Hexham and Newcastle Clergy

I pray not only for these but for those also who through their words will believe in me.

As I begin to write this first reflection I am conscious that it is the Feast of the Lateran Basilica, the Cathedral Church of Pope Francis and as it says at its entrance, The Mother of all the churches of the whole World. It therefore seems a good day to reflect on the Church, which like each one of us has a story to tell. Each of us has a story to tell, parts of which will be public and well documented, other parts of our story are known by only a few, those people we trust and with whom we are prepared to share our more private thoughts, and there will be parts of our story known only by God and ourselves. There will be parts of which we are rightly proud, and parts which we would prefer to forget, and perhaps given the chance would do very differently. Looking back over our lives, that is with the gift of hindsight we can see certain moments, certain decisions taken either by ourselves or by others as defining moments, shaping the way we have lived. The first appointment we were given, the different moves as curates and then as parish priests, different responsibilities we have been asked to undertake and so forth. All of us might at some stage either today or at some other time take a prayerful and reflective look at the past years of priestly ministry, however short or long they have been.

As some of you will know part of my own time as a priest was spent on the staff at Ushaw teaching Church History. In these days of increasing busy-ness I blush when I remind myself that when I went there in 1977 I had two lectures a week! I blush even more when I remember on one occasion I cancelled a lecture because I wasn’t prepared. At first I thought my job was to turn out Church Historians, but I quickly learnt that not only was this a forlorn task it was also wrong, so what I ended up trying to do was help the students to know something of the story of the Church, to have a feel for its long history, to recognise that Vatican II wasn’t the first time the Church had undergone significant change.

I appreciate that this is not a history lecture but I want to kick off today with a reflection on the Church using a verse from John 17, the so called farewell discourse, and I do so because I think it can give us real hope and encouragement in these present times. Jesus is preparing his disciples for the events that are to unfold, the betrayal by Judas and his subsequent arrest, the denials of Peter and his subsequent remorse, the abandonment of the other disciples and Jesus own suffering which leads to his death on the cross and his being raised to life and his return to the Father. he prays first for the disciples, that the father will protect them from the evil one, and he promises them the Spirit who will consecrate them in the truth. And then Jesus widens his prayer as he says, *I pray not only for these but for those also who through their words will believe in me.* This is a beautiful prayer, a hope filled prayer reminding us as it does that Jesus has prayed for the Church – the Spirit filled pilgrim people of God – throughout the centuries, just as he prays for us today. Jesus didn’t stop with his disciples, or with the first generation of Christians, rather his prayer is constant and continues for us today.

If we go back to the last recorded words of Jesus in Matthew’s Gospel we read the following: *Meanwhile the eleven disciples set out for Galilee to the mountain where Jesus had arranged to meet them. When they saw him they fell down, though some hesitated. Jesus then came up and spoke to them, he said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore make disciples of all nations, baptise them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teach them to observe al the commands I gave you. And know that I am with you always, yes until the end of time.*

What we have here is a mission and a promise, the mission to go out and make disciples of all nations, the promise that Jesus will be with us until the end of time. Jesus didn’t give a set of instruction on how to be Church, he didn’t leave a blue print, indeed he spoke far more of the Kingdom than of the Church. He left a mission and a promise, and throughout its long history right down to our own day, the Church has lived under the imperative of the mission and with the encouragement of the promise. Sometimes the mission can seem too great, we are more conscious of our inadequacies than any achievements, it is precisely at such a time that we need to remember the promise of his abiding presence, and also to remember that it is HIS Church.

We get an insight into the story of the beginnings of the Church through the AA. The dramatic response to the preaching of Peter, the opposition of some of the religious authorities, the Damascus Road Conversion experience of Saul of Tarsus, the struggles to reconcile converts from Judaism and converts from a Gentile/Pagan background; the importance of decisions like those made at The Council of Jerusalem refusing to make unnecessary demands on gentile converts. And Jesus prayed for them.

We know that for the first three centuries, the followers of Christ, who were called Christians for the first time at Antioch, were liable to persecution by the Roman State, meaning that the decision to become a Christian was a serious one made more pertinent by the ultimate witness of martyrdom – the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church. And Jesus prayed for them.

