

MINUTES FROM PARISH ASSEMBLY SATURDAY, 10th JUNE 2017

Facilitator: Noreen Lockhart, Sara Nash (Chair of PPC), David Myles (Vice-Chair), Ann Hill (Secretary)

1. How do we want this assembly to run?
 - Everyone to be listened to and have a chance to speak
 - Enjoyable
 - Keep Gospel in mind
 - Listen to and respect views of people who are not here
 - Open to new ideas – no matter how scary
2. Purpose of the day: To plan for the future of Ss Alban & Stephen parish, in particular for the next three years and, in doing so, to hear and value the parish voice because the Parish belongs to all of us.
3. Challenges to us in our Parish:
 - Step back – what would you change? Re-imagine the broader parish including the people who are not here.
 - Being missionaries sets fire to a parish (quote from David Wells presentation)
 - What would this parish be like in 10 and 20 years time – asked to reflect on this

4. Group Presentations

4.1. PPC Report – Sara Nash

Sara highlighted work done by David Myles and Ann Hill and said she was stepping down from the PPC.

The PPC have met regularly and meetings have been well attended. Representatives of the strategy groups have produced reports and the 5 independent members have attended as regularly as possible. Minutes have been freely available to parishioners.

Priority – to feed back thoughts from 2014 assembly at each Mass. People were invited to complete *Share Your Talents* forms and over 360 forms were completed.

An *Open Weekend* was held in 2016 – tribute to all the organisations outside the parish groups – over 40 of them. This enabled us to update the Parish Directory. The parish website is available for all to look at and see the diversity of activities.

We have maintained involvement with other city centre churches – a *Grill the Clergy* evening gave greater insight into each others' beliefs. We also shared a market stall selling Christmas goods and hope to help with an emergency night shelter for the homeless in severe weather. A venue has been identified and training for volunteers will take place very soon.

We have celebrated special birthdays for Fr Jimmy and Fr Tom and special anniversaries for Fr Tom and Fr Sandy. PPC and music groups worked together to give Fr Charles a fitting farewell. Fr T J has dealt with pastoral and maintenance demands with good humour. Jules Chevalier, founder of the MSC globally advocated including the laity in working alongside religious men and women. We hope our Parish lives out this important ministry.

Q. Parishioner commented that he did not feel the *Grill the Clergy* evening gave a greater understanding of other religions, nor did they give honest replies.

R. Everyone was as honest as they could be.

C. Fr Jimmy commented that he did feel it gave greater understanding.

4.2. Mission Group Report – Melanie O'Neill

Ten members have met regularly every month with Fr Tom. Our aim is to promote our faith and help people to deepen and understand theirs. We became the parish response to Proclaim 15 initiative, set up by the Bishops of England and Wales, to promote Pope Francis' desire for us to be missionary people. Focus has been on: our own parishioners – to help them deepen their faith through Advent and Lent talks, parish Mission and parish pilgrimages; the wider community of Christians –through

the Good Friday Cross procession, CTSA events, Autumn prayer walk; those without faith or who do not go to church – through Finding Silence weekends and days, religious art exhibition, Sharing the Light – where the church doors were opened to passersby who were invited to light candles and share prayer; distribution of Christmas and Easter cards in the market place.

We would like to continue our work as part of an integrated parish strategy. We need to encourage younger people to become more engaged and involved.

Q. In terms of St Albans, do you think young adults constitute a wide demography as it is very expensive to live here?

R. We need to engage young adults, single people and young families, who already attend masses in our church. We could make arrangements such as baby-sitting, communicating with people on line (via email), asking young people specifically to help lead some activities for the parish or wider city. At the moment parish events are focused on people who have the time to get to them, who are often retired. We need to think of different ways of supporting and reaching 16–30 year olds.

Q. As a former single member of the Parish in my 30s, and working in the City, I felt isolated, there are very few things that young people are welcomed at. We need a singles group.

