**St Joseph & the English Martyrs, Bishop’s Stortford**

**Parish Pastoral Council – Not the New Year Gathering – 13.1.18**Event advertised in Parish Magazine, Newsletter and via posters in Church

Present: Fr Peter, Fr Carlos, All PPC members and 15 parishioners

After a short period of socialising Fr Peter welcomed those present and invited them to gather for an opening prayer. He thanked those present but also noted that before us may be many more questions than answers. A synopsis from the PPC was available together with an overview of finances drawn from the detailed analyses of Parish expenditure for 2016 undertaken by the Diocese which were displayed.
**Area development/impact**: Fr Peter noted the huge changes facing the town in terms of development but also in the way people choose to express their faith. Many feel a tribal connection evident in large numbers attending over the Christmas period. Approximately 750 at 5pm Christmas Eve, 7pm very full while midnight, 9am and 11am all full. WhileBishop’s Stortford and Sawbridgeworth face great upheaval with large expansion it is important to maintain established communities.
Fr Peter noted when he first arrived 6 years ago there were 12 children at the primary school for whom English was not their first language but that number would now be 60-70. Not all these may view themselves staying long-term so different approaches required to encourage integration within the Parish as flagged during discussions with the Polish chaplaincy.
**Catechesis intiative**: Welcomers now distribute newsletters and hymn books at most weekend masses as more volunteers have been recruited. Parish wide catechesis and the demands of greater numbers has led to a plan to recruit a catechetical co-ordinator to support and develop programmes and recruit and train catechists. Intention to advertise and appoint by Easter @ c£20k on a 1 year renewable contract. While provision for training is available within the deanery and Diocese many are reticent to travel the distances involved allied with a great sense of belonging to their own Parish.
**Finances**: Moving on to the financial position Fr Peter noted the debt owed to Mike Carroll, Martin Curran and Chris Brolly for their commitment and dedication to ensuring the finances remain in order. The counters too undertake an enormous task as £2k-£3k is banked in cash each week at HSBC and the demands of the Charity Commission and charity law makes this a far more complicated task that previously. The Diocese was insistent that the finances of all 3 churches were brought together 18 months ago when they were audited. This revealed that the collection at St Joseph’s was going down which triggered a cycle of planned giving appeals across all 3 churches offering parishioners a chance to review their giving and amend accordingly, with additional choices to give by standing order and opt into Gift Aid if appropriate. At St Joseph’s this resulted in a 10-15% increase overall but showed an increase in Gift Aid of 40-50%. Bank reserves of £500k include £250k resulting from historical unfulfilled plans to create a separate Catholic Church in Much Hadham. These funds are earmarked for the RC BS Building account against which all three churches can draw. It should be noted MH retains responsibility for 40% of the maintenance costs for Holy Cross. Diocesan insurance demands are becoming more onerous with demands for proof of regular maintenance required before claims are met. St Joseph’s has the only lead roof in the Diocese and possibly at some point a change to gas heating rather than oil may be required.
**Fabric**: The external lighting outside the church is to be replaced with old fashioned lanterns with additional spotlights which will wash the crucifixion scene from dusk to dawn.
**WCC**: The Parish Centre still does not pay for itself and is a drain on finances (£20-25k pa) but greater use is now being made of it but as it is nearly 10 years old maintenance issues are beginning to arise. Restrictions limit lettings which limits revenue streams but greater use would also require caretaking provision which may mitigate any gain.
**Changing role**: Fr Peter reflected that his role had changed and widened as the demands of a Parish of three churches meant his attention was split. He noted that his parenting skills were improving as he sought to ensure enough attention was lavished in the right proportions fairly!

**Questions posed**: Those present were then asked to provide suggestions/ideas:

* For building up the dynamic Christian community we wish to become
* On how best to welcome and serve both newcomers and existing parishioners to strengthen our community, while deepening our faith
* For further learning/sharing/outreach in our community

Please respond with any suggestions or ideas you may have to the Parish email address or pop a note through No 3.

**Feedback from Not the New Year Gathering – 13.1.2018**

Must advertise event more

**Suggestions for building up the dynamic Christian community we wish to become:**

More Eucharistic Ministers for 9am Mass – 5 not 3 please

Large Parish - Initiative – Liturgy groups ie musicians, readers, Extraordinary Ministers of Communion - these groups need to meet annually – draw others in etc

**Suggestions on how best to welcome and serve both newcomers and existing parishioners to strengthen our community, while deepening our faith:**

Welcome pack for new parishioners (put together and made available)

Use census to inform those in your area of opportunities of being part of St Joseph’s and getting involved

The sick and elderly need social visiting and company in addition to the visit from Ministers of the Eucharist

More social activities – try different ideas

Video games night – PG rated of course

Help needed to put away chairs/tables after refreshments served after 11am Sunday Mass – most people serving are older parishioners and need help

**Suggestions for further learning/sharing/outreach in our community:**

Could the parish adopt a parish in the Third World

What about our own Lourdes trip for handicapped children

Whole parish pilgrimage to Holy Land

The hope that Marriage Preparation can once again become ‘parish based’ or deanery based rather than sourced out. It is a great way to welcome new families at source.