

You Are Living Stones parish open meetings in Borrowwash and Long Eaton

Aim: to discuss the questions posed by our Bishop with his pastoral message.

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The proposal that most intimately affects our parishes in the scheme put forward by the bishop and his Council is this: **“Link St Francis of Assisi, Long Eaton with St Hugh, Borrowwash”**

At Bishop Malcolm's presentation to priests, the question was asked, “What does 'link' mean? Does it mean, 'Prepare to share a priest?’” The answer was, “Yes.” In a further written clarification, Fr Andrew Cole, the bishop's secretary wrote, “For the avoidance of doubt 'link' means share a parish priest.”

St Francis has a capacity of 160 seats with kneelers for the congregation, with a further 23 seats without kneelers (e.g. for deacons, servers, any concelebrating priests, organist and choir). In the last official count, in October, the average attendance over the two Masses was 207. On Sunday 3rd March, 32 children took part in the children's liturgy of the word during Sunday morning Mass.

St Hugh has a capacity of 140 seats. In the last official count, in October, the average Sunday Mass attendance was 120. 15 children take part in the children's liturgy of the word.

The bishop's first question: what do you think of the proposed links between parishes, etc., in general?

Is the general idea of linking parishes to avoid or delay closing churches one we support? Do we have any other reflections on the proposals?

The bishop's second question: do you think that the proposed link is reasonable? If so, why? If not, why not? Please feel free to suggest reasoned amendments (e.g., this proposal won't work because...).

Is it practical, if one priest is to celebrate Holy Mass in both parishes? The Mass times at present are like this:

- Saturday St Francis 6pm Holy Mass
- Sunday St Hugh 9.30am Holy Mass with children's liturgy, and St Francis 10.30am Holy Mass with children's liturgy

A common theme when priests who've taken on a second parish are asked to reflect on their experience is the advice: “Never have less than two hours between the start of two Masses.” Their experience is that less than this means that they can have no time to linger and chat to people after the first Mass, and they can find themselves unable to arrive in time for their spiritual preparation before the second Mass. This is unsatisfactory for parishioners who don't get to talk to their priest, and if it persists as a long term

arrangement (versus a temporary emergency), the anxiety of knowing that he has the next Mass to get to can do serious damage to a priest's devotion. He can find that this habitual anxiety means he no longer looks forward with serenity and joy to a celebration of Holy Mass; and in some cases, after years of coping, it can even lead to priests celebrating Holy Mass in a joyless, hurried, careless fashion, giving the congregation the impression that Holy Mass for their priest is a chore, celebrated (if that's the word) as if he's got something better to do.

Each of the parishes has had the experience of losing a Mass in recent years; Long Eaton, their 8.30am Mass, and Borrowwash, their 11am Mass and their Sunday evening Mass. Of those losses, the ending of the Borrowwash evening Mass was the most recent (the other two Masses ended more than three years ago). Does this history mean that Long Eaton should in charity be more willing to give up a Mass, or change their Mass time, than Borrowwash?

There are two special groups whose needs we might want to keep in mind. People who rely on public transport, and children who attend the children's liturgy. Sometimes only one parent is Catholic, and the other parent looks forward to their spouse and child returning from Mass so they can spend the rest of the day together – a children's liturgy too late in the morning could cause tensions in some households. Some of these parents might judge that for the sake of family harmony, and to have more time for family activities, they would have to choose the earlier Mass wherever it is celebrated.

Here's some possibilities for Sundays.

- St Hugh's 9.00am Holy Mass with children's liturgy
St Francis 11.00am Holy Mass with children's liturgy

This shares out the pain of moving Mass time, as each congregation has a half hour adjustment. If many of the parents of the 32 children from St Francis children's liturgy choose to move to an earlier St Hugh's Mass instead, that might be overwhelming (not just for the children's liturgy, but also because there are only twenty spare seats in Borrowwash on a Sunday). So the two times could be swapped.