R. There used to be a singles group and it could be relaunched. Agree: we need to do something for these people.

4.3. Justice & Peace Report – Anne Rose and Anne Romain

J & P decide collectively on issues and action inspired by Jesus and the teaching of the Church. We meet every month.

The group expressed their thanks for support given to the Bakhita and Tiplyang projects. Bakhita Village in South Africa is where Sisters of the Sacred Heart run an orphanage and school for girls. Our contributions help the welfare and education of the girls, including the provision of two scholarships for secondary education. The *Hands Together Tiplyang Project* is a charity set up in memory of a 20 yr old soldier who was killed in Burma in WW2, fighting with a Major Lumley and Tul Bahadur Pun, a Nepalese soldier. The charity sustains and develops the school it has built and supports the education, healthcare and development of hill communities around Tul Bahadur's village of Tiplyang in the Nepalese Himalayas. This gives us hope that from tragedy, good can result.

We have organised collectations for refugees in Calais and 17 crossings have been made with donations for people in the camps in conjunction with Bruderhof in Kent. Each year, our group leads a Stations of the Cross on a Saturday morning. We have shared our Stations of the Cross with the women of Nablus. We have held Rich Man Poor Man suppers, and an *I Daniel Blake* CAFOD supper. Less successfully, we led a *Live Simply* campaign where we asked people in the parish to walk to Mass on one Sunday in June. We had a sit down meal for *Laudato Si* and all parishioners were welcomed. As part of the completion of the *Year of Mercy*, our Nov 2016 study day focused on the theology of Mercy. We had the privilege of hosting the Lampedusa Cross in our church for the weekend and ended the day with reflections around this extraordinary cross. We try and build community by such activities as volunteering with Open Door and Centre 33, foodbank collections and Fair Trade participation. Some help in organising parish support to Bakhita Village. This weekend we are launching an appeal for specific donated goods for the homeless in St Albans.

4.4. Community Support (Parish Friends) – Jacquie Fowler

Parish Friends (renamed in 2014 as Community Support) grew out of the first Assembly in 2008 to look after older, more frail people and support people with special needs by visiting the housebound, organising outings and helping with special needs Masses. We have Neighbourhood Links and community can reach out to the lapsed. During the last three years we have consolidated and built on these activities. We organized 6 film shows with about 150 people attending each; held coffee mornings specifically for charity and 300 people attended Turkey & Tinsel. We have had boat trips with cream tea cruises and an outing to Bletchley Park. Three tea parties are held each year. We have tried to open up events to all parishioners during the last 3 years. More recently we have been

looking at what we as a parish can do until 2020. Cath White coordinates Neighbourhood Links with around 15 neighbourhoods across the parish. We have volunteers who knock on doors or put leaflets through thus - being a friendly link. The *You Can be Santa* initiative began four years ago with 18 children and last year had grown to more than 160 children on the list. What can we do as a parish to help families with young children living in bedsits? SVP visit parishioners in need. How can we acknowledge all the things going on that do not come under a specific category group? Pilgrimage to Lourdes – how can we link in more closely with Westminster and other parishes across the country? Lifts to Mass have been organised for the last three years and we currently have 15 drivers.

4.5 Youth Strategy Group – Brendan Day

Identified as a priority group at Assembly three years ago.

Sacramental – input into Baptism, Reconciliation, First Holy Communion and Confirmation programmes. In the last 3 years, there has been an increase in the numbers of children coming forward to receive these sacraments. Approx. 400 babies and children have been baptised, 380 children have received their First Reconciliation and First Holy Communion and 170 candidates have received the Holy Spirit in Confirmation. Preparation classes and trips to events such as *Flame* encourage children to develop their faith and get to know God more personally. There are lots of different groups and volunteers – Duke of Edinburgh volunteers, youth clubs, etc. We are trying to create a safe space so children can grow in their faith.

