

Report of Consultation with Parish Groups 2017

Introduction

In preparation for the Parish Assembly the Parish Pastoral Council met with representatives of groups active in the parish between March and September 2017. The purpose of the meetings was to thank people for their contribution to parish life, to hear their views and to take note of their suggestions.

In advance of the meetings a letter was sent to each group asking them to think about their strengths and weaknesses as well as the challenges and opportunities facing their group/team. They were also asked to consider the wider challenges facing the parish over the next 5 years and ideas as to how the parish might communicate more effectively with both parishioners and those who describe themselves as Catholic but who may not attend church on a regular basis.

Representatives of the PPC met with representatives of 30 parish groups which were categorised under 7 headings (Parish Support, Care of the Church, Prayer, Children and Young People, Church Music, Liturgy and groups catering for specific needs in the parish and beyond). A list of the groups is attached in the appendix.

The Parish Pastoral Council was humbled by the dedication, commitment to living the Gospel and practical support to the priests, deacon and parish team of the groups working on a voluntary basis in the parish. The range, variety and dedication of the parish groups is one of the primary reasons why Ballinteer is one of the most vibrant parishes in the Diocese.

The PPC is also very grateful for the excellent support provided by the Parish Office and the Sacristy Team.

Summary of Findings and suggestions made by Parish Groups

Membership of Groups

It was clear that from the meetings that there were very considerable strengths identified by all of the groups including dedicated and committed members.

A number of teams (Cleaning and care of the Church, Gardening Team and Baptism Team) have sufficient numbers to enable them to carry out their duties without difficulty.

It is also clear that some groups rely on the commitment of a small number of individuals who, in some cases, work on a number of teams. The population in the parish is aging and this is true also of participation in parish groups. One of the most significant challenges identified by a number of groups was the issue of manpower and the need to attract new members. Even those groups which did not have difficulty per se with numbers were concerned with the age profile of members.

A number of groups mentioned the difficulty of getting volunteers to perform duties at the 5.30pm Sunday Mass which is also the least well-attended Mass at the weekend.

Strengthening Community

A number of groups mentioned the importance of a welcoming community in ensuring a vibrant parish. The absence of a parish centre, or at least a place where people could have a coffee and socialise, or the bereaved

could congregate after a funeral, was raised at a number of meetings as a significant gap that needs to be addressed particularly as the population of the parish was ageing.

The importance of the social/community dimension of parish life was mentioned by an tAifreann Gaeilge who suggested that having a cup of tea after Mass once or twice a year would give people a chance to mingle and get to know each other and they asked if the parish community would be prepared to help them in providing this facility. It was also mentioned in comments by the Gospel Choir who emphasised the importance of an open and welcoming parish community particularly as going to church is one of the only community events in an area where people have an opportunity to meet. The provision of tea/coffee after Mass by churches in Europe was mentioned as an example that might be followed.

The work of the parish catering team in providing refreshments for events in the church was much appreciated.

Prayer

The parish has a number of groups dedicated to prayer including the Parish Cell Community, the Eucharistic Adoration and Intercessory Prayer Teams, the Padre Pio and Morning Prayer Teams. These teams had a number of significant strengths including a concentration on personal faith development, developing a sense of community in the parish and meeting people's spiritual needs. In the case of the Padre Pio Mass (every second Saturday) there is a large attendance by the Travelling Community who travel long distances to attend. The Mass is also a lifeline for many people who don't normally attend church.

The challenges facing these groups are similar to those facing a number of other groups i.e. the need to attract new members. This is the case in relation to Eucharistic Adoration (where it is a constant challenge to secure enough people to maintain the rota) and the Padre Pio Mass, in particular. In relation to the rota for Eucharistic Adoration it was suggested that if the visit was reduced from an hour to half an hour it might encourage more people to participate.

Encouraging children and young adults to pray was a significant challenge. One of the suggestions made was to invite mothers or minders to bring young children into the church for a blessing.

Other groups, including the Legion of Mary, stressed the need for evangelisation in the parish.

