

NOTES FROM THE MEETING TO DISCUSS THE ROLE AND PURPOSE OF A PARISH PASTORAL COUNCIL HELD ON 29 APRIL 2023.

Introduction

Daniel Sinnott and Nick Fishwick welcomed everyone to the meeting, which started with a prayer, and invited everyone to recall the Parable of the Lost Sheep. People introduced themselves and briefly outlined the various past and present roles they had in the parish community.

The purpose of the meeting was to consider what the pastoral role of the Parish Council could/should be (in addition to its administrative and financial functions). Wider participation and outreach in the Parish had greatly diminished in recent years, particularly since the pandemic. There is an urgent need to strengthen our Parish community and reach out to those people who have lost touch with the parish and/or their faith and find ways to re-engage them.

Key issues

- ⇒ What do we want from our Parish Pastoral Council?
- ⇒ Disassociation of many young people in the parish after Confirmation – who are they and what can we do to help them stay involved?
- ⇒ The need to recognise that the world for young people is different from the world we grew up in – how can we be more relevant to them and their lives?
- ⇒ How we can encourage young people to play active roles in the parish?
- ⇒ How to transfer the strong sense of community engendered at St Thomas More school through to the Parish
- ⇒ How to reach out to people who may feel excluded, such as disabled people, the LGBTQ+ community, people without children
- ⇒ How to encourage more people, particularly younger people, to get involved in Parish groups
- ⇒ Whether more parish groups are needed in addition to the core groups fundamental to its functioning
- ⇒ How we can outwardly show the importance of our faith to our children and young people
- ⇒ How can we counteract the sense of the three different Parish communities that has evolved around each weekend Mass and forge one whole interactive community?
- ⇒ How might we engage with other church communities within our Parish?

Summary of discussion

The discussion brought up a number of points of consensus and people shared their hopes for the Parish community as well as their concerns.

- Several people had children of their own or knew of young people who had completely disengaged from the Church; however, it was encouraging that people often returned when they were getting married or having a young family of their own and wanted them to be baptised. Faith seldom leaves and values/behaviours stay.
- The lives of young people are so much busier with more competing demands than many of us experienced. It is difficult for them to make church a priority. We need to work hard to get people to stay and to show them that their faith will sustain them throughout their lives. In the past, the groups set up and run by younger parents were very successful, such as drama, the youth club, the annual pantomime, as well as events such as the Walsingham walk. We need more of this kind of fun community activity
- We don't have anything in the parish for younger people once they have been confirmed. We don't provide opportunities for them to get involved. We don't ask them to be active members of the parish e.g. through being a reader, or a Eucharistic Minister
- We could involve the Confirmation group in determining the best way of involving young people: what do they want from the/their Church? What are we not providing that they need? How can we better involve them in issues they care about, such as climate change, the environment and injustice?
- We need to make sure we are welcoming to people when they do return and accept them even if, for example, they don't come every Sunday; we need to work with what we have. We also need to find a way of engaging people who at the early stages of life-building i.e. who have left education and are perhaps starting a young family
- Schools are a huge resource as they have already created a community and friendship groups – we should build on this.
- There used to be lots of social/community events in the Parish, lots of celebrations. Is this still relevant? Perhaps we could do something around the forthcoming Confirmation? People came to the recent film, The Letter, but attendance could have been better, despite advertising it. Word of mouth is hugely important in getting people to come to things – we should develop the coffee mornings and use them to promote other community activities, such as a picnic on Broadway Gardens after 9.30 am Mass.

- We need to find more people to participate in Parish groups generally, particularly as the current people involved have been doing it for some time. We also need to see whether we have the right groups post-Covid
- We need more cross-over between Masses. People tend to go to one particular Mass and so don't know people attending other times. Perhaps people from both Sunday morning Masses could be encouraged to go to the coffee morning after 9.30? Perhaps the choirs could occasionally swap Mass times?
- Perhaps we can learn from other Parishes how to strengthen our community and wider Parish links?

Suggested Action Points

- ⇒ Hold a Parish Recruitment Fair to engage interest of parishioners in joining (or even setting up?) a Parish Group.
 - Talk pre-/end of each Mass about the fair and the need for new participants
 - Hold fair at the end of each weekend Mass
 - Possible dates for this: early June (not 11th) and/or end of September or early October
- ⇒ Last two weekends in September and first two in October provide an opportunity to invite to the fair or to other events people who have had a child baptised in the last 5-10 years; parents of children who have recently made their first Holy Communion; people who have been married within the last 5 or so years as well as other parishioners
- ⇒ Develop the Sunday coffee morning between Masses and encourage people, including children and young people, to go along after 9.30 Mass and before 11.30 (via Newsletter; speaking at Mass); hold these where possible in the Fortescue Hall and St Hilda's on other occasions
- ⇒ Encourage 'friendship groups' (parents/children) to meet regularly over the summer
- ⇒ Encourage cross-over events with St Thomas More, building on the success of the Christmas Fair held in Fortescue Hall
- ⇒ Open up the post-Confirmation celebration after Mass on 28th May to anyone else in the Parish who would like to attend
- ⇒ Establish a fun picnic event for families and parishioners after 9.30 Mass and use coffee mornings to 'spread the word'
- ⇒ Ask for volunteers to be a parish sponsor/'buddy' for newly baptised young people and people new to the Parish

- ⇒ Talk to the Confirmation group about what they want from their Church, what we are not providing and how we can help them to get more involved, particularly after Confirmation itself. They could help develop the role of the Parish Council.
- ⇒ Hold a showing of 'The Letter' for the Confirmation group and ask a member of CAFOD to speak to them
- ⇒ Choir leaders to explore occasionally singing at the other's usual Mass
- ⇒ Find out how other Parishes have strengthened their Parish Council's pastoral role

Becoming a Pastoral Parish Council: how to make your PCC really useful for the 21st Century by Patricia Carroll, published by Messenger Publications.

The Parish now has seven copies of this book. People were invited to borrow and read the book so a reading group to discuss it and report back to the Parish Council.

The meeting closed with a prayer and reading from the Gospel of John.