St Joseph's, Blaydon would cease to hold a Saturday Vigil Mass (as a vigil mass is the only viable option in St. Barnabas' due to C/E Service times.) A new timetable for weekday masses would be drawn up for Blaydon/Winlaton/Highfield.

Stage Two – Implementation date to be confirmed

Stage Two is based on the reduction to three priests serving the Ovingham Partnership and the formation of two administrative areas within the partnership.

- Chopwell, Crawcrook, Prudhoe – served by one priest.
- Blaydon, Highfield (full responsibility transferred at this time), Stella, Winlaton – served by two priests.

Stage Three – Implementation date to be confirmed

Stage Three is based on the reduction to two priests serving the Ovingham Partnership.

- Chopwell, Crawcrook, Prudhoe – served by one priest.
- Blaydon, Highfield, Stella, Winlaton – served by one priest.

At this stage, regretfully, Highfield would cease to hold a weekend mass. However, the life of St. Joseph's, Highfield Faith Community would continue to be sustained and developed in celebration of a weekday Mass, school events, use of St. Barnabas' Hall and Church when appropriate, and all desired, required, needed events as organised by Highfield Parish and Parishioners themselves.

Rationale

Why choose St Joseph's, Highfield for losing the weekend mass?

Since the closure of the church at Highfield mass has continued in St Barnabas' CoE Church in Rowlands Gill. The use of a church from another Christian denomination has led to a number of issues some of which have been resolved and some are ongoing.

The ongoing issues with the building include: a limitation in the times that the church is available [eg: Holydays], St. B's "Low Churchmanship" that can be restrictive of some permanent artefacts of Catholic Piety [eg: Statues], the necessity of preparing the sanctuary each weekend for the Catholic mass and then returning to its original state [eg: removal of altar rails, re-siting of altar.]

At the time of the agreement to use St Barnabas' parishioners agreed to attend this church as the only possible appropriate local venue available to keep the community of St Joseph's, Highfield together.

Over the years many of those people have made their way to one of the surrounding parishes from a desire to be in a more Catholic Church, and for convenience. This has led to a diminishing congregation and increasing work load on those who remain.

Reputedly, from the time of closure of St. Joseph's Church, Highfield the feeling was expressed that the use of St Barnabas' Church would only be a temporary position and that inevitably it would cease to be a weekend mass centre.

Why a shared responsibility for Highfield for a period of time?

There are several reasons, which are outlined below:

- In order to try and balance the workload of the serving priests.
- to maintain for as long as possible present arrangements current for the 3 independent parishes of St. Agnes' Crawcrook/St. Joseph's Highfield/OLL Chopwell, working well together while sharing resources in common together [eg: Liturgical Practice/Parish Council/Admin/Financial oversight...]
- to smooth transition to stages two/three, ultimately envisaged to be inevitable for reasons above.
- St Joseph's School also serves the parish of Chopwell and, at the moment, the First Holy Communion programme is a shared venture. This too would take time to resolve.

Fr J James and Fr A Tuckwell will work together with parishioners to enable this shared responsibility to work. As both Fr James and Fr Tuckwell are now involved with their respective First Holy Communion Programmes we now envisage the first stage of the proposal not taking place until the completion of these programmes. We would recommend July 2019 as a possible starting point.

Conclusion

This outline plan is a broad brush-stroke and both stages one and two would require some lead in time. While those stages are ongoing we would also need to begin to prepare for stage three.

We are aware that the formation of the administrative areas will take time and will overlap the three stages of this proposal. When the administrative areas are established we must be prepared for a reduction in the number of services/events etc in individual parishes that involve duplication unless Lay led. A more co-operative approach in working together based on the strengths of different communities will be needed by Clergy and Lay People of all constituent parishes.

'How the future may look' reply form

Please use this reply form to tell us your thoughts about the strategy proposal for 'how the future may look' and return it to your Partnership Development Group representative or Parish Priest. Alternatively, you may email your reply to apewwithaview@gmail.com stating your name, parish and comments. Please reply before the deadline otherwise your feedback may not be considered.

Name: _____

Parish: _____

Preferred contact: _____ (optional)

I **am** / **am not*** broadly in support of stage **one**.

I **am** / **am not*** broadly in support of stage **two**.

I **am** / **am not*** broadly in support of stage **three**.

(* Please delete as applicable and aim to provide any specific reasons in the comments section below.)

Comments:

Continue on a separate page if necessary.