Liturgy groups – at 9.30am Mass, children meet in the hall and downstairs rooms. Younger children do the first reading and Psalm. There are a good number of altar servers, a kids' choir and some talented musicians in the parish. The travelling crib comes back to the church for the Crib Service on Christmas Eve. School links are important and we need to maintain the connection between the parish and schools. Year 6 children are invited to apply to join a chaplaincy team and present assemblies to schools. Post Confirmation young people are invited to become Eucharistic Ministers. Sr Anita and priests are familiar faces in schools trying to make God as relevant as we can in our parish and community. The youth website has been re-energised recently and we are trying to make it as interactive as possible. First Holy Communion and Confirmation photos will be updated. We are blessed to have our priests and deacon together with Sr Anita who welcome the children.

Q. To what extent do we try to obtain opinions and feedback of youth so we can tell how successful each initiative is?

R. A lot of contact comes through Sr Anita working in schools. Sometimes it is easier to do in small groups rather than sending out questionnaires but we could do more.

Comment: Children are our future. We need to have things for them. We need to do all we can as a community to maintain that.

Q. Where does Youth Strategy Group remit end?

R. We see our remit as providing a safe space for children up to university. We do not have a group that goes beyond but we would like to.

4.6 Liturgy Strategy Group – Sara Nash

We are lucky to have a huge range and style of services. We aim to ensure that all services work well, including Welcoming, Ministers of the Word and Eucharistic Ministers. We meet 3 or 4 times a year to discuss the various special liturgies – Christmas, Easter, etc. and the cards that are distributed at these times. The 8 am Mass was introduced following the closure of Maryland. This also affected the demography at 6 pm Mass, the mass goers were consulted about music at all 6 pm Masses but the consensus was for music on special occasions only. We had large attendances for Christmas and Easter. Fr Charles leaving service was a testament to the close collaboration of priests, laity and the different music groups. We were also fortunate to be able to incorporate different genres of music in Advent and Easter services. Tim Vellacott has revitalised the church choir which sings on the first and third Sundays. We now have approximately 50 Ministers of the Word and 50 Ministers of the Eucharist, which is a huge testimony to the parish and the leaders –

Allan Engelhardt and Anne Myles. All ministers are recommissioned every year – Eucharistic Ministers at the Mass of the Last Supper and Ministers of the Word at Pentecost. The Stations of the Cross during Lent were covered by all the strategy groups.

The spirituality of the MSCs is celebrated during the Feast of the Sacred Heart and the Novena of the Sacred Heart and the Memorare to Our Lady of the Sacred Heart is said at most Saturday morning Masses.

We would encourage people to come to meetings advertised in the bulletin. We are a vibrant parish with many different forms of celebration and Liturgy.

Q. Assembly of people going to Communion is very disorderly. Everyone gets up at once in our Church. The sign of peace can also appear chaotic.

R. Come to next Liturgy meeting to propose a model for discussion.

Q. As new parishioners, we became involved following slips of paper being put out requesting volunteers. This was welcome as, at the time, we did not feel we knew anyone. Could this be done at least once a year to catch people?

R. Share Your Talents forms are available at the back of the Church but it is a good point.

Comment: Share Your Talents is a good form as it is very specific and quite a few people came onto the coffee rota as a result.

Comment: Sometimes people volunteer to help but are told they are not needed. This should never happen as it causes discouragement and a job can always be found for someone.

4.7 Safeguarding – Nicky Vellacott

There are 3 members of the team and our main role is to carry out Disclosure Barring Service (DBS) checks for Catechists for First Holy Communion, Confirmation and Children's Liturgy as well as visiting the elderly and bringing people to Mass. Westminster Diocese provide training but we also do our own in-house to make sure that volunteers for children and the elderly know what safeguarding issues we need to look at and who to contact. We work closely with priests and Sr Anita. If there are any issues, Fr T J becomes involved. We represent the Diocese and follow their policies and procedures as well. We have induction training and yearly updates. We meet regularly as a team to go through procedures and any changes. We all undergo a lot of training. The Diocese has provided us with a secure email. The church has been on quite a journey in relation to safeguarding and society as a whole therefore specific policies and procedures are in place that we have to follow. Westminster Diocese policies are governed by the Care Act and the Children's Act.

