

## **DIOCESAN ASSEMBLY:**

### **Introduction:**

On Saturday 24<sup>th</sup> November 2012 180 people from across the Diocese gathered at LACE (Liverpool Archdiocesan Centre for Evangelisation) to meet as the Diocesan Assembly discussing: "It was the Lord's Day," Keeping Sunday.

Delegates were sent from each Pastoral Area and from specialised ministries and agencies within the Diocese. There were also ecumenical representatives.

In preparation for the meeting the Archbishop reminded us the purpose of the Assembly would be to look at the developments of Leaving Safe Harbours and With You Always within a reflection on the Lord's Day. We would meet to learn, to listen, to explore to plan and to pray together. He reminded us how Pope Benedict often refers to the Lord's Day and how in his first volume of "Jesus of Nazareth" he speaks about the Sabbath and its significance for the identity of the Jewish people, the change to the Third Day and what we can learn today from the Jewish way of keeping Sabbath then and now.

As part of the preparation for the Assembly each Parish was invited (from September to November) to reproduce in their weekly newsletter part of the Apostolic Letter of Blessed Pope John Paul II called Dies Domine – the Lord's Day. The quotations from then Letter were accompanied by some thoughts and reflection questions for each week. These reminded us that Sunday is a day of rest; a day for remembering; a day for relationships; a day of grace; a day for gathering; a day of welcoming; a festive day; and a day for justice and a day for sharing.

In 21<sup>st</sup> century Britain we have more leisure hours per person than anyone could have guessed a hundred years ago – but we are not leisurely, we are not relaxed. We are anxious, we are in a hurry, we are busy. The anxiety and the hurry ruin intimacy and sabotage our best intentions in faith, hope and love – the three actions in which we try to do our best. We need to keep Sabbath in order to live whole and mature, with an appreciation and pleasure, experiencing the heights and depths of God's glory in our bodies, in our work, in our friends, in our gardens, in our emotions, at the sea, in the mountains. And we cannot do that if all is hurry or if we are watching the clock.

Sabbath is the biblical tool for protecting time against desecration. It is the rhythmic setting aside of one day each week for praying and for playing. This is necessary for us to "live life to the full", to live a "truly blessed life". We can learn from children how to keep Sabbath – we can play and pray. This is God's gift to us.

For the Christian praying, our act of worship is liberating and freeing. We stop being "me" and become "we". We find our rightful place in the plan of our loving God and we find the right place of our brothers and sisters throughout the world.

The second element of the day is to play! The makers instructions invite us to celebrate the gift of the earth, the gift of our bodies and minds – games, walks, reading, writing, pic-nic-ing, eating. We take in colours, shapes, sounds, smells. We let creation –re-create us. We surprise ourselves by creating a meal, a conversation, an appreciation, some laughter.

Why do we find this so hard to do? Who is wanting to steal our Sabbath from us? This is happening bit by bit, not an armed robbery, but we are being pick-pocketed. So many situations, people, things call us away from playing and praying because they want us, they make demands on us – they have rights over us. And once we have given away Sabbath we may never get it back again.

## Responses from the Consultation on Keeping Sunday

### Summary report of the responses to “Keeping Sunday: A Consultation”

*Dear Diocesan Assembly*

*If this letter surfaces at your gathering, I will be astonished. One of the presumptions made about the laity is that we are all ‘on line’ and can be processed easily. So no e-mail ‘no-go’.*

Over 500 people took the time to respond to the consultation, either by e-mail or letter and many of these were hand written. Contributions were received from the Deaf Community, from parish groups and from one school staff. A majority of responses appeared to be from the elderly but whilst some are completely negative, many are genuinely searching their experience and their hearts to offer valid comments – a strong sense of never being asked to contribute or of being listened to shines through. A generous amount of time has been spent preparing responses: revealing a desire to reflect on the deeper underlying issues behind the questions with many groping to discover possible answers within their reflections. Almost all expressed some measure of concern about the outcomes from the consultation. It would seem that lots of people are struggling to stay inside the Church. Areas of concern included:

- Sunday opening resulting in a feeling of ‘7 identical days’
- The changed nature of ‘family’ and the pressures on young families
- Lots about how to attract young people – from ‘old people’!
- Lots of sadness, a sense of loss for what has been lost: the closure of parishes; changed Mass times.
- Obligation v Free response
- The multi-faceted task of reaching out to people – personal invites, sacramental programmes, links with schools, welcoming of children
- The importance of the homily
- A lack of accountability in parishes
- The scandal of abuse
- The new translation of the missal
- The importance of music in liturgical celebration
- Transport
- The flexibility Vigil Masses offer: for some they provide the only opportunity for Sunday worship

