

Restoring the Order of the Sacraments of Initiation: Progress Report January 2010

Archbishop's Statement

In March 2009, Archbishop Kelly issued this statement through the *Ad Clerum* and asked that it be made known through parish newsletters:

In faithfulness to the appeal Pope Benedict made in *Sacramentum Caritatis*, and having been encouraged to do so by the Council of Priests, I have decided that the diocese should move towards restoring the traditional order of the Sacraments of Initiation: Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist. A working party has been established to explore the processes and resources we will need in order to enable parishes and schools to support parents in their right and responsibility, made clear in the *Rite of Infant Baptism*, to hand on faith to their children. Apart from the decision to restore the traditional order, no decisions have been made about ages, policies or programmes: the working party will consider those issues over the next three years, reporting regularly to the Council of Priests and making recommendations about consultation, resources and formation.

Members of the Working Party

Fr Chris Fallon (Facilitator)

Fr Graeme Dunne (Council of Priests)

Fr Des Seddon (Christian Education)

Fr John McLoughlin (Pastoral Formation)

Fr Philip Inch (Evangelisation)

Fr Stephen Pritchard (Animate)

Sr Monica Feehan (catechist in Skelmersdale)

Mrs Anne-Marie Harrison (Chaplain De La Salle St Helens; catechist in Atherton; youth leader for Lourdes; parent)

Mrs Pat Cooney (Headteacher St Marie's Kirkby; involved in St George's Maghull)

Mrs Veronica Murphy (formerly Marriage and Family Life Co-ordinator, now Faith Formation Co-ordinator)

Meetings and Topics

The Working Party has met five times and considered presentations on the following topics:

- key issues from the history and theology of the sacraments of initiation and the sacrament of reconciliation
- current church teaching and policy on these issues (including what is covered in school RE programmes)
- the experience of implementing similar changes in Salford, Scotland and the USA
- recent work done in this diocese (inc. the working party on Confirmation led by Stephen Pritchard; Peter McGrail's research on First Communion; recent reviews in pastoral areas; research on young teens and their attitudes to church)

The Working Party will continue meeting to consider and make recommendations about the following items:

- the ages at which the sacraments of initiation should be celebrated
- issues around invitation, conditions and delay or refusal of sacraments
- consultation and formation with priests, catechists, parents, teachers
- processes, programmes and materials in use elsewhere
- commissioning the preparation of what is needed to implement the change in this diocese

Comment

It has become clear through the discussions that simply restoring the order of the sacraments will not address the issues that cause concern: a major change is needed in the way we celebrate and bear witness to our faith through our sacramental practice. Parents, as the 'first and most important teachers of their children in the ways of faith' need the wholehearted support of all the baptized in this important ministry. This will require a fundamental shift in our approach from merely delivering programmes of preparation for the sacraments to developing opportunities for ongoing celebration and formation for sacramental living. Within that context, the Working Party members are especially concerned to ensure that what they propose will result in an increase in the local church's engagement with families and young people.