Q. How often do you have to have a DBS check?

R. Diocese says officially every 3 years but allow that we do not have the capacity to do this.

Q. How valid are DBS checks?

R. It only shows something that someone has been caught for. It is one of those things that we have to be aware of. We have training and as a community, it is something we need to look at.

R. (Fr T J) With regard to overseas personnel, priests have the equivalent of a DBS from wherever we have come. In the parish, I have been through a whole process e.g. for any committee, etc. I go through a new process. I am a Governor of 3 schools and have had DBS checks for all schools. We are in the process of bringing a priest to the parish, whose home is in Pakistan, he will have to go through the process via Westminster as well as back home.

4.8 General comments from the attendees

-The breadth of what we do and professionalism of how we do it is very good.

- We are very vibrant with lots of really good and professional effort but I speak for people who cannot be here – we can come across as cliquey. Lots of what we do is not on the website.

- I have been in this Parish for 25 years and have looked at the website about 4 times.

- There is a problem with letting people know what is going on. Bulletin and the website are good. It is easy for people to say that no-one told them but it is their responsibility to go and find out.

- Is the parish too cosy and cliquey?

- Perhaps some of our groups should be advertising in a wider space. (Toddlers Group is on Mumsnet)
- We are lucky that it is such a large parish – 1500 people and about 60 here.
- It is wonderful hearing of the talks. Perhaps once a month we could have a group putting what they do into the bulletin together with telephone number/email address. People might join.
- Communication – young people do look at the website. Perhaps we should be in the local area magazines.
- Fr J – I have never been in a parish where so much happens. It is tremendous. Danger this could become a gathering for what we are not doing. I am happy with the website and do read the bulletins. We do a lot.
- How can the Parish be more open to others?

4.9 Analysis of Feedback Forms – Ian Nash

This is a snapshot of opinions in the Parish and gives the chance for people to put their ideas forward. There were 457 replies and thanks to everyone who took the time to complete the form. The forms gave an immediate statistical return plus the chance for everyone to air their views but by their very nature lacked detail on how these should be implemented. Question 2 asked people to rate the Parish Groups. The overall average rating of 80% Very good + Good was very satisfying. The overall Poor rating was only 2.5% but should not be ignored. More detailed breakdowns have been sent to the groups e.g. Age bands have been used to help identify trends in areas. Unsurprisingly, most of the 'don't knows' on youth will have come from the older generation.

Question 1: What are the best things to have happened in our Parish within the last 3 years?

Half to two-thirds responded to Question 1. Many expressed delight and gratitude that MSC priests are still able to give ministry in this Parish. Their ethos is prominent and underpins everything. Refurbishment and work on parish centre, decoration in church, and the anonymous donation for lighting are much appreciated. Others highlight the great variety and choice of activities, the sense of community and welcome, along with the diversity of activity evidenced by response and that the clergy encourage lay leadership.

Outreach – people appreciate the choice and like to know what is going on. Gratitude for work of Community Support (Parish Friends) in helping elderly and several liked J & P input into the Bidding prayers.

Liturgy – pleased with Christmas and Easter services plus times and ranges of weekend masses and the new choir.

Mission – one activity that did come up most often was *Sharing the Light*. People are pleased with speakers for Lent and Advent talks plus input of other organisations to add to diversity of retreats available.

Youth – popularity of masses and sacramental programmes + marriage preparation courses and particularly strong for the under 15s

Question 3: What are other areas of parish life are we doing well or could be done differently?

One-third of forms had responses. Various diverse ideas and some contradictions e.g. some want singing at Masses and some less emphasis on music but choices of masses available cover for this. Pastoral care – underlying theme of greater practical involvement of the laity. Suggestions valid but no detail offered. Question of how/which to prioritise plus management and recruitment of volunteers.

Youth – main concern about 16–30 age group. This came out clearly on forms. Our parish is not alone in this. One suggestion to help us was to perhaps combine events with neighbouring parishes plus technology.

Training the laity for leadership – a priority. There is a need for talks and courses that deepen understanding of faith.