Children and Young People

There is a 'Lighthouse' group run by parents for 11-12 year olds with a view to developing their faith. The sacramental programme 'You shall be my Witness' had proved very popular but the challenge now is to continue the momentum. An 8 week programme was run before Christmas which was attended by 45 young people one day a week after school. The young people expressed a view that this should continue. Annette Farrell is hoping to invite children from the three parishes (Ballinteer, Dundrum and Meadowbrook) with a view to starting a programme in Dundrum in September. It is envisaged that young people aged 17-21 would lead the programme with parents acting as coordinators.

The 'Do this in Memory Programme' has become a Family Mass. There are now Family Masses held in Meadowbrook, Dundrum and Ballinteer. In Meadowbrook there are now 18 parents involved in the preparation and in Ballinteer there are 12 volunteer parents involved in helping to prepare the Masses.

The view of those working with young people in the parish is that people will be drawn into a community if they see a community in operation and more work could be done in this respect. It is very important to do whatever is necessary to make parents and children/young people feel welcome. Parents also need support. There are a number of ways in which they can be supported. 'The Mass in Slow Motion' explains the Mass so

that people can understand it. There is also a newsletter called 'The Bridge' which is useful. It was also suggested that they supported financially if they were travelling abroad on faith-related events.

An tAifreann Gaeilge would like to attract more young people to its Sunday morning Mass. Scoil Naithí pupils attend once or twice a year but they would like to be in a position to invite other local schools to get involved during the school year. This would give children an opportunity to use their Irish and get involved in the Irish Mass.

The Parish Twinning Committee also suggested that the parish schools develop a relationship with Jangbunu Parish, e.g. by sending Easter and Christmas cards to the school children. They also suggested that representatives from 'Youth 2000' be invited to the parish assembly.

Suggestions relating to the fabric of the Church

A number of practical suggestions were made in relation to improvements to the church from teams involved in the care and cleaning of the church as well as by other groups. These included:

- the need for somewhere private for people to speak to the priest
- refurbishing the toilets, which was badly needed, making them wheelchair accessible and improving the signage which was needed particularly for people attending funerals
- sandblasting the altar as it was yellowing and gold-plating the emblems on the altar as they are currently indistinguishable from the surrounding stone
- removing/replacing the cloths surrounding the Sacred Heart altar at the back of the church as they are in a very bad condition
- dealing with hazard of umbrellas dripping on the floor on wet days as they may lead to a claim
- buffing the floors at least twice a year to get rid of the heavy dirt
- cleaning the carpet around the altar as it is stained
- access to the conference room on dark evenings is of concern to some groups on safety grounds
- the Oratory is used for an tAifreann Gaeilge. There are sometimes issues with the amp at the Ambo which may require some fine tuning
- the Baptism Team may have a total of 18 people attending pre-Baptism meetings in the parish office which can give rise to capacity concerns. Parking may also be an issue if the girls' school is not available after 12.30 Mass.

Catering for people with specific needs in the parish and beyond

These groups include the Vincent de Paul, the Legion of Mary, Saint Joseph's Young Priests Society, the Parish Twinning Committee, the Parish Visitation Group and the Faith and Light Community.

There is very large support within the parish for fund-raising activities of the the Vincent de Paul Society and the Parish Twinning Committee. In addition to support from the church collections the Vincent de Paul annual letter box appeal is very successful and people contribute even if they are not practising. The Twinning Committee's 300 draw is holding up and the children's trollies in Supervalu have been a successful initiative. Since the committee started work it has funded a borehole, four classrooms and solar panels in Jangbunu. It is

hoped to add an additional four classrooms to finish the school. Twinning is not about creating dependency. Curates from Yola diocese help out in Ballinteer parish while studying in Maynooth.

The Legion of Mary and Saint Joseph's Young Priests Society are also active in the parish. The society had a number of suggestions in relation to publicising its activities and has suggested that a member of the PPC should attend branch meetings.

The Faith and Light Community, an ecumenical group, which caters for people with an intellectual disability, would welcome more people and are looking for ways to better communicate what they have to offer.

