

At the Heart of the Thriving Catholic Community



**LOCAL STEERING GROUP
BULLETIN No. 1 Feb. 2010**

NORTHAMPTON SOUTH & WEST PASTORAL AREA

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

“WALKING HUMBLY” ??

In December 2007 Bishop Peter addressed a Diocesan Gathering. At that meeting he shared his vision for the Diocese. He explained that he drew inspiration from the prophet Micah, whose admonition to “act justly, love tenderly, and walk humbly with your God” (Micah 6:8) was incorporated in his episcopal crest. Reviewing the history and challenges of the Diocese, he spoke of the need for “Three C’s” –

- **Confidence** in God, our faith, and ourselves,
- **Conversation** with God, with each other and with the world, and
- **Connections**, the outworking of “love God and love your neighbour” whereby the Church engages with its members and with the world.

Among other aims, the Bishop wished to establish a multi-skilled group of clergy and laity to *think strategically and practically about the future of the Diocese*. Their remit would be to consult with deaneries and *prepare “groundplans” for the life and mission of the Church in local areas*. It is primarily this element, translating vision into action, which is the “Walking Humbly process”.

The “multi-skilled” group, convened in April 2008, was labelled the “Stream Three Team”, and over a period lasting from November 08 to March 09, they took out their proposals for a Development Process to a series of meetings with various bodies at different levels and places in the Diocese, including the former Deanery Pastoral Councils. During Lent, all parishes and schools were invited to reflect on the Bishop’s vision, and how its elements were experienced in our communities, making use of a DVD and study material. A lot of meetings were held and a lot of people became involved; a lot has been written about it in The Vine and in some parish newsletters: but it is still very possible that many people have never heard of the Walking Humbly process.

One of the most high-profile practical changes which has already been brought about by this process is the replacement of the former eight Deaneries with thirteen “Pastoral Areas”. In our locality this has meant the division of the large former St Thomas of Canterbury Deanery into two Areas. For our Area, provisionally called Northampton South & West, the **Dean** is Canon John Udris of the Cathedral parish, assisted during the Walking Humbly process by a **Pastoral Area Link**, Angela Tiffen from The Sacred Heart and Our Lady’s parish, Aston-le-Walls.

In addition, a **Local Steering Group** has been convened, consisting of the local clergy, and lay people nominated for particular skills and qualities. That group met informally with Bishop Peter when he came to celebrate a “Year for Priests” Mass at Our Lady and St Augustine’s, Daventry in October 2009, and has since had four formal meetings.

Its current work involves assisting our churches to review their present activities and strengths, and by next Pentecost, it will have worked with all our churches, schools and catholic bodies to prepare a Groundplan identifying ways in which we can all move nearer to the ideal of a “Thriving Catholic Community”. This will take account of our many strengths, as well as the challenges we face, such as the impact of having fewer priests; this has already had a major effect in our New Pastoral Area in recent months.

But the process is not about “managing decline”. **It is about renewed focus on our mission, making best use of our resources, collaborating where we can, and building the Kingdom of God right here.**

What happens next ?

At the moment, factual information is being collected, which will probably only need to involve the parish priests and one or two key people.

During the next few weeks, our communities, in churches and schools, will be invited to view a short DVD produced by the Stream Three Team, which will feature a number of people from all around the Diocese speaking on what we have called the “Twelve Marks of a Thriving Catholic Community”. These are the desirable characteristics of a living, active church (or school). Using the DVD, and a feature published in the December 2009 edition of “The Vine”, everyone will have the chance to say what they feel their community does well at present, and what they would aspire to build up for the future.

The next stage, during Lent, is for “Guided Review Conversations”, when priests will be asked to draw together a slightly larger group of the main organisers of activities in our churches. These groups will be asked to reflect more deeply on the “Thriving Catholic Community” characteristics. Their comments, and the results of the DVD sessions, will feed into the next stage of the process, the formulation of an Area Groundplan, taking us up to Pentecost.

How will our voices be heard ?

- By taking part in the sessions, mentioned above, beginning in the next few weeks
- In the Lenten stage, each church’s input to the Ground plan for the Area will be open to wider consultation in each community. You will need to keep a close eye on your parish bulletin and on your church websites.

OUR LOCAL PATRON — SAINT ALNOTH

Alnoth (+ 700) was an English herder, hermit and martyr who is mentioned in the life of St Werburga. Alnoth piously tended livestock on the lands of St Werburga’s monastery in **Weedon**. He was badly used by the bailiff, earning a reputation for holiness and patience. Alnoth retired from active life and became a hermit in a very lonely spot, where he was eventually murdered by two robbers. On this ground he was honoured locally as a martyr, and his tomb at **Stowe**, near Bugbrooke became a shrine for pilgrims. His feast was kept on **27 February or 25 November**.



Who do we contact about this ?

The Steering Group member from your parish — if you do not know them, Pastoral Area Link **Angela Tiffen** will forward messages.

E-mail her: angela@tiffens.net

Who’s on the Local Steering Group ?

As well as **Canon John Udris** and **Angela Tiffen**, already mentioned, the Local Steering Group includes:

All priests in our Area; so, **Monsignor Séan Healy**, **Fr Brendan Killeen**, **Fr Phillip Swingler**, and any assistant or retired priests, are entitled to attend the meetings if they wish. Other members are chosen so that there is at least one from each church: but they are not “representatives” of their church as such — they have not been *elected*. They were nominated by their parish priests for skills, qualities and experience that they could bring to the group.

In alphabetical order:

Nick Bull (The Sacred Heart & Our Lady, Aston-le-Walls)
Anna Fox (St Thomas More, Towcester)
Julia Gibson (Ss Francis & Therese, East Hunsbury)
Sr Brenda Moore (Cathedral of Our Lady & St Thomas, Northampton)
Michael O’Neill (St Patrick, Duston)
Paul Street (St Augustine, Daventry)



Some of the Local Steering Group members at a recent meeting
Back Row L-R: Monsignor Séan Healy, Anna Fox, Michael O’Neill,
Paul Street, Canon John Udris, Fr Andy Ollard
Seated L-R: Sr Brenda Moore, Julia Gibson, Angela Tiffen



Nick Bull (right) was unable to be at the photo shoot.