

The Holy Family Sisters of the Needy

Introduction

The following document is the response to the proposal that The Holy Family Sisters of the Needy establish and community resident in St Teresa's Dumfries and work throughout the area covered by the parishes of St Teresa's Dumfries, St Andrew's Dumfries, Holy Trinity Lockerbie, St Luke's Moffat and St Columba's Annan. This response is the conclusion to the discussions held at various levels, between clergy, laity and bishop.

The Process

After an initial enquiry regarding the work and possible Mission of the Sisters there was a meeting held at St Teresa's Presbytery on Thursday 4th January. Present at the meeting were Bishop William Nolan, Fr Jim Hayes and Fr Gerald Donnelly together with two representatives of the Sisters. It was decided the next step of the process was a joint Parish Pastoral Council meeting to discuss the proposal. This meeting was held at St Teresa's Church on Tuesday 15th March 2018. It was also decided that a period of time be given for individual responses.

The Proposal

A discussion paper was produced (copy included) which was the subject matter of the meeting at St Teresa's. The announcing of the proposal was made at this meeting with each Parish Community being told at the same time. After this meeting the proposal became public and was able to be freely discussed in each parish with copies of the proposal made available and notice of the meeting made in all parish bulletins.

The Discussion of the Meeting of 15th March 2018

1. All of the five Parish Pastoral Councils were present and represented. The mood of the meeting was positive and cooperative with all participants keen to be involved.
2. It is fair to say that the unanimous feeling at the meeting and at all levels of conversation formal and informal was that the idea of the Sisters coming was a great idea but the finances make it prohibitive. Comment was made that perhaps the Diocese should or could contribute to the funding.
3. The proposal document contained a number areas of work that it was thought the Sisters could do in the deanery and parishes (p2). The feeling of the meeting quickly became one of : "If this is the work that needs

doing then we, the practicing laity, are the ones to be doing it to assist the priests”. This role was received enthusiastically.

4. One particular suggestion was that Fr Jim Hayes should move to the Presbytery of Holy Trinity Lockerbie. On paper it would be simply an administrative change whilst doing the same parish duties. The reality would mean a financial burden on Holy Family Lockerbie and would mean in reality that there was only one priest in the town of Dumfries and only one priest within 15 miles of the Dumfries and Galloway Infirmary.
5. Another concern was that although contributing financially, the outlying parishes (Holy Trinity, St Luke's and St Columba's) were unlikely to get much in return for their contribution and realistically the vast percentage of the Sisters work would be in the Dumfries parishes.
6. One of the “by-products” of the meeting was a great spirit of cooperation between all the Parish Pastoral Councils. Reference was made to the Embracing Change programme in the Diocese which perhaps was seen as too abstract and conceptual. The list of tasks and jobs given in the proposal gave some focus and direction to what lay people should and could be doing and if something was happening in a parish other than their own then it should be supported by all.

Further Reaction

As mentioned above, after the public meeting, the proposal document was made available and for a limited period of time comment was invited. The comments received echo the points made above: Yes, the idea is great but the finances make it impossible, let's work together on the things we can do.

Conclusion

The clergy and laity of the Eastern part of St Andrew's Deanery are aware of the declining numbers of clergy and the changing dynamic of the Catholic Parish. We sincerely thank Bishop Nolan for all the work he has done seeking and inviting Religious Communities to the Diocese to work and hope he continues to do so.

However this particular solution, namely the Sisters of the Holy Family of the Needy, to this particular pastoral situation in Dumfries and region is not the answer. It is with regret that we must recommend that Bishop Nolan informs the Sisters that we cannot sustain their community here in Dumfries.