Social events – request for more, particularly family but no indication on how to implement.
Ecumenism – collaboration likely to become more necessary as clergy numbers decrease.
Collaboration with others in St Albans needs to continue and increase. Need to develop links with neighbouring Catholic parishes.

5. **Parish Constitution – Sara Nash**

Changes to constitution were explained. These were mainly to delete repetition and to enable chairs of groups to be appointed within a month of the assembly. Motion was carried with two abstentions and none against. The amended constitution was accepted.

6. **Discussion Groups** – participants were invited to ‘vote’ for specific areas that they considered important priorities:

Communication (31)

Youth particularly 16–30 age range (38)

Leadership of Laity (28)

Inclusivity and support for struggling families – (27)

Mission and Outreach (23)– reach people in our church, those who do not go, collaboration with other churches, inter-faith, etc.

Justice and Peace (12)

How can we help Fr T J with parish tasks such as maintenance, etc. – salaried positions were suggested. This will be for PPC to take forward. Fr T J emphasised that what emerged in the discussion at the Assembly does not negate anything already happening.

Leadership of the Laity – should this be a sub-group of the PPC? What would leadership of the laity look like and how should the parish engage with this going forward? A lot of people are looking at gaps in what we are already doing. What we have been doing is highly valued so we do not want to lose that. We will look at potential new areas but will not lose the old.

Communication and Social Media – a clear message that more is required. Current groups should include this remit and a focus on participation for 16–30 age group.

As a result, the following discussion groups were formed to consider what it would take to move this on to the next stage and report back with two things to take their area forward:

6.1. **Communication and Social Media**

- Want channels to be easy
- Need to engage more people
- Social media is a huge part
- Some people may never be on social media-how can we do to help those who do want to be?
- Engage more – more dynamic content – on the website the same day
- One page recommendation to go to PPC. Communications accountable to PPC and in line with directive from Parish Assembly.

6.2. **Community Support** – tea parties, films, Christmas dinners, etc. will still happen but not the main focus:

- Reach out to vulnerable (work with SVP)
- Work with CWL if possible for tea parties
- Link with other churches – what do they provide? (Go to them, invite them to come to us)
- Involve 16–30s in preparation and running of an event (eg next Confirmation group?)

6.3. **Leadership of the Laity** – need to manage with less time from priests. Opportunities to grow faith of Laity – experience of own priests in St Albans with large areas and congregations in Africa +

elsewhere here and in Ireland

- Engage laity in ways that access a broad range of people
- Don't clericalise the laity
- Should come under auspices of PPC as sub-group

6.4. Youth

- Primary, secondary, young adults – want to discuss with youth
- Define – ask - visual – e€ – enjoy, inspire
- Explore idea of youth assembly around twitter, etc. – cyber café

6.5. Justice and Peace

- How to engage young people – link with Confirmation candidates
- Use apps to engage
- Date of monthly meeting in bulletin and on website + update page on website regularly

6.6. Mission

- Bring together on website and notice board in porch many things already available for 16–30 years old.
- Look at all activities through their eyes

6.7. Liturgy

- Youth – options focused on age group (have children's liturgy for younger age group)
- Youth likes to be led by youth
- Collaboration and comparison with other parishes and churches
- Bands, choirs, events, masses

7. Composition of PPC

A vote was held to keep five existing group titles (although priorities would change). There would be a separate focus group on youth as part of YSG + have as part of remit across groups: 16–30s have to run their own group. PPC priority to create such a sub-group.

As communications in every form is so important, then all parish groups should discuss the issue as a high priority, then report back to the PPC who will collate and implement ideas on how communications on parish life could be improved.

Vote to keep names of groups same – unanimous (note Parish Friends should be Community Support as agreed at last Assembly)

7.1 Nominations received for PPC:

Five independent members: David Myles, Stan Grabecki, Melanie O'Neill, Ann Hill, Ian Nash
The above were voted unanimously onto the PPC.

Parish Groups were reminded they have 30 days to elect their representative to the PPC.