

Notes from Parish Open meeting, 9 June 2019

John Sexton, Chair of the Parish Team, opened the meeting with prayer, based on a new Mission statement for the Parish – a quotation which is on one of the stained glass windows in our church:

“Go out to the whole world; proclaim the Good News to all creation” (Mark 16:15).

The Parish Core Team had been discussing the way ahead for our parish, based on this Mission statement. The Parish Meeting touched on this as well as covering:

- i) the current financial position of our parish and the budget;
- ii) the Diocesan Plan and its implications for our parish;
- iii) new initiatives and current programmes/activities in the parish, both liturgical and pastoral;
- iv) the new parish website and live streaming;
- v) Youth Ministry

i) Finances

John thanked all those involved in managing the finances of the parish for their dedication and hard work.

Joe Dunne, Chair of the Finance Committee, presented the current Income & Expenditure Accounts, the Balance sheet, and also the budget for the next year. The following key points were noted:

- Expenditure has exceeded ordinary income over the past year; (“ordinary” meaning offertory collections and donations etc.). Whilst not serious right now it needs addressing and has been mitigated this past year by two generous legacies totalling over £130K.
- The parish has reserve funds over £500K. In response to whether it is right to be holding such a high sum, Fr Peter and others said such funds needed to be retained to pay for:
 - Any substantial premises repairs that may arise;
 - new parish programmes, as we move to become a more mission-focussed church;
 - unknown costs associated with the Diocesan plan, including St Dunstan’s closer union with other local parishes and paying for chaplains in each Catholic school.

The reserves are held centrally in a Diocesan account and so help offset bank charges overall for the Diocese.

- The budget forecasts an overspend for our parish of £58K, assuming “ordinary” income does not increase. This compares with a deficit of c. £15K last year.
- This substantial change is due in part to increased personnel costs, incl. more people in paid positions in the parish, but the major reason will be an increase in the diocesan levy to 35% (over £80K).

- The higher levy is due to contributions to the maintenance fund for retired priests and the costs of clergy education being included.

Need to increase giving: The parish will therefore soon run out of money if expenditure continues to exceed income year-on-year.

The first priority is to appeal for an overall increase in offertory donations, not just an increase in Gift Aid. Fr Peter mentioned that the Diocese is suggesting offertory donation increases of £1 per person per week. It was proposed that the parish look at the sum it needs to raise for the year and what level of increase in offertory giving therefore needs to be made, per person.

Brian McKendry, the parish Gift Aid Coordinator said that:

- 58% of the offertory collections are through standing orders
- 2/3rd of offertory donations are gift-aided
- Gift Aid in our parish and across the diocese is declining.

The decline in Gift Aid is due to various factors, including:

- some parishioners not paying tax or not enough to support Gift Aid (e.g. as they retire);
- some people's concerns about making a commitment or about security (even though management of the Gift Aid scheme is highly confidential and secure);
- Flexible/ variable work contracts and irregular levels of pay.

The parish will note these issues in planning appeals for increased, regular giving and for Gift Aid.

ii) Diocesan Plan

John Sexton ran through a brief summary of the Diocesan Plan ("The Word who is Life"). John and Fr Peter both made it clear that the details of what is proposed in the Plan can be viewed on the Diocese's website (www.dabnet.org).

The closer working and, in some cases, future mergers between local parishes as part of the Plan were highlighted, with the point being strongly made that these were not certain to happen.

iii) New Evangelisation and Parish Activities

Mary Smith gave a presentation on current and evolving programmes as we move from "maintenance to mission" as a parish, and provided some of the background to this.

Some of the many references from the past four Popes to "Evangelisation" and "New Evangelisation" were quoted.

New Evangelisation is called for in situations where many are baptised but few practise, and where people have no real personal relationship with Jesus. All of the baptised are called to become Missionary Disciples.

While 'Evangelisation' was traditionally considered necessary in many countries overseas, a 'New Evangelisation' is now needed in our own country, town, parish communities and families. The current emphasis is more to invite people, whatever their state of life and belief, to "come and see", and to be welcomed and hopefully to become engaged with our parish community. Having enjoyed this contact, they may then be open to hearing about Jesus and his Church. Beliefs are changed by building trust through relationships, through caring and through belonging.

Recent parish initiatives, focussing on the New Evangelisation, include:

- Alpha Courses,
- Connect Groups (small groups of individuals coming together)
- Youth Ministry and
- Hospitality.

More opportunities for formation, helping parishioners in the lifelong process of learning about and learning from Jesus, are also being planned.

Mention was made of the First Holy Communion Programme now being used, where parents are assisted to be the educators of their children and in so doing have an opportunity to develop or re-engage with their own faith and the Church.

The Parish Core team have been reading "*Divine Renovation – bringing your parish from maintenance to mission*", a book by Fr James Mallon about making disciples of all the baptised and developing parishes to be more focussed on evangelisation and less on 'maintaining' the status quo.

A summary was then given of the many parish and related activities going on in the areas of Liturgy and Prayer, Sacramental Preparation, Adult Formation, Outreach and Social Activities.

iv) Parish Website and Live Streaming

Kevin Wallace presented the new St Dunstan's parish website and its main features. Website address: www.st-dunstans.org

Statistics from the time that Live Streaming of Masses and other celebrations and events in the church had started was also presented. There are an average of about 50 unique viewings per day out of over 200 in total (i.e. someone looking in more than once). Over Christmas and Easter there were over 200 unique viewings for each day.

Kevin was thanked for his extensive work on the website and the streaming facility.

v) Youth Ministry

Fernanda (Nanda) Mee described the activities that had been established to engage young people in our parish since she started as Youth Ministry Coordinator in the parish in September 2018.

Nanda disagrees with those who say the youth are the future of the church. They are the present.

The objective of our parish Youth Ministry is to give young people the opportunity to meet the person of Jesus. The initiatives that have been set up include:

- Youth Alive Jr - school years 4, 5 and 6
- Youth Alive Nights - school years 7 to 13
- A new young adults event called "Encounter", aimed at 15+ to 35 (post Confirmation)

Some members of Youth Alive went to FLAME, (the big national Catholic Youth gathering) at Wembley; (part sponsored by the Catenians).

The Confirmation programme was also mentioned. Preparation for this was Alpha-based, each session being followed by a time of Adoration; - a new experience for some young people. 54 were confirmed by Bishop Richard at St Dunstan's the previous Saturday.

Nanda was thanked for her hard work since taking office.

vi) Sculpture in memory of Canon Frank

A design for a Holy Family sculpture (with Jesus portrayed as an older child than the usual infant), is anticipated from newly selected sculptor, Marcus Cornish. The sculpture is likely to be in bronze and positioned in the front garden of the church.

vii) Change of Parish Team Leader

John Sexton was thanked by Fr Peter for the last four and half years he had given to the role of Parish Team Leader. A presentation was made to John and his wife, Libby, who was also thanked for her support for John in the role.

Karin Harvey was introduced and welcomed as the new coordinator of the Parish Core Team.

The meeting closed with prayer.