A huge change took place in the 4th century when the Emperor Constantine began a process which was to allow the Church to move from being a persecuted minority, through acceptance to become the dominant religion in the Empire. Bishops now took on civic responsibilities, changes took place in the liturgy, it was now the done thing to become a Christian and writers begin to speak of nominal or sham Christianity. So disillusioned were some that they literally withdrew into the wilderness to live as a hermit or as a member of a growing number of religious communities, the forerunners of the Religious Orders. And Jesus prayed for them.

WE know there were heated debates about the God revealed by Jesus as a communion of Father, Son and Holy Spirit, about the Person of Jesus himself and it took more than 400 years to for the creed we say every Sunday and Solemnity to be formulated. But the very creed which was meant to bind Christians together became one of the sources of disagreement and conflict leading to the first major split in the Church between East and West culminating in mutual excommunication in the middle of the 11th century. And Jesus prayed for them.

After this split and with the growing influence of Islam there were the crusades beginning at least in the minds and hearts of popes and saints as an attempt to win back the Middle east to Christianity but which often degenerated into the wholesale destruction of scared [places and which further alienated East and West. And Jesus prayed for them.

In the West there were constant calls for reform often led by the new Religious Orders, known as the Mendicants. With the changed and changing face of Europe, the opening up of the so called New World, the apparent inability of unwillingness to reform we have what is called The Reformation when among other things we find the bizarre situation of people calling themselves Christians putting to death other people who also called themselves Christians, and the one who died was either a heretic or a martyr depending on which side you stood. And Jesus prayed for them.

After the Reformation positions hardened and as always when dialogue stops little progress can be made in finding solutions to differences. The Reformer were convinced that the Pope was Antichrist, and the Church was convinced that the Reformers were heretics. The Church battened down the hatches, demanding absolute obedience and conformity on its members. The Protestants had defected from the truth and the only way forward was repentance and a return to Rome. And Jesus prayed for them.

Elsewhere the Gospel was being preached in places hitherto ignorant of Christianity. Those baptised were likely to be introduced to a Western understanding of the Church, words like inculturation were unheard of, and in some places the Church, supported by political power, committed great atrocities in the name of religion. And Jesus prayed for them.

At the beginning of the so-called modern period with a whole number of revolutions, political, industrial, intellectual, scientific and so forth people were raising huge questions not about which side was right but about the relevance of the Church and the very existence of God. And Jesus prayed for them

In our own time, John XXIII shocked the church and the world by summoning the bishops of the world to 2VC, only the 21st General/Ecumenical Council in close on 2,000. He gave three reasons for summoning the Council, Renewal, Reform of Canon Law and Christian Unity. His successor, Paul VI pledged himself to bringing the Council to a fruitful conclusion which came bout on December 8th 1965 – exactly 50 years to the day before the beginning of The Year of Mercy. And Jesus prayed for them.

In those past 50 years the Church has lived in a world and a society which has changed more quickly than at any time in the past. Think for example of communications, the power of television, the introduction of the internet, the availability of the mobile phone. Think too of changes in medicine, in technology, in science, in travel in work patterns, in the role of women. Think of the changes in attitudes towards authority, towards marriage, towards family life. Think of the changes in our own lives, our own experiences, our understanding of the Church, of evangelisation, of mission, of ecumenism and so forth. And Jesus prays for us.

When things are changing rapidly the temptation can be to go for the quick fix, to move the deck chairs rather than to look more deeply. When things are changing rapidly we need to hold on to Tradition with a capital T and to have the wisdom to know that traditions with a small t we can legitimately set aside. We live under the same mission and we have the same promise as all our predecessors over the last 2,000 as we try and be the Church in our world at this particular time. And as we continue to proclaim the Good News, build community, celebrate our faith and serve the world and the Church, albeit in changed and changing circumstances we are sustained and encouraged by knowing that whatever else is true, Jesus is praying for us.