*We are very fortunate in having a priest who breaks open the Word so richly; the homily fortifies and inspires, guides you through the week. Gives the week meaning – helps with difficulties.*

#### **Question 1**

- **How has Sunday changed for you over the years?**
- **What have we gained and what have we lost?**
- **In what ways do you keep Sunday a special day in the week?**

“Over the years Sunday has changed enormously. We always walked to church and I only remember the sun shining as I went down the road. We had three Masses – 8am, 9.30 and 11.00. Mother would run to 8.am because she had to return for 11.00 to play the organ and lead the choir and she said you could not hear Mass when doing that.

Father was only with us for a short while, the first five years of my life was war time but the next five years, when he was well enough, we went to the 9.30. I only remember the sermon time because I would sit next to him and with arms folded he would hold my hand. That made Sunday very special. After he went to heaven my place in church was on the organ bench sitting next to mother. That made me and Sunday special.

There were not so nice things as well – wearing hand-me-downs was one thing, but when it came to my brother's Harris Tweed overcoats – they were prickly as well – I just wanted to disappear: all illusions of grandness and specialness had evaporated.”

[Recorded for the Assembly]

Generally, whilst the loss of a ‘special day’ was clear, there was also appreciation for the more relaxed feel to Sunday and the opportunities for spending time with family and friends.

I attend Mass on Sunday for several reasons. First, to worship God because I am a child of God and worship is life-blood for faith to be sustained; it is a source of vitamins for faith, it provides a booster injection; it is refuelling for the week ahead.

Second, to be reminded of the story of salvation in which we are invited to participate and the offer of grace we are invited to receive.

Third, to have my faith reinforced by being in the presence of other people worshipping – since we cannot be Christians on our own, as a solo effort. I find that with all their variety, oddities, and diverse kinds of goodness, their striving, their loyalty, their perseverance, their humanity - all this is humbling and helpful to my sticking with it.

Fourth, because I am a sinner, I fall short, I need to acknowledge this in the words of the Mass and to express this out loud and to open myself to the constant offer of forgiveness.

Fifth, to hear the Word of God opened up in different ways in the sermon.

Sixth, on a specially good day, or in special circumstances, to experience a more powerful boost to faith, perhaps to receive some insight into an aspect of God's will for us and God's ways with us, perhaps a strong emotional lift, perhaps a stronger than usual sense of the spiritual. [Recorded for the Assembly]

For some, a new and deeper appreciation of Eucharist as thanksgiving has been gained. The Deaf Community now has access to more signed Masses; there are more relaxed relationships between laity and clergy and in many places, a deeper appreciation of community through opportunities for tea/coffee after Mass. Overwhelmingly, there was support for the freedom and flexibility afforded by Saturday Vigil Mass.

### Question 3

- How can we attract more people to join us in worship on Sundays?
- How can we reach out to Catholics of all ages, teenagers, young families, older people, who no longer worship with us?

“I feel, having given it much thought, that the Church needs to improve its image and standing in people's minds. The new translation of the Mass alienates rather than attracts people, its language is abstruse and non-inclusive and the syntax is very off-putting. The product with which we are presented obscures my understanding. The process by which it was imposed on us was yet another example of the dictatorial stance adopted by the Vatican. It presents for me an image of God as one who punishes and is judgemental, the God of the Old Testament. When I attend Mass now I feel much the same as I did as a child at one of the many Missions I attended with my parents. I remember so well the feelings of being made to feel afraid of God. I can still recall the words on the back of the Mission leaflet: “Remember you have one life to lead, one God to love and serve, one eternity to expect. Death will come soon, judgement will follow and then heaven or hell forever ...” I was terrified of God. I feel that the image being portrayed to me now through the new translation would instil in me equal fear had I not been fortunate enough in my life to be taught by others that God loves me unconditionally.” [Recorded for the Assembly]

### Why do you attend Mass on Sunday?

- How does it help you?
- What positive changes have you noticed in the Church in recent years?
- Do you think the introduction of a Vigil Mass on Saturday night has changed the nature of Sunday for many people?

Respondents pleaded for change at the institutional level: more consultation and less imposition. They spoke of the challenge this question poses today in an age of secularisation when 'the Church' is felt by many to be 'out of touch' with the ordinary of people's lives. But there were many positive ideas of practical ways to invite people and to stay in connection.

