

**ARCHBISHOP'S HOUSE  
150 ST. GEORGE'S ROAD  
SOUTHWARK  
LONDON SE1 6HX**

**Pastoral Letter  
To be read or made available at Masses on the weekend of  
13<sup>th</sup> - 14<sup>th</sup> October 2007**

My dear people,

In 2006 I published a document called *"Towards a Vision for the Diocese"* in which I proposed a process of reflection on the future of the Diocese. A year later, I would like to express my heartfelt thanks to all those who have contributed so generously and enthusiastically to this process. We have considered together three issues that are central to the life of the Church today: Growing in Communion, Reaching Out in Mission, and Facing the Future. Clergy discussions took place as well as discussions among the laity. These came together in deanery meetings in which a composite report was prepared, drawing the fruits of the conversations together. I know this involved a lot of work and I would like to express appreciation to all those who gave their time and talents to it. The next stage was for the reports from the deaneries to be collated so that we could get a picture of what was said through the diocese as a whole. This process has now been completed and I offer for your consideration a summary of what was said in response to the invitation to reflect together. Some copies will be available in parishes and it can be accessed online ([www.rcsouthwark.co.uk](http://www.rcsouthwark.co.uk)). It is important that people feel they have been heard and I hope you will find that your thoughts and ideas figure in the summary. Not included in this present publication are submissions from other groups but I wish to acknowledge them and to offer assurance that the fruits of their deliberations will be taken forward

to the next stage of the process. It is important to acknowledge that this process has already borne fruit in the life and work of some parishes and deaneries that have engaged with it. This document should help to further that development. But more work has to be done at diocesan level.

So, where do we go from here? Before Christmas I will be having two important meetings. One is with the heads of diocesan agencies who do great work for our diocese. The purpose of this meeting will be for them to "receive" the fruits of the deanery meetings, identify priorities and seek to develop a shared vision for the future. The report contains helpful indications for the future of the diocese, including the work and priorities of our agencies. The other meeting is one with the deans at which, in the light of what has emerged so far, we will begin to look at issues of practical implementation especially in relation to Facing the Future. In my initial document I mentioned the fact that in Southwark we are in a different position from some dioceses where the British and Irish communities, who were the traditional back-bone of the parishes, are now severely depleted and drastic decisions about closures, amalgamations, and new pastoral areas, have to be made. Of course, we have suffered from reduced attendance at Mass, too, but our congregations in many parts of the diocese have been swelled and enhanced by the arrival of Catholics from overseas. Our overall Mass attendance is stable. Our diocese is

complex and diverse and there can be no one-size-fits all solution for the challenges we now face. At this stage, it seems to me that the deanery, not in isolation but in collaboration with neighbouring deaneries, is the most obvious framework for discerning and implementing the changes that will be necessary over the next few years.

It is my hope and intention, therefore, that a Vision statement for the future will emerge next year. But we must take things step by step and a number of issues will need to be considered, such as the question of what expertise or what special groups we may need to take things further.

It is not possible or, indeed, appropriate to summarise the report in this letter but I would like to highlight a few themes from the consultation as a whole that struck me as particularly important for our future work.

In first place there was the centrality of the Eucharist and the importance of building up community around it, an open inclusive community characterised by a real spirit of welcome; the need for groups, like Parish Pastoral Councils, but also groups where people can pray and break open the Word of God together. In terms of outreach and mission there was a clear sense that this is a complex and multi-faceted task which involves dialogue with those outside the Church and outreach to the marginalised and those in need. Looking to the future there were real fears but also a desire to prepare constructively. There was also a strongly felt need for coordinated adult formation that is accessible and, indeed, for a good theology of the laity. Likewise there was a strong call for a real drive to discern and foster vocations to the priesthood and diaconate. The question of supporting our young people figured significantly

as did a desire for greater integration of schools and parishes in the one communion of the Church. As well as concern that clergy should be more free of administrative burdens, there was a recognition that our lay people are also under pressure and not always able to give as much time to parish work as they would wish. And there were many other things that were said and proposed in a very positive and constructive way. Of course, it goes without saying that future plans and projects will be fully in accordance with the teaching, practice, and discipline of the Church. But there is scope for creativity and development and I commend this report for your reflection and prayer.

Once again, I appeal to you to bring this whole matter before God in prayer. The Liturgy Commission is preparing some resources for use in Advent when we open ourselves afresh to the action of God in our lives and in the Church.

Let us be open to the Holy Spirit in these days and have real hope in all that the Lord is doing in our times. As in my first Vision statement, I invite you to turn confidently to the Lord, and particularly to the Cross where blood and water still flow from the side of Christ to give life to the Church and the World.

With my blessing and the assurance of my prayers,

**+Kevin**

Archbishop of Southwark

Given at St George's Cathedral,  
Southwark  
On 1<sup>st</sup> October 2007,  
The Memorial of St Thérèse of the Child  
Jesus