I pray not only for these but for those also who through their words will believe in me. (2)

Soon after Arthur Roche took over from David Konstant as Bishop of Leeds he called a series of meetings of the clergy to ‘discuss the state of the diocese’. We were invited to look at our own individual situations in parish and deanery, and more widely to look at the diocese as a whole. The reason he gave was simply that we cannot go on as we have done in the past. The growth time, in vocations, in church attendance, in new build, in creating new parishes was not just slowing down but shuddering to a halt. Projections for the future, and the date we were given was 2018 which isn’t that far away, all pointed in the same direction, namely that we would have to manage a significant change both of personnel and plant if we were to avoid meltdown.

I remember the discussions well largely because I was on the losing side of the argument which wanted to begin with identifying faith communities and then ways of encouraging, nourishing, nurturing those communities with or without a resident priest. The side that won the argument started with the priest and how he might best be employed. So our reorganisation was called Providing priests for parishes. The decision was then made to go down a statistical route, a viable parish should have a weekend Mass going population of 500, and a reasonable workload on a priest was 60 baptisms and funerals in a year. Having just left a parish where there were more than 500 at Mass and significantly more than 60 baptisms and funerals I knew first hand what sort of workload that entailed. The statistical route we were told, though far from perfect, was at least an attempt to be fair. From where I was sitting it was riddled with holes because it presumed that all of us whatever our age or health could be expected to do the same amount of work and handle the same amount of responsibility. The advantage of having different parishes in terms of size and location is that there is some chance of those involved with appointments being able to match the interests and abilities of the priest with the needs of the parish.

As I mentioned above, I lost the argument. In the Leeds diocese, unlike here, reorganisation began on a piecemeal basis, and the first city to be looked at was Bradford which was made up of two deaneries. It was an interesting choice with which to begin because Bradford, arguably more than any other city or town in the diocese, had undergone a huge demographic change in the past couple of decades. The term ‘white flight’ was a short hand for this change. What was interesting was that very few people argued against the need for reorganisation, but it was often a case of the reorganisation taking place somewhere other than their parish. Many people appreciated the amount of information that they had been given, especially the snapshots of the various parishes in the deaneries, all of which again underlined the fact that things could not stay as they are. People also felt that they were given sufficient opportunity to express their views but, and it was a big but, there was a strong feeling among a lot of people that their opinions were not taken into account and that decisions had already been made, or would be made anyway. Eventually the planned reorganisation was published by the bishop and reactions to it were, as expected, mixed. Some agreed, others disagreed but where the changes took place relatively quickly and with the support, at least publicly, of the priests involved, the new arrangements had a good chance of succeeding. Where a proposal was published and not implemented, and there is still at least one outstanding, the hurt continues and in fact deepens.

Those who were responsible for fronting the process of change learned from the Bradford experience and there was significantly less aggravation in the other areas that went through the process. I was directly involved in two changes, the first in Huddersfield and the second in Selby. In Huddersfield I wasn’t parish based at the time but I was living in the area. Eventually after weeks of meetings and consultations the Bishop came to present his proposals for the area. It was a very full meeting and there was a good conversation and at the end of the meeting the Bishop had obviously heard one of the main points being made, namely that people tend to go along a valley rather than across it, and one of the proposals would mean people crossing the valley. The plan was changed to accommodate that view.

In Selby things were different again. The Selby deanery was, and remains very small, made up of Selby, Tadcaster, Scarthingwell, Carlton and Goole and Howden which it had recently acquired from the Middlesbrough diocese. There were resident priests in 5 of the 6 parishes, with Howden serving Carlton with a Mass on Sunday. In June 2008 Bishop Roche came to Scarthingwell for a Deanery Confirmation. After the Confirmation he gave each of us a pastoral letter to be read the following Sunday at each of the Masses. In the Pastoral Letter he explained that he was having to remove the priest from Howden who would not be replaced and from the following September, the parishes of Selby and Carlton and Howden and Goole would be amalgamated. Tadcaster and Scarthingwell would remain as they were. Fortunately the priests of the deanery had for some time been preparing for such an eventuality and so the announcement at the weekend Masses hardly came as a surprise. However, as any of us know who have been involved in amalgamations or clusterings or whatever and the actual nitty gritty of Mass Times and availability etc was a not without its moments.