Finally, a visionary response looking to what it might be like:

" ... the connections between the hopes and fears, the joys and sorrows, of daily life, on the one hand, and, on the other hand the gestures and language of the liturgy and the teaching of holy scripture need to be brought out in as many concrete ways as possible. This requires as many people as possible having some degree of involvement in preparing for the liturgy, in reflecting on the scriptures, and in the process raising the issues of daily life, sharing their concerns and the perspectives. The voices of as many categories of people as possible need to be surfaced in the church, so that people can identify with the experiences being shared and with the diverse faith perspectives actually held. This will inevitably be messy, untidy, not smooth, clean, safe or polished (but then life is not smooth, tidy, simple, or unambiguous). We have to work extremely hard to become a LISTENING church. It will take years to overcome the excessive stress on promulgation from on high, telling people what to think. We have to ask people what God is saying to them in their experience, help them to listen to their experience (where God is at work all the time), give them the confidence to speak out of their experience, provide hospitable spaces for sharing both life and faith. In the typical congregation there is massive experience of life and an inchoate and unarticulated wisdom waiting to be drawn upon. However, moving from where we are - with very long traditions of passivity and one-way transmission, from above to below - will be very hard indeed. People will resist taking on more responsibility. Of course, if they did take on more responsibility, they would soon want to have more say in the major decisions, and that would be extremely uncomfortable for those in authority. If we applied to the church what we know from ordinary life about what makes some people credible, and what ensures that leaders are made accountable, rather than self-serving, then a very different pattern of hierarchy would develop and there would be a chance for the emergence of a church that understood authority properly - authority in service of facilitating growth in our discipleship. "

## Summary of the Presentation by Canon Joseph Smith, Leeds Diocese.

Jesus knew and loved the Sabbath – the night before was family meal time – he kept in touch with the Law, with family and community.

He began to heal on the Sabbath – he took up from God the Father (who rested on the Sabbath) he began to give people health, wholeness, salvation, a way back in to the community – what the Father wanted for all Gods people.

The Resurrection came, it is now the key to understanding Sunday for us.

The key to this is the resurrection was a surprise. Being surprised is a key to our Christian life – have you been surprised this week?

Jesus breathed on his disciples and told them “go out”. The breathe of new life, the gift of the Spirit, is given to us to “go out.”

The Apostle Thomas not only meets the risen Jesus, but he is part of the community again – this is key to our celebration of Sunday.

In the Emmaus story, Jesus asks questions: “What are you talking about?” – Jesus listens. In the responses to the Diocesan leaflet about Sunday, people said it was good to be asked, to be listened to. The 2 disciples invited Jesus to stay – he accepted – when did I last ask Jesus to be with me, to stay with me, to abide with me?

There will be 6 conversation groups that will be part of the Assembly Day the titles of them have been made up from the responses to the leaflet, Keeping Sunday:

1. **What is good about Sunday liturgy in your parish and what could be better?** The homily is a very important part of Sunday. Not junk food, but something that will really feed us. Being welcomed really matters. Not just the ministry of welcomers in the church porch but the responsibility of all of us. The welcome isn't just at the beginning of the Mass, nor just at tea/coffee time, but at any time in the Mass. Silence is also very important – how long is it, what do we do with it?
2. **Family Sunday's: Church – Life - Work balance:** What makes Sunday special for me? Is it just going to Mass. What do I do on a Sunday that will help me deepen the awareness that the Lord is risen? It must be life-giving. (Sundays of old were dreadful days, boring – not a celebration of resurrection!) Jesus is about life, (“I have come that you may have life and have it to the full”); the gift of Sunday is a special day so that we can enjoy life. The week must not be 7 identical days – this is not what God wants. How do we do this? A meal, a video – so many ideas can come from this Assembly. Whatever we choose to do has to be life –giving?
3. **Why have some Catholics stopped going to Mass?** The most common response was lack of welcome. (For example do divorced people ever get a welcome!) We must not make people feel burdened, we must not pile burdens on to those who already feel they that don't get it right, or do not do enough. Jesus teaches us how to welcome people. The other issue raised was accountability. Is there an opportunity for gentle nudging? In the Church there is no “complaints system.” For many families Sunday sport has become a huge part of life. It involves many members of the family. What can we do to help, not pretending this is not a reality – but how can we help? How do you fit everything in over the weekend? How do we nourish a strong faith? The Mass cannot take the full weight of that.
4. **What might bring people back?** Baptism begins with naming, our prayer begins “in the name...” In Church how often do we say “the man with the stick...the lady who does the flowers...” we don't know their names. Everywhere you go people have their names showing (supermarkets, train conductors etc) – and here we are in the Eucharist and we don't know each other by name. “We are called by name.” Do we ever think of having an evaluation sheet? Am I willing to be involved in what is going on?
5. **Celebration or obligation – me or us?** The Mass is a communal prayer. We ask the Holy Spirit to come down on us and make us one, in mind, body and spirit. How do we show we are one? I have

got to be concerned about all my brothers and sisters. Being the Body of Christ means I am concerned about the Body of Christ. The Eucharist gives us the energy, compassion and concern of Jesus so that we can live it in our lives.

