

A Response  
for the Bishops of Lancaster  
by Fr Peter Stanton,  
Director of the Lancaster Diocesan  
Residential Youth Centre,  
Castlerigg Manor,  
to the document:

Fit for Mission?  
A review of the  
Lancaster Diocesan Youth Service  
Report to the Bishop of Lancaster  
18<sup>th</sup> December 2008

## **Reflective Practice**

When I embarked on my MA in Community and Youth Work, the first seminar I attended and the first assignment I was asked to complete were both on the subject of reflective practice. I was invited to reflect on the writings of Donald Schön and David Kolb and to assess the place and value of structured reflection on practice in the profession of youth work. It was not something with which I was unfamiliar. In fact, reflecting on the work you had done was regular practice in the Catholic Missionary Society where I had spent seven years engaging in and promoting evangelisation in the parishes and schools of the dioceses of England and Wales. It was also an established part of the practice of the work of Castlerigg Manor with which I was becoming acquainted.

Since then, I have indulged in regular reflections on work carried out at Castlerigg Manor: at the end of each course with the young people who attended, with the school staff who accompanied them and with the Castlerigg Manor staff who have just delivered the course. As a course leader, I have received the written evaluations of the school staff who have brought groups of young people to the Centre and I have composed reports on all the courses I have led.

For the Youth Service Management Group I have written termly reports on the progress of the Centre. As part of my MA course I have frequently had to write pieces reflecting on policy and practice at Castlerigg Manor from the macro view of a SWOT analysis to the workings of the equal opportunities policy. As part of my MA research I undertook a survey of the reactions of the young people at the end of several courses and an analysis of the difference they perceived as a result of spending time at the Centre. (Data are available on the Castlerigg Manor website <http://www.castleriggmanor.co.uk/Research2008>.)

During my time as Director I have been in receipt of reports on Castlerigg Manor from Fr Philip Connor and Mr Simon Hornshaw, from Mr Ian Terry and from Mr John O'Brian.

All these reflections, reviews and reports have not dimmed my appetite for analysis of motive and performance in the delivery of the work we do to spread the Gospel among the young and has shaped the way we work at the Centre.

## **Youth Review Process Welcomed**

When I heard the names of those who had been chosen to form the Review Team for Fit For Mission? Youth, I was pleased to welcome their interest and eager to get their reflections on the work of Castlerigg Manor.

Even though I was given less than 48 hours notice to prepare a presentation for the Brettargh Holt events. I was keen to prepare something to contribute to the gathering of all the clergy of the diocese and so many who were involved in working with the young people of the diocese.

When the review team came to visit, all at Castlerigg Manor were open and frank with them. They were provided with course materials and copies of the school staff evaluations of the last two years and any other documents they requested.

## **A Report?**

I doubt if you can imagine the depth of my disappointment when I received the document purporting to be their review. I had expected to learn something about how Castlerigg Manor performed that might help me in my role, but the nine sides of A4 merely contained a preamble and a 'summary of recommendations'. They were not a report or a review at all. The literary form of the content of the document was so surprising that I had to question what I was looking for in it.

If I were writing such a report for my tutors at Durham, I would have had to include a lengthy literature review putting into context the assessment criteria and purpose and practice of the Youth service. I saw none of this in the pages I have received. If I were conducting such a review I would want to ask what are the needs of the young people of the diocese. (Missiology teaches that effective evangelisation is the result of caring for others' needs as they perceive them.) I saw no such evangelical accent in this document.

The least I would have expected to see would have been an assessment of the current performance of the centre against the criteria set out in the review document. Where was the summary of the evidence presented to the review team? Where was their assessment of it? What happened to all that evidence that we at Castlerigg Manor submitted? What did people say at Brettargh? How was that data analysed? What were the common themes that the review identified?

What was the contribution of the financial review? Where were the figures? Where was the analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the current provision? What opportunities on the horizon were identified? What threats were we facing?

The first purpose of the report as outlined on page two to 'accurately reflect and honour the contributions of all participants whilst maintaining the confidentiality of individuals' is in no way achieved by these pages. Reading the report I have received, I feel that my contributions have neither been heard nor honoured.

Their second purpose to 'identify clear themes and issues, draw conclusions and make recommendations as to how the work of both Castlerigg Manor and the Youth Service could improve' is not served by this five-page document. It does not identify themes and issues and far from drawing conclusions it is devoid of argument and reason.

Since it so clearly fails in its stated purpose, it is clear that this is not the report of the review team. Further evidence of the crude redaction can be found on page three in the Terminology section where it suggests that the abbreviation 'Crigg' will be used to refer to 'Castlerigg Manor and its residential retreat provision'. This abbreviation is nowhere to be found in the rest of the document. Still more evidence is found on page nine, which refers to a 'seemingly bleak position'. No such position is outlined in the preceding pages.

All this suggests that the appeal to transparency and openness in recommendation three has fallen on deaf ears.