In 2012 Bishop Roche moved to Rome and it wasn’t until November of last year that Bishop Stock was ordained. In those years nothing happened in terms of the on going reorganisation of the diocese, and to date the situation of 2012 remains the same today, though the Halifax deanery has been told that it is likely to be the next to be reorganised. This obviously leaves a feeling of the job only being half done and so there remains the reality of further change but no one knows as yet when that will happen or if it will follow the previous pattern.

What did happen in September of 2012 was the publication called A review of ‘Providing Priests for Parishes’ produced by the Kinharvie Institute on behalf of the diocese of Leeds. It makes interesting reading and I would like to share a few things from it which I have found very useful.

1. To acknowledge the need to do something is one thing, finding the right way of doing it is another.
2. Where change takes place the positive outcomes of the change need to be emphasised as much as, or more, than the negative reasons for change. For example if the only reason for change is because there is no priest there is little to encourage people to embrace a different future. All of us need a vision out of which to live rather than a reminder of how things used to be in the past.
3. Change is best accepted where consultation has taken place and where those being consulted feel that they have had a real input into the decision making process. The key to good consultation is for those taking part to know from the beginning that their contribution is needed and valued but that the leadership is retaining the authority to make the decisions. This avoids false expectations and disappointments.
4. To acknowledge that change necessitates a period of transition – the psychological adjustment people need in order to come to terms with their new reality. This will mean people being supported in different ways. For example if a church is to be closed to celebrate the closure with a ritual of some kind which acknowledges the loss that people understandably feel.
5. Time scale is also important if change is to be accepted. Our experience has been that making decisions and then not implementing them is a recipe for discontent and disappointment.

I began this brief paper by admitting that when we embarked on the preliminary meetings for the reorganisation of the diocese I lost the argument, but that is how life is, you win some and you lose some. What I would have loved to have happened and what I still think would be a good discussion at a deanery conference is to ask what we understand the main priorities of the Church to be, and then to ask how can we best try and promote those priorities. I suggest four to begin with and invite you, either individually or round the table to agree, disagree, add, subtract or whatever:

Proclaim the Gospel Proclamation

Build Community Communion

Celebrate our faith Liturgy

Serve the World and the Church Service

Hexham & Newcastle Clergy Afternoon Session

You did not choose me, no I chose you and I commissioned you to go out and bear fruit, fruit that will last.

Today the Church keeps the memory of Pope St Leo the Great who was pope from 440-461. A respected teacher and theologian he is only one of two popes to have the cognomen Great after his name. It was during his time as pope that the 4th Ecumenical Council of the Church took place at Chalcedon which declared the two natures of Christ, human and divine, though the rapid growth of monophysitism, claiming Christ only had one nature and that divine, demonstrated the difference between proclamation and acceptance. Leo wasn’t present at the Council but his influence was and the after the declaration of the two natures those present are alleged to have said, ‘Peter and has spoken through Leo’ something those who championed the position of the papacy would quote again and again. Leo’s papacy was lived against a background of rapid change. The Roman Army had for many years overstretched its resources and what had been one of the most secure empires in history was beginning to disintegrate. Leo personally persuaded Attila the Hun not to sack Rome, and later he deterred the Vandals from torching it and raising it to the ground. Ironically the breakup of the Roman Empire was going to give the papacy the opportunity of assuming a leadership role that it could never have imagined while the Emperors were in power.

I mention all this simply because it is another example of change affecting the Church, offering opportunities as well as problems, albeit many centuries ago. This morning we reflected a little on the Church and this afternoon I want to offer a reflection on ordained ministry. By the time of Leo the Great the so called three fold ministry of bishop, priest and deacon was established. The diaconate as a ministry in its own rite was to virtually vanish from the Church in the Middle Ages and has relatively recently been restored in the Western Church after Vatican II. Interestingly in our diocese Bishop Stock recently met the permanent deacons and asked them to share with him their joys and challenges associated with their ministry, then he shared with them his own vision for the permanent Diaconate emphasising the importance of vocation, of being called to this particular ministry by God.

