

SUPPORTING INFORMATION ON THE CURRENT AND EXPECTED FUTURE REALITY IN OUR PARISH AND ACROSS THE DIOCESE OF EAST ANGLIA

AT DIOCESAN LEVEL

Many parishes in the Diocese are cared for by priests from outside of East Anglia. This generous service can mask that the Diocese now has fewer of its own priests than it has parishes. Presently, the diocese has a total of 44 active priests from which to appoint to 52 parishes.

More than half of the priests of the diocese are over 60 years of age and the number of new priests each year is regularly lower than the number of priests retiring. For this reason, in 10 years' time, there will only be around 30 priests of the Diocese of East Anglia in active ministry, with only 10 priests under the age of 50.

Diocesan Pastoral Statistics for 2023 show that

- 2 parishes served 25% of the faithful in the diocese, as many as the smallest 33 parishes
- 8 parishes served one half of the diocesan faithful, whilst 44 served the other
- Half of the parishes in the diocese, and therefore a great proportion of the priests, each serve only 1% or less of the total number of people who attend Mass across the Diocese
- 13 of the smallest parishes in the diocese are 15 minutes' drive or less to the nearest other parish

AT DEANERY LEVEL

- The deanery of St Wilfrid currently has 9 priests who cover 7 parishes, with a total of 12 churches plus one Mass centre;
- 7 priests are over 60 years of age, with 3 over 75;
- Walsingham parish covers 4 churches served by three Marist Fathers, who are not diocesan priests, which means they are under the authority of their order, rather than that of the Bishop
- The priest in charge at Fakenham, has now retired; a new priest in charge has been appointed, but is not yet named. A priest in charge is usually a temporary appointment.

AT PARISH LEVEL

The statistics show that Hunstanton parish Mass attendance in 2023 stood at 119 (based on annual count made over latter half of September and first half of October). This placed Hunstanton 43rd of the 52 parishes for Mass attendance. For 2024 attendance stands at 112.

Mass attendance for Hunstanton represents 0.7% of total Diocesan Mass attendance (as of 2023). This places Hunstanton 22nd of the 33 parishes in the lower quartile of Mass attendance.

Hunstanton parish is estimated to be one of four parishes in the Diocese that lies approximately 30 minutes drive to the nearest neighbouring parish. Of these four parishes, one has a Mass attendance of 0.9% of the diocesan total, one has equal percentage of 0.7%, and the fourth has 0.5% of the diocesan total Mass attendance.

QUESTION 1: How do you think Parish Structure and practices need to evolve to best serve the mission of the church, that is, sharing the Gospel in a society which is forgetting its Christian roots more and more? You will need to reflect on how both your parish community has changed over the past 25 years and what it realistically might look like in 10 years' time, with the help of the document sent with these questions?

[Let your imagination free to roam where there is no constraint, dream a response to this question]

QUESTION 2: How can we foster and sustain a deeper personal relationship with Christ within the communion of the church, both in your local parish and as part of the diocese? What can be done to ensure that young and old alike can better live their everyday lives as ‘intentional disciples’ that is, followers of Jesus Christ who embrace his teaching and become capable of sharing a living catholic faith with others?

[What development in faith knowledge, practice and experience is needed to foster and sustain the deeper relationship with Christ?]

QUESTION 3: Being realistic about our resources, both human and financial, what concrete steps do you think should be taken in your parish to address present and future needs?

You should think about

- How the diocese, your neighbouring parishes, and the different congregations within your parish (those who attend different masses that are celebrated) can help you overcome challenges and create opportunities
- How individual members of your parish community can be appropriately enabled to contribute to the demanding work of change and development

[This is asking for practical steps AND it is essential that we consider what assumptions lie beneath those ideas and unpick what changes in culture , attitude, mindset and behaviour on the part of clergy and all baptised Christians will be required]