## **The Task**

In responding, as requested, to the document, and in view of the brief time available to me, despite my concerns, I will gloss over the first four pages of the document.

This leaves me the task of commenting on a series of unjustified recommendations and a conclusion. I am severely hampered in this task since I cannot hear the argument in favour of any of the recommendations. The document is mute in this regard. This is a pity,

because I would have liked to engage with the thought behind them and would, most likely, have been differently disposed towards them were I presented with the evidence.

## **The Recommendations**

On the matter of the first four recommendations, I can only agree that a process of assessment and evaluation of the recommendations take place at the highest level in the diocese, that professional advice be sought, that the process be an open and transparent one and that those involved in the changes are consulted.

Recommendation five concerns a process to arrive at a shared, coherent and cohesive vision. I would like to encourage such a process. I am not sure what the document means by 'the Management of the Youth Service and Castlerigg Manor' and I am saddened by the purely diocesan focus of the needs analysis. A more Catholic vision that takes into account the service that is being performed by Castlerigg Manor for the Church in England and Wales and particularly in the north west of England would reflect the value of the work that our diocese can do for the wider Catholic community.

The meaning of recommendation six is very difficult to discern from the document. Currently both Outreach and Centre share the same management group and members of the Outreach team participate in diocesan schools' courses. This recommendation must mean more than that. I can only imagine that it builds on the shared vision of recommendation five and is explained in recommendations seven and nine. It is hard to critique it out of the context of those recommendations.

Recommendation seven argues for a great reduction in the clerical investment in the Youth Service. This 'report' recommends we reduce our commitment from two full-time and one part-time priest involved in the service to one. No justification is made for this either from a lack of vocations or a downgrading of the perceived importance of the young in the Church.

Recommendation eight's call for major investment is made for two reasons: to re-create it as the 'centre' for all youth ministry in the diocese and to bring the facilities up to standard.

The idea that an outreach team be based at Castlerigg Manor seems to be behind this recommendation. That an outreach team would be a good thing for the diocese is proposition with which I would agree, but the suggestion that such a team be based in Keswick has little merit. Keswick is so far from all the centres of population in the diocese, apart from West Cumbria, that it would add greatly to the expense of such a team. The time taken to travel to the various engagements at the beginning of the day and late at night would be burdensome. Whilst there must be some synergy in the residential and outreach teams, the resources and methods required by their different contexts would be sufficiently different to provide little justification for their co-habiting.

Recommendation nine is that the Diocese of Lancaster adopt the model of the Nottingham Diocese. (Not too surprising a recommendation if you have Joe Wheat in the review team.) It is difficult to critique this proposal since it is not based on any argument to which I am privy.

With regard to recommendation ten, I have already indicated my support for the establishment of an outreach team and my reservations about its location in Keswick.

Recommendations eleven and twelve suffer from the same short-sightedness that plagued the assessment of the youth work going on in the diocese: the complete disregard for the contributions of religious to the mission to young people in the diocese. That the gatherings at Brettargh Holt were held in a residential youth centre with a team of volunteers did not appear to be even acknowledged by those investigating the outreach aspects of the youth service, and no mention of their work appears in the document as I have it.

There are many places in the diocese that are used both by groups from within and without the diocese. On the one side, those seeking such provision appreciate the choice that they have, whilst on the other the various providers know that to deliver the work at affordable prices their business models need to be tailored to the demands of their settings. There seems to be no acknowledgement of this in these recommendations.

These two recommendations seek to restrict the work of Castlerigg Manor to the confines of the diocese. At present, there simply is not the business to support this approach even if it were morally defensible. The vast majority of diocesan schools use Castlerigg Manor for some or all of the residential experiences they organise. Whilst the Centre must be attentive to schools so that their needs can be met, it must always be remembered that schools can choose to go elsewhere should remain free to do so. Needless to say, Castlerigg Manor has not turned away any request for residential provision from a diocesan school while I have been Director.

Recommendation thirteen would naturally follow if recommendation nine were accepted.

Recommendations fourteen and fifteen would be financially disastrous and as far as Castlerigg Manor is concerned. Current customers would seek provision elsewhere and would be hard to win back. It is a course of action that could only benefit someone proposing to open a residential centre nearby.

There is no justification for anything in the document with which I have been provided, so it goes without saying that the need to shut the residential centre is not established.

Recommendations sixteen and seventeen suffer from the same geographical shortcomings that I previously pointed out. The model in the organigram is, of course, not justified in the text of the document I have and appears to be a slightly adapted version of the Nottingham model.

Apart from the centralising tendency, and the long spine from *Diocesan Trustees* to *Diocesan Youth Ministry Coordinator* (which appears a weak organisational structure), the other novelty is the lack of a role such as that played by our current youth tutors. These posts are unique to Castlerigg Manor and are part of the reason that it is so attractive to our clients.