As we know there are three aspects to vocation, the call from God, the acceptance by the individual and the recognition of both the call and the acceptance by the Church. Thinking about vocation, can I believe, be of great encouragement to us all because it reminds us that for whatever reason we have been chosen by the Lord to be priests and deacons at this particular time and in this particular place. The God who called Abram, Moses, David, the Prophets, Mary calls us. The Lord who called Peter and Andrew, James and John on the sea shore, Matthew from the tax office, Jude the zealot, Judas who betrayed him calls us. We can think of a hundred and one reasons why someone else should have been called in our place, but they were not and we were, and are called, because God never revokes his promises, God is always faithful, and the call we received and to which we responded is as real today as it was when we first became aware of it.

Just for a moment go back in time and try and recall when you first thought about ordained ministry, what it was, or perhaps better, who it was who planted the idea in your minds and hearts. Think of the questions you asked and were asked by others, think of the support of family and friends, or perhaps not as has sometimes been the case. Think of the years of preparation and formation, the good times and the not so good, the people who helped and those even who might have been a hindrance. Think of the different appointments you have been given and you have taken up without necessarily understanding why you have been asked to go here or there, do this or that, but have done it with generosity. You did not choose me, no I chose you and commissioned you to go out and bear fruit, fruit that will last. Christ has bound himself to us, has poured the Spirit into us, not simply at baptism, confirmation or ordination, but every moment of our lives, and the spirit we have been given is not a spirit of timidity but of love and strength and self control.

At this stage I can hear myself, never mind anyone else here, thinking easy words to say but not that easy to believe on a wet Thursday when hardly anyone came for Mass, the person who had said a meeting was urgent has failed to turn up, the school decided it was more important to have a rehearsal for the play than to have the planned assembly you had promised to attend, and there is the hospital to visit, a Governors’ meeting and a couple who you have never met wanting to know what they have to do to get married. The examples could be multiplied, and perhaps when they are we need all the more to remember and rejoice in the fact that we have been and continue to be called. Our vocation is alive and well and something we might want intentionally to give thanks for.

One of the realities of our own time is the so called lack of vocations. One of the main reasons prompting the whole discussion about reorganisation is the lack of vocations, and how best to make provision for the future. If we are honest, we are probably wondering what impact fewer priests in the future will have on us, will we ever get to resign from office and so enter a different, presumably less pressured, period of priesthood? Perhaps a different question might be are we too anxious about vocations? If we pray for them, if we try and live out our ministry with joy and hope then what more can we do? It is God’s Church and presumably God has a way of dealing with what we might regard as a serious personnel problem. God is quite capable of deciding what kind of Church he wants. Instead of anxiety perhaps we should pray for a more ardent trust in God, to be a little bit more in awe of the power of God’s Spirit, to be more God centred, to really believe in God’s providence who will not see the Church fail.

And this brings us back to the question of how we see the Church. Is the Church basically a human entity or a divine reality? Is the Church just a historical construct or the mystery of God’s continuing presence among people? We need to be clear because what is true of the universal Church is also true of the local Church. A diocese is more than a group of parishes under the guidance of an individual bishop, a parish is more than a geographical area with a church and a resident priest, the parish is the place where two or three gather in Jesus’ name. The Holy Spirit is poured into these human gatherings, and we are invited to share in the divinity of Christ who humbled himself to share in our humanity. The whole Church came to be from the side of Christ, from which flowed blood and water, the sign of his total self giving ,a priestly people, gifted in different ways and with different responsibilities to proclaim the reign of God among us and to be the body of Christ. Being the Church is a shared exercise and we know from our own experience that part of our role as priests is to encourage and nurture the gifts of those who are not ordained but who have the ability, willingness and generosity to use what God has given them for the building of the Kingdom and the glory of his name. Priests have been doing this for centuries though the words collaborative ministry are relatively new.

