

Deanery of Warrington and Widnes Synodal Council - First Update November 2022.

Synod 2020 gave us an experience of being what Pope Francis calls 'The Synodal Church'. It is the way he is asking us to act in this millennium. We all had a chance to experience synodality in our parish groups during the listening and discernment phase of Synod 2020. Synodality is a way of thinking and being that reflects the truth that the church is led by the Holy Spirit who enables everyone to offer their own contribution to church life.

As part of this, Deanery Synodal Councils have been established to implement the six recommendations of the Synod. Your Deanery Council has been tasked with working on the fourth recommendation. So far it has had two meetings, with a remit to look at the future structure and operation of our Parishes over the next generation.

The Deanery of Warrington and Widnes consists of 8 Parishes, covering 14 churches.

The parishes within the Deanery are:

- Holy Family, Cronton, Widnes
- St Wilfrid, Widnes (the churches of St Bede, St Basil, St Michael, St John Fisher)
- Sacred Heart And St Alban, Warrington
- Blessed James Bell, Warrington (the churches of St Benedict's & St Oswald's and the former parish of St Mary's)
- St Joseph, Penketh, Warrington
- St Paul Of The Cross, Burtonwood Warrington
- St Stephen, First Martyr, Orford, and St Bridget's Warrington
- St Peter And St Michael, Woolston, Warrington

The Deanery as a whole faces multiple challenges in the coming years. Just some of the big challenges are:

- Thirty years ago, there were about 325 priests serving the Archdiocese. Now there are just over 100 priests. In 20 years, that number is expected to reduce to 50. In our own Deanery, we have 9 priests – three of whom are expected to retire within the next few years. So we will need to learn to manage with fewer priests.
- We all will have noticed how our congregations have become older and smaller. The pandemic has accelerated this pattern.
- Smaller congregations means reduced income, which in turn makes it difficult for us to maintain the current infrastructure that enables us to operate in our parishes in the way that we have become accustomed to.

We all, as the members of congregations of the Deanery, need to face these challenges, which requires us to reinvigorate our congregations, re-engage with our communities as well as managing the current reduction in our numbers.

One of The Synod recommendations to deal with this reality is to introduce 'Families of Parishes' throughout the Deanery, which means that we will be hoping to introduce the congregations of the various parishes to the resources and people of the other parishes in the Deanery. We want to help everyone to belong to a bigger church family, despite many individual Parishes getting smaller overall.

We hope everyone will engage with this process, and provide the Deanery Synodal Council with ideas and feedback as we progress. With the help of the Holy Spirit, as St Paul says we are all many parts, but one body, so every one of us has a part to play in this journey.

We hope that you can see that we must embrace this kind of change - which is to be part of something bigger than just our individual parish - our Families of Parishes.

The Deanery Synodal Council will continue to inform you of progress on these matters and hope you will help us in the future.