The Parish Visitation Group was set up about two years ago. The group has formed a befriender group in conjunction with Marlay Nursing Home and visits residents every Tuesday. This is working very well. Through contact with residents the group is also in a position to identify needs that, when met, greatly improve the life of residents (e.g. providing a radio to a person who can no longer watch television).

The Parish Book of Life was also mentioned as being very valuable to people who did not attend church regularly but who felt it was very important that their loved-ones be remembered.

Church Choirs

The Gospel Choir is in its 8th year of operation. It has 85 members and there is a waiting list. Some members of the choir thought that the Mass was a bit late and there were some suggestions that the choir sing at other Masses. A number of suggestions were made regarding communication of the choir's activities. It was also suggested that the lack of participation by the congregation could be improved by either putting the words of the hymns on screen or having an animator for the congregation. An tAifrean Gaeilge had raised similar issues in relation to the encouraging singing at the Irish Mass.

The Ballinteer Male Voice Choir sings in the church at the Christmas carol service, the Christmas and Easter Masses and two Masses during the year from which they get a very good response. The choir has 45 members. It is a community choir. It sings in nursing homes and it sang in City Hall for Culture Night. It also organised a very successful international choral festival which was held in the church in May.

Educating people in the Liturgy

One of the issues that emerged from a number of meetings, particularly from those who deal with the wider community, is that many people (including young people) no longer understand the significance of the liturgy. This included the purpose of the constituent elements of the Mass, the reasons for kneeling or standing at certain points and the significance of altar furniture (e.g. the Tabernacle). The point was made that in the past people did not question why they did things but times were different now and explanation and appropriate education were required.

A gap identified by the Funeral Team is that there is no post funeral bereavement team (previously there was Bethany support).

Communication

Another common theme of the meetings was issues around communication both in terms of how the parish communicates with the wider world and how groups communicate what they do. These can be summarised as follows:

- At present the parish website is managed by one dedicated individual. There are plans for a pastoral area website but where this stands at the moment is unclear.

- Greater use of social media (including facebook) was recommended by a number of groups.
- The Newsletter Team recommend returning to the 4 page format (printed in colour) as the single sheet printed on both sides does not have sufficient room.
- Parish groups should be encouraged to share what they do.
- Morning Prayer should be explained and advertised including through the use of electronic media.
- The Parish Shop and the Saint Vincent de Paul Society suggested raising their profile by visiting the schools.
- The Gardening Group said it would be a good idea to bring back the suggestion box.
- The Gospel Choir suggested putting signs up outside the church to let people know when the choir is singing and that Masses should be advertised as to which type of music is available.
- An tAifreann Gaeilge intend to publicise the Irish Mass more widely though providing posters and notices to local schools and pre-schools and by asking all the parishes in the region to put up notices on their websites and in their newsletters.
- The parish Twinning Committee suggested showing a video of the Twinning Committee's work in Jangbunu after Mass.
- Saint Joseph's Young Priests' Society suggested having a stand at the parish assembly to promote awareness of its activities.

Appendix Parish Groups

1. Care of the Church

Altar Society
Care and Cleaning of the Church
Flower Arrangers
Gardening Group
Catering for Parish Events

2. Parish Support

Parish Office
Finance Group
Parish Website
Repository Shop
Parish Newsletter

3. Music

Ballinteer Male Voice Choir
St. John's Gospel Choir

4. Liturgy

Sacristy Team
Baptism Team
Altar Servers
Funeral Liturgy Team
Minsters of the Eucharist
Ministers of the Word
Aifrean Gaeilge

5. Prayer

Parish Cell Community
Eucharistic Adoration
Intercessory Prayer Team
Padre Pio Prayer Group
Legion of Mary and Patricians
Morning Prayer Group

6. Children and Young People

Sacramental Preparation and Family Mass
Programme for teenagers run by youth leaders

7. Groups catering for people with specific needs in the Parish and beyond

Saint Vincent de Paul Society
Parish Twinning Committee
Saint Joseph's Young Priests Society
Faith and Light Community
Parish Visitation Group
Pioneer Total Abstinence Association (not operating in the parish but views provided in writing).