Some priests might be fearful of letting go and of wondering what is left, others might be thinking if only there were such gifted, willing and generous people in the parish, I can’t even get anyone to help with the liturgy of the word for children never mind anything else. It would be an interesting exercise to write down what we saw as the priorities of priestly ministry and then to write down how we spend our time and energy. In my own case, with a very small parish and no secretary the Newsletter probably takes up more time than it should. If we were to look up Canon Law we would see the duties, rights and responsibilities of a priest set in legal terms. Book 2 Chapter 6 Canons 515-552. It made interesting reading in preparation for today. (Sometimes we might have recourse to the law for our own protection or to help someone else.)

Canon 521 //2 reads ‘He, the parish priest, is also to be outstanding in sound doctrine and uprightness of character, endowed with zeal for souls and other virtues, and possessed of those qualities which by universal or particular law are required for the care of the parish in question.’

This section of the Code forms the basis of the Induction of the priest into the parish and as a way forward for this afternoon I thought it might be helpful to think of our ministry in terms of the questions asked both of the individual priest and the parish, emphasising as it does that we are certainly in this together but that, by virtue of ordination, we do have a very specific role. The way the Induction Rite is set out, at least in our diocese, is that there is a statement and then a question to the priest followed by a question to the people.

The first statement: *It is the duty of the priest to proclaim the Word of God. He must study the Bible and meditate on its message; believe what he reads; teach what he believes and practice what he teaches.* (echoes of the ordination ceremony) Given this is the first statement does it mean that Proclaiming the Word is our first priority, and if so do I give it the time and energy it deserves and needs? What helps and what hinders?

Then the question to the priest: *Are you willing to cooperate with your bishop in preaching Christ in season and out of season, explaining to all the Word of God?*

The question to the people: *We are all called to preach Christ by the witness of a good life and to share our faith with others. Are you willing to do this?*

This first statement and questions to both priest and people are very powerful and telling. We all share in preaching Christ by a witness of a good life, we all share in sharing are faith with others, but through ordination, we as priests and deacons, have the responsibility of giving the homily after due meditation and preparation, which others do not have.

The Second Statement: *The priest supports the People of God in his prayer as they go forth to carry out the mission of the Church.*  What a powerful and succinct statement reminding us of the centrality of prayer and of the obligation to pray for the people of the parish *as they go forth to carry out the mission of the Church to the world.*

The question to the priest: *Are you willing to pray with the people of this parish as well as for them, and encourage them in their apostolate in the world.*

The question to the people: *You share in the work of the Church. Will you work and pray together in love, seeking through prayer and service to grow in the knowledge of the faith and make the Gospel known throughout the world.?*

The Third statement is quite a lengthy one. *The priest is to be a faithful minister of the Sacraments. In the Sacrament of Baptism men, women and children are reborn in Christ and become members of the family of the Church. In the Sacrament of Matrimony he witnesses marriage vows. In the Sacrament of reconciliation he forgives sin in the name of Christ and his Church. In the Sacrament of the Sick he strengthens and consoles the sick and the dying with holy oil.* This is a very strong reminder of the sacramental nature of the Church and the importance of the celebration of the different sacraments at different times in people’s lives.

The question to the priest: *Will you ensure that the people of the parish are prepared to receive the Sacraments worthily and fruitfully?*

The Question to the people: *Will you co-operate in preparing people for the reception of the Sacraments and celebrate the Sacraments with them?*

The Fourth Statement: *It is the priest’s privilege and duty to preside at the Sacrifice of the Mass to proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes, and to feed the people with the Body and Blood of Christ.* The Eucharist is the source and summit of the Church’s liturgical and Sacramental life. The parish is most obviously the Church when it gathers to celebrate Mass especially at the weekend. It matters then how Mass is celebrated, it matters that we deepen our appreciation of and gratitude for the Eucharist, it matters that everyone present plays as full a part as is possible and appropriate to their age and understanding.

The question to the priest: *Are you willing to celebrate the Eucharist faithfully for the living and the dead, as the Church ordains for the glory of God and the sanctification of Christ’s people?*

The question to the people: Will you faithfully participate in the Eucharist so that the Church may be built up as the Body of Christ?

