

# Notes from open parish meeting on 12th April

## 1. Opening Prayer and Introduction

Fr Allen opened the meeting with prayer, and noted that the business of the meeting was focussed on the domestic/housekeeping side of the parish. We ought not to lose sight of the challenge to consider how our community responds to the vision of parish promoted by Pope Francis - a description of which is provided in the article overleaf. This most important dimension is something we must not neglect. A number of parishioners are individually involved in good works, and to great benefit, but the parish corporately is less so. This is a matter that we will need to return to over coming months.

## 2. Presentation of the parish accounts for 2015

Tony Broom presented the previously published parish accounts. Fr Allen thanked Tony for his service as Chair of the Finance Committee, from which he has now asked to step down. Other members of the Committee were thanked, and also those who presently do the counting of the weekly collection and the banking.

A new Finance Committee is shortly to be appointed after a final meeting of the current Committee.

A number of volunteers have generously come forward in response to the recent appeal to strengthen the Counting team, and bring us in line with diocesan and auditor expectations.

## 3. The planned upgrading of the facilities provided in the Benedict and McEvilly Rooms, and how these rooms are used

The limitations of the present rooms were noted - wood rot and water ingress in the porch to the McEvilly room; limited access to kitchen and lavatory; poor sound insulation between the two rooms, effectively meaning that only one room can be used at a time; lack of storage space for users; issues to do with cleaning and leaving the room tidy.

These limitations meant that regularly requests for access to the rooms had to be declined.

It was noted that in fact at present, for various reasons, the rooms are under-used by the parish. They are regularly used as a valuable overflow space for St Nicholas School (thought this itself, because of the previously mentioned limitations, are at present a certain constraint on more regular parish use)

The lease for use of the Carpenter's Arms, the parish's use of that building, and the future of the Carpenter's Arms were subject of lively discussion. The meeting recognised the continuing value of that resource to the broader community, and that the opportunity is there for the parish's greater use of the Carpenter's Arms.

A meeting will be sought with the Trustees to dis-

cuss the future collaboration between them and the parish, and our use of their facilities.

A report will be commissioned on how the present deficiencies of the Benedict and McEvilly rooms might be addressed, and attention given to parish resources might better used to address the needs of the Church.

## 4. Planned redecoration of the church.

The electrical installation in the Church has recently been certificated, but we have been advised that it will not pass another inspection, so will need to be replaced prior to any decoration

The poor quality of the lighting was noted, the poor energy efficiency of the installation, and the difficulty and expense of replacing lights.

The cramped nature of the war memorial chapel and the poor state of the Lady Chapel, including damp patches, were noted, and also the relatively poor sight lines to the sanctuary from these side chapels.

There were discussions of the value of re-siting the place dedicated to music leaders from the back of the church to the memorial chapel.

The inadequate siting of the statue of St Joseph was noted, and there was consideration of re-siting it, and commissioning a statue of St Joachim and Anne, with a view to strengthen and deepen devotion to these saints, promoting a fresh appreciation of the dignity of fatherhood and grandparenthood, alongside of that of motherhood, and offering a privileged place to offer prayer to these patrons of the family.

The sometime use of the McEvilly room as an overflow space was noted, and consideration will be given to how those using the space during Mass might better integrated into the worshipping assembly, without compromising the more usual use of the room.

## 5. Parish pilgrimage 2017.

A number of parishioners had expressed interest in a parish pilgrimage to the Holy Land. This will be pursued. Presently the October 2017 half term is being considered for the pilgrimage, so that families with children might also find it easier to participate. Thought is also being given to offering the opportunity, should some pilgrims choose, to stay in the Holy Land for a retreat of 3 or 4 days, after the end of the pilgrimage.

Fr Allen asked whether there would be interest in a series of smaller one-day pilgrimages. And there was. There was also interest in residential retreats being promoted.

The meeting ended, in the Lady Chapel, with the singing of the *Regina Coeli*.

AM 13/4/16

## The parish in the vision of Pope Francis

*A reflection by Bishop Thomas Olmsted*

Parishes are established for the good of souls. Each local community is made up of persons of various ages and unique gifts, young and old, rich and poor, saints and sinners. The vitality of our families and parishes is an accurate gauge of the vitality of the Church in a particular territory or country.

