

In the light of the forthcoming reduction in priests, Bishop Peter is now asking us to revise this plan. As some priests will have to retire this summer the need for a revised plan is urgent. Furthermore, it has become clear that even after the summer period we will need to continue revising our plan so that we can address future challenges in the most effective way. It is important to realise that there will have to be changes within our pastoral area and that these changes will affect us all. However, it is an exciting time. It is an opportunity to allow the Holy Spirit to refocus us and encourage us to use the gifts we have all received through baptism and confirmation. We must continue to work together to draw up our plan.

This is a wonderful occasion for prayer. We thank God for our own priests and for those from overseas. We thank him for the support our priests receive from their caring parishioners. We also thank him for calling new men to the Priesthood. Finally, we thank him for our Bishop Peter and we ask God to guide him and us so that we can plan for the future.

PRAYER



Almighty God and Father,

We praise and thank You for all that is being accomplished, by Your grace, in the *Walking Humbly* process through conversation and connections in our Pastoral Areas.

As we lay before You all our hopes and plans, may Your Holy Spirit, guide and direct us.

By the power of Your Spirit, may we grow into truly thriving Catholic communities, confidently and humbly proclaiming the Good News of Your Son, Jesus Christ.

This we ask through the same Christ, our Lord. Amen.



**LOCAL PASTORAL AREA
BULLETIN No. 6** Apr. 2014
www.northamptonswpa.btck.co.uk

NORTHAMPTON SOUTH & WEST PASTORAL AREA

The Catholic churches and schools of south and west Northampton, Aston-le-Walls, Daventry and Towcester

The Diocese of Northampton covers the counties of Northamptonshire, Buckinghamshire and Bedfordshire. An earlier change to county boundaries means that it also includes Berkshire north of the Thames. Within this large area there are many sizeable towns such as Northampton, Corby, Milton Keynes, Bedford, Luton, Aylesbury and Slough. There are also many rural areas. Indeed, the total Catholic population is about 180,000.

Within this large diocese the Good News of Christ and the values of his Kingdom are promoted by priests, deacons, religious and lay persons working together. The main way in which we are given the strength to perform this work is through the Mass which is the source and summit of our Christian life. It is the Mass which nourishes our Catholic communities. This focus on the Mass means that it is essential that we have sufficient priests placed in key parts of the diocese. Our priests are immensely grateful for all the assistance they receive from numerous people in so many ways. However, only a priest can celebrate Mass - if there is no priest then there can be no Mass.

When it comes to the availability of priests there are many reasons why we can give thanks to God. For example, at the recent Vocations Weekend at our Cathedral in Northampton a good number of men came along and are discerning whether they are being called to the Priesthood. Also, we have overseas priests who are working temporarily in the diocese before having to return to their commitments at home. Their presence reminds us of the universal nature of the Church.

However, last year we sadly saw the death of seven of our diocesan priests. They were of various ages - one being very young indeed. Moreover, this year two of our younger priests have been taken very ill.

It is for these reasons that Bishop Peter is having to take the availability of priests extremely seriously. Although it is not possible to be totally precise, it is true to say that within 10 years there will be only about 39 diocesan priests. This is very worrying considering the size of the diocese.

We are all very much aware of our own parish. Bishop Peter has grouped neighbouring parishes together in what are called 'pastoral areas'. At present the diocese consists of 13 such areas. We are in the 'Pastoral Area of Saint Thomas of Canterbury' which covers the south and west of the Northampton region. It is made up of the following parishes in Northampton:

- ❖ The Cathedral;
- ❖ St. Patrick in Duston;
- ❖ St. Aidan in Kingsthorpe;
- ❖ Ss. Francis & Therese in East Hunsbury.