The Fifth Statement: *The priest should encourage his people along the road to unity with all Christians and seek the gifts of unity and peace in the world.* There is a level of friendship and co-operation between Christians of different denominations which we sort of take for granted, and there is a willingness on the whole to emphasise what we have in common rather than what divides us, but full participation in the Eucharist is still a hope rather than a reality.

The question to the priest: *Are you willing to work zealously to overcome division and to seek the unity for which Christ prayed?*

The question to the people: *Will you co-operate with all Christians to promote the work of unity?*

It seems to me that the Induction Rite invites us to reflect on our role as priests within the context of parish we are appointed to serve reminding us that we have a great deal in common with the whole community but that we also have specific responsibilities that come to us through ordination.

The Induction Rite – Diocese of Leeds:

The first statement: **It is the duty of the priest to proclaim the Word of God. He must study the Bible and meditate on its message; believe what he reads; teach what he believes and practice what he teaches.**

*Are you willing to co-operate with your Bishop in preaching Christ in season and out of season, explaining to all the word of God?*

*People of the parish of…we are all called to preach Christ by the witness of a good life and to share our faith with others. Are you willing to do this?*

The Second Statement: **The priest supports the People of God in his prayer as they go forth to carry out the mission of the Church**

*Are you willing to pray with the people of this parish as well as for them, and to encourage them in their apostolate in the world?*

*People of the parish of…you share in the work of the Church. Will you work and pray together in love, seeking through prayer and service to grow in the knowledge of the faith and make the Gospel known throughout the world?*

The Third statement is quite a lengthy one. **The priest is to be a faithful minister of the Sacraments. In the Sacrament of Baptism men, women and children are reborn in Christ and become members of the family of the Church. In the Sacrament of Matrimony he witnesses marriage vows. In the Sacrament of reconciliation he forgives sin in the name of Christ and his Church. In the Sacrament of the Sick he strengthens and consoles the sick and the dying with holy oil.**

*Will you ensure that the people of the parish are prepared to receive the sacraments worthily and fruitfully?*

*People of the parish of…will you co-operate in preparing people for the reception of the sacraments and celebrate these sacraments with them?*

The Fourth Statement: **It is the priest’s privilege and duty to preside at the Sacrifice of the Mass to proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes, and to feed the people with the Body and Blood of Christ.**

*Are you willing to celebrate the Eucharist faithfully for the living and the dead, as the Church ordains for the glory of God and the sanctification of God’s people?*

*People of the parish of…will you faithfully participate in the Eucharist so that the Church may be built up as the Body of Christ?*

The Fifth Statement: **The priest should encourage his people along the road to unity with all Christians and seek the gifts of unity and peace in the world.**

*Are you willing to work zealously to overcome division and to seek the unity for which Christ prayed?*

*People of the parish of…will you co-operate with all Christians to promote the work of unity?*

The final Question: *Are you willing to accept your responsibilities and to carry out your ministry in this parish?*

*People of…your new parish priest has publicly committed himself to his responsibilities and his ministry among you. Will you pray for him and co-operate with him in this ministry?*

Other priorities?

Some Scripture Passages for personal reflection

God said to Abram, “Leave your country, your family and your Father’s house, for the land I will show you. I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name so famous that it will be used as a blessing.”

Genesis 12:1-2

God said, “And now the cry of the sons of Israel has come to me and I have witnessed the way in which the Egyptians oppress them, so come I send you to Pharaoh to bring the sons of Israel, my people, out of Egypt.” Moses said to God, “Who am I to go to Pharaoh and bring the sons of Israel out of Egypt?” “I shall be with you,” was the answer.

Exodus 3:10-11

Samuel said to Jesse, “Are these all the sons you have?” He answered, “There is still one left, the youngest; he is out looking after the sheep.” Then Samuel said to Jesse, “Send for him; we will not sit down to eat until he comes.” Jesse had him sent for, a boy of fresh complexion, with fine eyes and pleasant bearing. God said, “Come anoint him for he is the one.” At this, Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him where he stood with his brothers, and the spirit of God seized on David and stayed with him from that day on.