It is not surprising, then, that Pope Francis writes about parishes in his apostolic exhortation, *The Joy of the Gospel (Evangelii Gaudium)*. His words give us insight into some of his top priorities as the Bishop of Rome. It is worthwhile, then, to look briefly at what he writes about parish life today.

### **A centre of evangelization**

Christianity is not an ethical system but a community of faith whose origin and identity are founded in the three Persons of the Blessed Trinity. This is why the Holy Father writes:

‘The parish is not an outdated institution; precisely because it possesses great flexibility, it can assume quite different contours depending on the openness and missionary creativity of the pastor and the community.’ (EG28)

Jesus calls His followers to speak the truth in love, to go forth in His Name, to make disciples of all nations. As we respond to His charge, it is important to keep in mind His words (Mt 28:20), ‘Behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age.’ Not by our own strength or our own plans does the Gospel reach the ends of the earth. It is all God’s work. His loving presence is the heart of the Good News.

The local Church, then, continually draws life and light from its Saviour, who remains present through His Word and the Sacraments. As the Holy Father writes:

‘It is a community of communities, a sanctuary where the thirsty come to drink in the midst of their journey, and a centre of constant missionary outreach.’ (EG28)

### **Focus on what?**

Pope Francis knows well the tough realities of the poor and the destructive nature of a ‘throw-away’ society. He is not hesitant, therefore, to call for reforms within society and also within the Church. At the same time, he urges us not to focus so intently on contemporary problems that we lose sight of the Redeemer who saves us from them. He wants us to avoid the mistake singled out by Hosea who wrote (Hos 8:14), ‘Israel has forgotten his maker.’

The Holy Father writes:

‘Today, our challenge is not so much atheism as the need to respond adequately to many people’s thirst for God.’ (EG89)

As St. Augustine wrote, our hearts are restless until they rest in Him. God created us with a longing for Him that is well expressed in Psalm 63 (vs. 2), ‘O God, you are my God whom I seek; for you my flesh pines and my soul thirsts like the earth, parched, lifeless and without water.’

Militant atheism may be an accurate description of what the Church is up against today in large sectors of secular societies; but we must not be preoccupied with fighting it. Faith is a gift of God, not a human construct. Atheism, then, can only be solved by God who chooses to work through His Church.

Our parishes should focus energy on praying for atheists, not on condemning them; and on helping them to recognize in their own hearts a spiritual hunger planted by our Creator. While aggressive secularism certainly deserves condemnation, what overcomes it is loving witness to Christ. Jesus never said, ‘Hate atheism’; He said (Mt 5:44), ‘...love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you.’ It is not for us to fret about the ‘-isms’ of our day. It is for us to trust God and His mercy, to rejoice in His forgiveness and to bring the joy of the Gospel to the lowly.

### **Not self-absorbed but mission-oriented**

As we can see, Pope Francis brings a fresh perspective to parish life. He wants parishes to be

‘environments of living communion and participation, and ...completely mission-oriented.’ (EG28)

There is an understandable but regrettable temptation for parishes, when facing grave challenges as we indeed do today, namely to withdraw into safe strongholds, to become ‘a self-absorbed group made up of a chosen few.’ What our Holy Father calls for is something quite different. Jesus said (Mt 10:16), ‘Behold, I am sending you out like lambs in the midst of wolves; so be shrewd as serpents and simple as doves.’ The dangers of being a friend of Jesus are real; they are not figments of our imagination. Unless we take up our cross each day and follow Him, we cannot be His disciple. But the dangers are nothing compared to the rich blessing of being followers and friends of our Saviour.

The vision of a parish that Pope Francis places before us has nothing to do with timidity, but everything to do with holiness. He writes:

‘The parish is the presence of the Church in a given territory, an environment for hearing God’s word, for growth in the Christian life, for dialogue, proclamation, charitable outreach, worship and celebration. In all its activities the parish encourages and trains its members to be evangelizers.’ (EG28)