

# FORWARD TOGETHER IN HOPE

We are calling our 3-year diocesan journey of renewal, *Forward Together in Hope*. It is about all of us, whether young or old, lay or ordained, in parishes or in schools, working together to explore and discern God's will for our diocese. It won't be an easy journey; in the words of Bishop Séamus, 'This can be painful, but there can be no growth without pain.'

Using information held centrally by the diocese and carrying out a thorough self-assessment, each worshipping community will look in detail at how best it can flourish into the future. This is likely to mean significant change for many of us. Some communities may not be able to worship in their current church but will be able to thrive by joining with a neighbouring community. A key strength of the approach is that it will take place in the same way across the whole of the diocese. The entire process will be firmly rooted in prayer and a real openness to the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Resources will be provided to help worshipping communities to reflect prayerfully on the future challenges and opportunities.

The success of *Forward Together in Hope* depends on all of us playing our part and thinking beyond existing boundaries. Please respond to this invitation to join the journey of renewal for our diocese by praying and offering of your skills and talents.



Fr Jim O'Keefe – Diocesan Development Director  
Tony Sacco – Diocesan Development Officer  
Email: [hope@diocesehn.org.uk](mailto:hope@diocesehn.org.uk)  
Website: [www.hope.rcdhn.org.uk](http://www.hope.rcdhn.org.uk)

Glory be to the Father –  
in whom we live and move  
and have our being.

Glory be to the Son –  
whose name we bear and who  
calls each of us to be his disciples;  
to build his Kingdom and to go out  
into the world and bear its fruit.

Glory be to the Holy Spirit –  
pouring out grace and guidance,  
forming us and renewing us.

Inspire us all in the Diocese of  
Hexham and Newcastle to live the  
Gospel, be open to change and  
move forward  
together in hope.



**'I am trusting in the Holy Spirit to guide us through  
the next three years. We are looking very realistically  
at our diocese and the resources available to us to  
ensure that we will flourish in the future'**

**Bishop Séamus**



**Your Invitation  
to take part in  
A Journey of Renewal  
in the  
Diocese of Hexham  
and Newcastle**

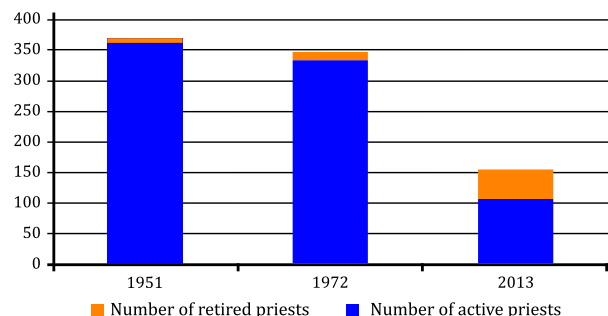
FORWARD TOGETHER  
IN  
HOPE



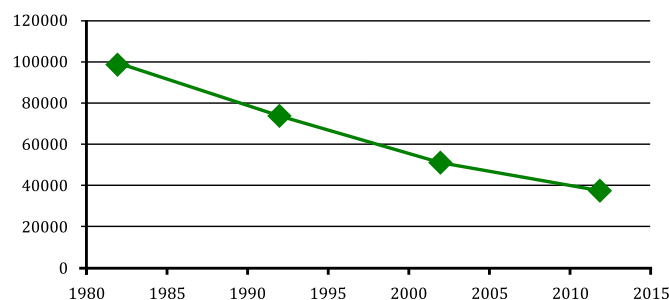
## WHERE WE ARE

Our diocese is founded on an immensely rich Christian heritage that has thrived and flourished over hundreds of years despite the many difficulties it has faced.

DIOCESAN PRIESTS



AVERAGE MASS ATTENDANCE



The group of priests serving our diocese is reducing in number and increasing in average age. Over the past 40 years, the number of active priests has fallen from around 340 to just over 100 today. We currently have only 5 priests under the age of 40 and more than half (56%) are already over 60.

Attendance at Mass has dropped significantly too; over the last 30 years or so the number has reduced from almost 100,000 each weekend to fewer than 40,000. The number of churches the diocese needs to manage and maintain has remained static since the 1970s despite the fact that there are many fewer priests.

As we move forward into the future we will continue to flourish - although we will all need to think about our diocese in new and creative ways.

## FLOURISHING WORSHIPPING COMMUNITIES

As part of this journey of renewal we will explore together what makes for a flourishing and viable worshipping community. Each of the current parishes in the diocese will be asked to consider carefully and prayerfully the ten areas shown below. The exploration will involve clergy and people working closely together at every stage. They will produce a detailed assessment under each of these headings along with recommendations about the way forward.



*'Pastoral ministry in a missionary key seeks to abandon the complacent attitude that says: "We have always done it this way". I invite everyone to be bold and creative in this task of rethinking the goals, structures, style and methods of evangelization in their respective communities.'* - Pope Francis (Evangelii Gaudium, 33)

## STAGES OF THE JOURNEY

### PREPARING THE WAY

- ▶ Developing liturgies and prayer resources
- ▶ Developing and distributing information leaflets and guidance
- ▶ Informing everyone about the approach through meetings, documents and a DVD
- ▶ Collating and presenting centrally held data
- ▶ Initial meetings and training for clergy and laity
- ▶ Bishop Séamus leads Days of Reflection

Autumn 2014 – Spring 2015

### EXPLORING THE WAY

- ▶ Prayer and liturgies across the diocese
- ▶ Providing unique data to each parish
- ▶ Extensive consultation and self-assessment process in each worshipping community
- ▶ Support and advice from the diocese
- ▶ Return completed self-assessment and recommendations
- ▶ Detailed analysis and validation of responses
- ▶ Clarification meetings and on-going discussions

Spring 2015 – Summer 2016

### POINTING THE WAY

- ▶ Prayer and liturgies across the diocese
- ▶ Information and analysis made available to Bishop Séamus to take decisions about the future
- ▶ Communicating these decisions and indicating the way forward for everyone
- ▶ Supporting parishes in moving to the new arrangements

Autumn 2016 – Summer 2017