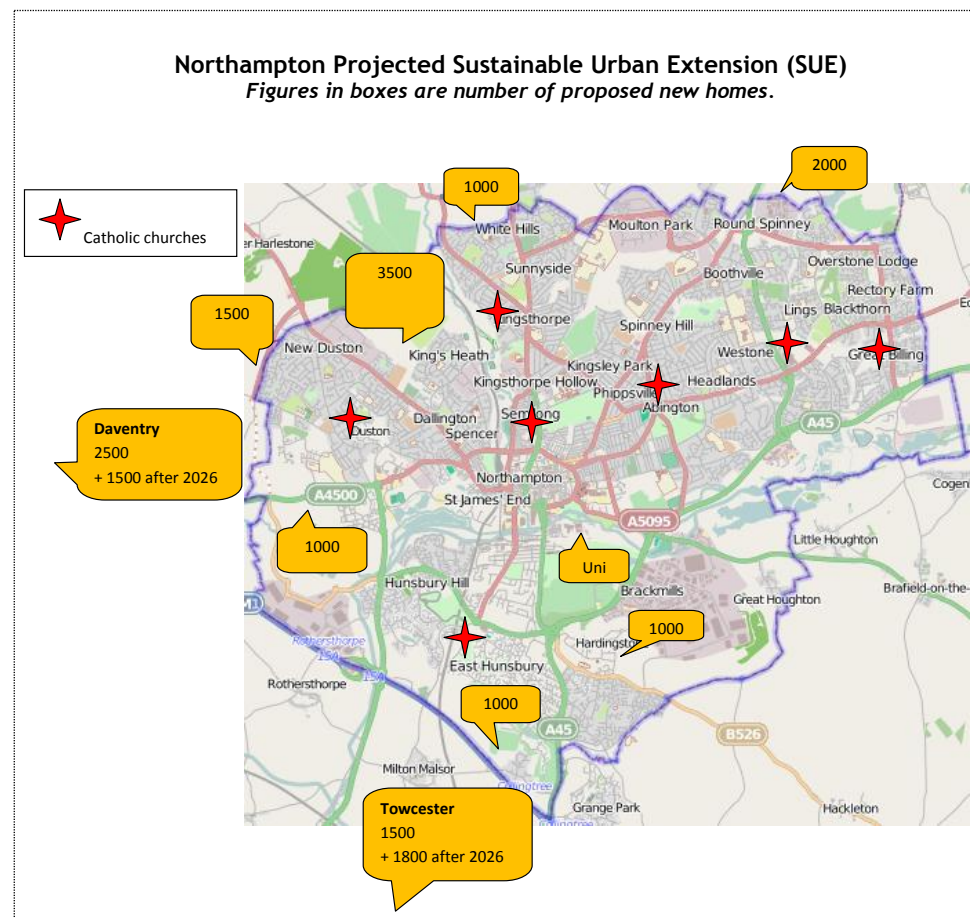
It also includes:

- ❖ St. Thomas More in Towcester;
- ❖ St. Augustine in Daventry (with St. Joseph in Long Buckby and Our Lady in Yelvertoft);
- ❖ The Sacred Heart and Our Lady in Aston-le-Walls (with Ss. Peter & Paul in Kings Sutton).

In order to plan for there being about 39 diocesan priests in the near future, Bishop Peter has asked each pastoral area to produce a plan whereby it can manage with fewer priests. At present we have **six** priests in our pastoral area. Bishop Peter has asked us to plan for just **four**.

Our planning will have to take into account not just the provision of Mass but the other sacraments and funerals. Also, we do not just have churches. There are schools, hospitals and prisons to consider. Likewise, we have to keep in mind the other part of Northampton which is in a neighbouring pastoral area. There are four Catholic churches in that region of Northampton. Very sadly, Fr. Frank Calnan of the Sacred Heart Church in Weston Favell, Northampton has just died.

We will also need to consider the thousands of new homes planned for many parts of Northampton, as well as for Towcester and Daventry. The following map will illustrate the size of these developments:



Over the last few years Bishop Peter has been promoting his *Walking Humbly with our God* process throughout the diocese. This has involved each pastoral area producing a plan for the spiritual and pastoral care of those within it. Our present plan (called the 'groundplan') is available on our pastoral area website:

www.northamptonswpa.btck.co.uk