I Samuel 16:11-13

In the year of King Uzziah’s death I saw the Lord God seated on a high throne; his train filled the sanctuary; above him stood seraphs, each one with six wings; two to cover its face, two to cover its feet and two for flying. And they cried out one to another in this way, ‘Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Sabaoth. His glory fills the whole earth.’ The foundations of the threshold shook with the voice of the one who cried out, and the Temple was filled with smoke. I said, “What a wretched state I am in! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have looked at the King, Lord Sabaoth.’

Then one of the seraphs flew to me, holding in his hand a live coal which he had taken from the altar with a pair of tongs. With this he touched my mouth and said, “See now, this has touched your lips, your sin is taken away, your iniquity is purged.”

Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, “Whom shall I send? Who will be our messenger?”

Then I answered, “Here I am, send me.”

Isaiah 6:1-9

The word of the Lord was addressed to me saying, ‘Before I formed you in the womb I knew you; before you came to birth I consecrated you; I have appointed you as prophet to the nations.’ I said, ‘Ah Lord God; look, I do not know how to speak, I am a child!’ But the Lord replied, ‘Do not say, “I am a child”. Go now to those to whom I send you and say whatever I command you. Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to protect you – it is the Lord who speaks!’

Then the Lord put out his hand and touched my mouth and said to me: 1There! I am putting my words into your mouth. Look today I am setting you over nations and kingdoms, to tear up and to knock down, to destroy and overthrow, to build and to plant.’

Jeremiah 1:1-11

A he was walking by the Sea of Galilee he saw two brothers, Simon, who was called Peter, and his brother Andrew; they were making a cast in the lake with their net, for they were fishermen. And he said to them, ‘Follow me and I will make you fishers of men.’ And they left their nets at once and followed him.

Going on from there he saw another pair of brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John; they were in their boat with their father Zebedee, mending their nets, and he called them. At once, leaving the boat and their father, they followed him.

Matthew 4:18-22

He went out again to the shore of the lake, and all the people came to him, and he taught them. As he was walking on he saw Levi the son of Alphaeus, sitting by the customs house, and he said to him, ‘Follow me’. And he got up and followed him. When Jesus was at dinner in his house, a number of tax collectors and sinners were also sitting at the table with Jesus and his disciples, for there were many of them among his followers. When the scribes of the Pharisee party saw him eating with sinners and tax collectors, they said to his disciples, ‘Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners? When Jesus heard this he said to them, ‘It is not the healthy who need the doctor, but the sick. I did not come to call the virtuous but sinners.’

Mark 2:13-17

He called the Twelve together and gave them power and authority over all devils and to cure diseases, and he sent them to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal. he said to them, ‘Take nothing for the journey; neither staff, nor haversack, nor bread, nor money; and let none of you take a spare tunic. Whatever house you enter, stay there’ and when you leave let it be from there. As for those who do not welcome you, when you leave their town, shake the dust from your feet as a sign to them.’ So they set off and went from village to village proclaiming the good news and healing everywhere.

Luke 9:1-6

On the following day as John stood there again with two of his disciples, Jesus passed, and John stared hard at him and said, ‘Look, there is the lamb of God.’ Hearing this, the two disciples followed Jesus. Jesus turned round, saw them following and said, ‘What do you want?’ They answered, @Rabbi’ – which means Teacher – ‘Where do you live?’ ‘Come and see’ he replied; so they went and saw where they lived, and stayed with him the rest of the day. It was about the tenth hour.

One of the two who became followers of Jesus after hearing what John had said was Andrew, the brother of Simon Peter. Early next morning Andrew met his brother and said to him, ‘We have found the Messiah’ – which means the Christ – and he took Simon to Jesus. Jesus looked hard at him and said, ‘You are Simon, son of John; you will be called Cephas’ – meaning rock.

John 1:35-42

Jesus said, ‘This is my commandment; love one another as I have loved you. A man can have no greater love than to lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. I shall not call you servants any more because a servant does not know his master’s business; I call you friends because I have made known to you everything I have learnt from my Father. You did not choose me, no I chose you; and I commissioned you to go out and bear fruit, fruit that will last; and then the father will give you anything you ask him in my name. What I command you is to love one another.

John 15:12-17