6. **This is what Sunday could be like?** An opportunity to dream dreams. It's over to you!

## **The Conversation Groups:**

### Conversation 1

#### **What is good about Sunday Liturgy in your parish and what could be better?**

Discussion started with, and many times returned to, the good examples of Liturgy of the Word with children. Parishes work with a model that works for them. Children leaving the main assemblies do so in a variety of ways as they do when they return. Delegates have taken away many ideas that they will try in their parish.

Welcomers at the door of the church are a relatively new idea to some whilst others have a well established team involved in the ministry of welcome. Some parishes confident in this ministry have introduced welcomers at all church services and are using training resources from the diocese to help with this. As with Liturgy of the Word with children there was lots of sharing of good practice and ideas.

The importance of music was discussed. Emphasis was placed on the use of appropriate music/hymns. There are many diverse examples of practice but it is felt that on the whole parishes do their best to provide music appropriate to the community, liturgical season and skills of musicians.

Homilies to reflect what goes on throughout the week. The things people are dealing with.

Do we expect the Mass to do everything? It was felt by some that we try to fit too much into the Sunday Mass. A joyful celebration with time for silence and reflection. It is difficult to get the balance right. Parish priests are challenged to leave communities with good, lasting experiences of liturgy and participation.

### Conversation 2

#### **Family Sunday: church – work – life balance.**

It is becoming more a case how/where do we fit Mass in around our busy lives. We are fortunate that in parishes and pastoral areas there are Mass times that include Saturday evening and Sunday. Parishes should be creative in enabling people to reflect on what shapes their Sunday. Our work with families through the With You Always programme is an opportunity to teach/re-educate families on the teachings of the church around the Sabbath.

It is true that shopping and sport has big influences on how we spend Sunday but we need to start by setting an example for others to see. Let's begin with Sunday parish activities/events. Sunday picnic, games afternoon, shared meal. These things might catch up; at the very least they may generate further discussion.

We can learn a lot from other denominations and how the Sabbath is a day for the whole community to spend time together socially as well as a community of worship.

How do we pass on faith and traditions of our faith to our young people?

### Conversation 3

#### **Why have some Catholics stopped going to Mass?**

Welcome is important to people whether they are new to the parish community or returning, for whatever reason, after a time away. Lots of areas of good practice were identified throughout the conversation including how in one parish deaf people are included in everything. This led to the importance of being an inclusive parish community where everyone is valued and can participate in parish life.

There are those people who have fallen out with the parish priest and then find it difficult to go back even when a new parish priest arrives. This can be seen as a two way situation. How do clergy reach out to those who been hurt or feel left out?

Closure of churches, changing Mass times, the new translation of the Mass and not enough new opportunities to engage are all having an impact. As are changing life styles and family situations. Same sex couples, second relationships and divorce. People feel unable to be welcome because of the way they live.

Strongly expressed during the conversation was that people do not attend Mass but they still have a very firm belief in God.

#### Conversation 4

##### **What might bring people back to Sunday Mass?**

Be a listener. Church needs to be a place where people can feel safe enough to say the things they are feeling without being judged. We are not very good at evangelisation. What about those people who are having difficulty putting bread on the table, asylum seekers, and single parents?

Things going on outside of Mass should be open invitation to all parishioners. There needs to be fresh ideas, new ways of thinking; inviting people to a "Come + See" Day at the parish – social action groups, bereavement ministries, lay home visits/visitors.

Let's involve/invite our families. With You Always is a good start. What about learning from others with activities like "Messy Church" that will encourage the whole family to participate?

We need to know more about divorce and marriage law. When inviting people who are divorced do we welcome them to participate in the Eucharist?

Keeping in touch after baptism. There are some examples of good practice from across the diocese. How do we share our experiences with other parishes? What works? What doesn't work?

The conversation also included how we keep in touch with people. Should we be using modern technology to keep in touch – text, phone, email?

Our challenge is to give good news and be good news.