- St Francis 9.00am Holy Mass with children's liturgy
St Hugh's 11.00am Holy Mass with children's liturgy

Might 9.00am be too early? In that case, keeping a 9.30am Mass at St Hugh's would look like this:

- St Hugh's 9.30am Holy Mass with children's liturgy
St Francis 11.30am Holy Mass with children's liturgy

The danger of overwhelming St Hugh's with children and parents from St Francis still exists in that plan, though, but it does have the advantage of keeping a time that those who have lost their Sunday evening Mass at St Hugh's are still getting used to. We could, though, keep that time, and, as before, swap the churches so that the earlier Mass is at St Francis, the larger church.

- St Francis 9.30am Holy Mass with children's liturgy
St Hugh's 11.30am Holy Mass with children's liturgy

Is 11.30am too late, and would a quarter of an hour make any difference? So instead of 9.30 and 11.30, Holy Mass is celebrated at 9.15 and 11.15? Are any of these options workable? Are there other options for the Sunday Masses (keeping in mind the needs of parents and children, and of those who rely on public transport)? Which option do we prefer, and why?

For the Vigil Mass on Saturday night, three options have been identified.

- Cancel it. Fewer than fifty people attend some weeks, and there are Saturday night Masses in Beeston and Derby available to people for whom any move to Sunday morning would cause intolerable hardship. Although there is not presently enough room in St Francis on Sunday morning for the people from Saturday night, there could be space if some Sunday worshippers from St Francis decide to worship at St Hugh when the Sunday Mass times change.
- Keep it as it is: Saturday 6pm in St Francis.
- Share it: celebrate the Saturday Vigil Mass at St Francis on (say) the first and third (and any fifth) Saturdays, and at St Hugh's on the second and fourth. If St Hugh's Sunday Mass does change time, gaining a Vigil Mass twice a month might soften the blow. Would it be confusing to have the Vigil Mass in one parish some weeks, and another, the others?

Are there other options for the Saturday Vigil Mass? Which option do we prefer, and why?

What about Holy Mass on weekdays? Can we find ways, for example, to see that people who rely on public transport are not disadvantaged?

Are there other topics to consider in answering the bishop's question as to whether "the proposed link

is reasonable?" Are there any "reasoned amendments" we'd want to suggest to the bishop?

The bishop's third question: in what ways can your parish and its parishioners change in order to better fulfil the Church's mission of preaching, worship and service?

Can those who run the children's liturgy in both parishes continue to serve at revised times?

Can people with cars take care of those who would otherwise face a long journey by bus to get to Holy Mass?

Can parishioners take care of setting things up for Holy Mass, and putting them away afterwards, so that their shared priest can arrive and leave in fitting serenity of mind, confident that everything is taken care of?

If we find a pattern of weekend Mass times that will work, should we adopt it as soon as possible, instead of waiting for the bishop to move one or both of our priests? This would give, for a time at least, Canon Ka Fai and Fr Martin the ability to cover for each other for holidays and (God forbid) sickness.

What about the broader issue of service? How can our parish better be a visible and active sign of God's love for the world and the local community?

The bishop's fourth question: what would your parish do to support other parishes if they lost a resident priest?

We don't know if Canon Ka Fai would be moved, or Fr Martin would be moved, or if they would both be moved and a new priest come in to care for both parishes. If one of the priests is to stay, should he be allowed, if he wishes, to continue living in his present house, so the stresses of taking on the service of a second parish aren't added to by the stresses of moving house?

What ways can we think of in our parish of supporting the other one if it's their parish that loses their resident priest? And the other local parishes who lose their resident priest?

The bishop's fifth question: in what practical ways can the parishes of your deanery work together?

A priest caring for both parishes cannot attend simultaneous meetings in both deaneries. Should Borrowwash parish join Nottingham West Deanery? Should Long Eaton parish join Derby Deanery?

Is there another parish that would work better than Long Eaton in sharing a priest with Borrowwash?

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What ways can we think of for parishes in our deanery to work together?