At Castlerigg Manor courses are not merely delivered by eighteen year-old volunteers, but in the main by graduates who have learnt to live away from home and learnt more about life and their faith. The existence of these roles not only provides for better course delivery but also provides a unique opportunity for committed Catholic graduates to contribute to mission of the Church among the young. A cursory glance at the careers of former Castlerigg Manor youth tutors confirms the value that that experience has been for them and the wider Church as well as for the users of the Centre.

They provide a valuable resource for the Church in England and Wales that would be lost if the Nottingham model of a volunteer team were adopted.

## **The Report's Conclusion**

It is certainly the case that this is a difficult 'report' to read when all the guts have been ripped out of it. Its conclusions appear unreasoned and flimsy in the form in which it is presented.

It is hard to know what is meant by 'put[ting] aside past difficulties and work[ing] for reconciliation and recreation'. Perhaps such difficulties have been highlighted in the excised sections of the report. The 'bleak position' is not apparent in the report nor from my perspective in Castlerigg Manor.

I have the privilege of directing an organisation that is delivering highly respected residential experiences that are changing the lives of thousands of young people every year. I get to see and hear young people grow in faith and write to us of how their life of faith has benefited from their time with us. I have seen all the former Castlerigg Manor youth tutors who have left in my time take up important leadership roles in other centres or find positions as lay school chaplains.

The suggestion that Castlerigg Manor is not a beacon of good practice is therefore puzzling to me. The plaudits of satisfied clients suggest that we are a beacon of good practice to them. (Without the main body of the report I cannot learn what shortcomings have been identified that might counter this view.)

I can certainly echo the 'report's' call to seek the guidance of God and I am encouraged by the kind words it has to say about our cooperation and dedication.

## **A Different View**

It is difficult to address the arguments of a report that one is not allowed to see. I therefore may miss the point when I put forward my view, but I would be failing in my duty were I not to let you both know what I think in the hope that my words could help to prevent the catastrophe that implementing the 'report' as I have it would cause.

Castlerigg Manor is going from strength to strength. It has a strong team both on the tutorial side and on the domestic side. It has very healthy bookings. With recent increases in fees, it is beginning to break even financially. The effect on the personal, social and faith development of the young people who visit is profound. Personally, I have just completed a very demanding period of training and hope to be able, over the coming few years, to let the fruits of that training shape the work of the Centre. There is, as you are well aware, a strong likelihood that, for a small concession of access, [REDACTED] will seek to invest much of the assets realised by the sale of [REDACTED] into the fabric of the building alleviating our concerns for the south roof and improving the internal facilities (without the requirement of an extended closure of the Centre).

Why throw all this away?

I am sure that the outreach aspects of the youth service too can point to signs of growth. I am particularly thinking of youth involvement the Lourdes pilgrimage. A 'fallow year' for that would undermine all the good done by both Sean McMahon and Fr Philip and leave people wondering what commitment the diocese really has to its young people.

If the unspoken problem in the report is that there is a difference of approach between the outreach team and the residential centre, it is not surprising. The outreach team was sent up in 2007 without reference to the residential centre. I personally was not consulted at all. Whilst a more unified approach would be of benefit to the diocese, that does not require everyone sleeping under the same roof. Neither does it justify the laying off of all the trained staff.

There are, certainly, serious issues to be faced in the provision of services to young people in the diocese of Lancaster. We are a diocese rich in professionally qualified youth workers amongst the clergy and committed laity. Why are none of these involved in the management of the service? Why are they excluded from setting the agenda in the future provision of services?

No matter where those delivering the policy full-time live, a diocesan shared, coherent and cohesive vision of what we are to do for young people will not come about until both clergy and experienced youth work practitioners in the diocese can have confidence in those setting that policy. The idea that putting one person in charge of both outreach and residential centre will create a shared vision in the diocese is to ignore the majority of contributions to this ministry. Most of the youth work in the diocese goes on outside of the confines of its residential centre and the ambit of any proposed outreach team. A diocesan vision needs to appeal to and involve not only residential and outreach teams, but also the religious and lay people who day to day work with the young of our diocese. Management of youth provision in the diocese needs to be inspirational and enabling, not controlling and stifling if it is to harness the gifts with which God has blessed us as a diocese.

An open process to develop a shared vision led by someone who is trusted by all involved would be of enormous benefit to the diocese. It will not be a quick process and it will not result in total agreement. That is the nature of the catholic Church which encompasses many shades of opinion on such matters.

## **Overall Response**

The Church and the diocese of Lancaster would be much the poorer if the centralising recommendations of this report were accepted.

The major asset of the residential youth provision of the diocese is not a building, but the people who work there. The Castlerigg Manor brand, which is respected throughout the diocese, is the product of the tradition of work that has gone on in that place and not the result of some architectural or geographical features.

Apart from the bad will that will be generated locally towards the diocese and the Centre, the proposal of a 'fallow year' and the closure of the centre implying the loss of both the domestic team and the tutorial team will break the tradition so that what goes on in that building thereafter will not be what people have come to know as Castlerigg Manor.

There would have to be some very compelling reasons in the real report to justify that degree of vandalism to the mission of the Church. From where I am, I cannot see any justification.