#### Conversation 5

##### **Celebration or obligation – me or us?**

The conversation began with discussion around whether Sunday Mass is a time for quiet prayer or communal celebration. Some people find it difficult to find a quiet time during week and think church on Sunday is the right place to find it. For some silence is difficult to reach as we live in a society that is far from silent. It is difficult to move from noise to silence sometimes.

The spoken word needs space. Silence needs a context.

Some have been brought up with Mass being an obligation. Why were we not told it was about meeting the risen Christ?

The conversation moved to the younger generation, young people and young parents. Lots of younger parents don't know the meaning of Mass. Parishes need to be creative in finding ways to teach them what they don't understand.

Mass is an obligation if you have toddler! It can be hard to be a parent of young children at Mass. We need to extend our welcome further with deeper meaning and understanding to these parents – Little children are welcome in their father's house.

The only people obligated to be at Mass is the priest. Although there is a sense in some that they would never miss Mass.

Essentially we are all family together, bound by the love of God. Within the community individuals have personal journeys and the need to talk to God personally. So in Mass there should be a balance of personal and communal prayer opportunities.

Conversation 6

### **This is what Sunday could be like?**

The conversation began with vision. How do we find a fresh vision? Who is allowed to form that vision? Lots of ideas culminated in the suggestion that we need to address the issues around those things that stop us developing or hinder our relationship with Christ including second relationships, how we pray, who leads the prayer.

We could hold youth events in the city use music and the children's talents to get them involved.

Family Masses each half term involving school, chaplains working with the people who know the families better than we do.

Events and activities to follow up the community gathering at Mass.

### **Where do we go from here as a Diocese?**

How to follow up the work of the Assembly:

- A lay council for the Archdiocese to feed back views from the laity
- More Adult Formation but basic, on the Mass for example, and not too intellectual
- Liturgical resources for various parts of the Mass to understand better the Lord's Day
- Formation after Mass using Diocesan resources
- Publicity about this Assembly day should be sent back to home parishes and be on the web
- This vision (of keeping Sunday) needs to be put across the Diocese at the parish level – using Pastoral letters and other means.
- Parishioners could talk at Mass about how to keep hold of the centrality of the Lord's Day
- We need a follow up meeting

## Evangelisation

- Evangelisation outside of the parish would help return Catholics to Church
- Engage with the local community – go out and don't expect them to come to us
- There is a tension between the ideal vs the real
- What does obligation mean
- How do we keep Sunday as a family day
- We need to involve more young people (as Eucharistic Ministers and readers)
- Each PA has unique needs

## How to keep Sunday?

- Emphasise the message that Sunday is different using the web, twitter, and a pastoral letter
- The family should pray together (even in a small way) to mark the Lord's Day
- Let's worship just on Sunday. Wouldn't that be a real witness with no Saturday night Masses?
- Let's support shop workers who work on Sundays by paying them a just wage 1½ time on Sundays
- Have no alcohol sales in parish clubs on Sundays

### **A few of the suggestions as to what can be done at Pastoral Area level:**

- Remember the Lord's Day is 24 hours
- Co-ordinate Mass times
- Share resources
- Create a will to be radical and creative
- How do we link reflect and educate?
- Give us leaflets with ideas on how we keep Sunday, not just in church but in our homes and with family.
- How do we make it a different day?
- What about a suggested family prayer at a Sunday meal, a candle prayer.
- Many Mass going Catholics just want to go to Mass, nothing else.
- Have a KISS Day every three months – (KISS = Keeping It Special on a Sunday).

### **A few of the suggestions as to what can be done individually:**

- Make more of an effort to sit down as a family once a week (on a Sunday or Sat night).
- The hardest place to evangelise is within our own families.
- Say a grace before meals on a Sunday.
- Be open to new ideas and ways of doing things.
- Be an active and willing member of the parish and Pastoral Area.
- Do something special one Sunday a month as a family.
- A day without twitter or facebook!

## **What happens next:**

- + On Feb 2<sup>nd</sup> in St Mary's Leyland the Diocese is hosting a day of workshops and prayer on how we encourage those who have "lapsed". There is an open invitation to be part of that day (organised by the Bishop's Conference of England and Wales.) – telephone Clare Ward on 02079014818
- + Some resources will be produced – "fridge thoughts" to help us Keep Sunday in our homes and families.
- + Pastoral Areas will be invited to continue these conversations.

- + The Evangelisation Commission has a road show which can come to any Pastoral Area to spend an evening thinking about evangelisation and how to encourage us to all be welcoming and inviting. (Contact Fr Mark Beattie on 0151 228 3327.)