

## **St. Vincent's Open Parish Meeting, Wednesday 14<sup>th</sup> September 2022.**

Meeting presided over by Father Walsh and chaired by Russell Brynes, chair of parish council. Approximately 40 parishioners attended, with apologies received from various people unable to come. Notes taken by Columba Timmins and Dominic Rice.

Russell provided an agenda to act as a framework if needed to promote discussion.

### **The Parish Pastoral Council.**

Russell described how the parish pastoral council came into being three years ago to support Father Walsh, members being drawn from representatives of some of the groups/ responsibilities in the parish; how the necessity of managing the Covid pandemic's effects soon determined its priorities, and to a certain extent still does. Countless parishioners worked to support each other and the community during the pandemic, and there were many contributed to the gradual reopening of the church for Mass. Russell asked the various members present to introduce themselves: Theresa Rice; Dominic Rice; Peter Twomey; Pete Delamere ; Catherine Evans; Kathleen Baster; Columba Timmins. Andrew Hayes attended from the Finance Committee. Additional members were Mick Howell and Christine Hopewell.

Two members of the council are standing down. New members are sought and welcome. There is not a formal limit to numbers of councilors.

The council Terms of Reference (a copy of these will be attached to this document, available on the parish website, and printed to go up in the Narthex) call for an annual open parish meeting, but this has not been feasible until now.

### **Moving forward as a parish.**

Suggestions were invited from parishioners as to how the parish could move forward now that covid concern is reduced. What sort of a parish do we envisage? How do we achieve spiritual renewal? What do we take from our parish Synod response?

Father Walsh expressed thanks to everyone for attending, and for the support of the parish both during the pandemic and ongoing. Two parishioners especially expressed how sustaining the support organized through the SVP has been –both during the pandemic and ongoing - with regular telephone contact and practical support offered.

Indeed mutual support within the parish through the past couple of years was regarded as a positive outcome of the covid restrictions. **Question: can we build on this as a parish?**

Father said Mass attendance was recovering, but was still about a 5<sup>th</sup> below pre-lockdown level. The dropping of the Sunday obligation had an effect: though it is now restored it has not been emphasised. **How might people be encouraged to return?** At the same time, Father sees

improvements in vocal participation during Mass. The pandemic has been a watershed and we are at a moment of reflection.

Father has been looking into a Mission from the Franciscan Friars of the Renewal - the meeting welcomed this idea. It should attempt to address the current issues of concern for people of all ages in the parish. Also suggested that any mission should include a thread of healing.

Other ideas included a regular Mass for young people and/or a youth liturgy.

Disappointment was expressed that the pre-pandemic Mass at St. Charles Borromeo, Attercliffe, has not been re-instated. (There are however two Polish Masses). This has meant the dispersal of the community that had built up around it.

Regret expressed for **the loss of the Communion chalice**, not yet restored since covid restrictions. When might this happen? Its return is a matter for the Bishops Conference, not individual parishes or dioceses. Could we remind the Bishops? Some ways around the restriction mentioned. Father reminded us that Communion under both kinds is not a universal provision of the Church.

Communication between council and parish is imperfect. Members' photos are needed to identify them. **We need a volunteer to action this.**

The feeling from some council members is that in some ways parish communication improved through the pandemic, both through council and individual parishioners' efforts to be aware of each other's spiritual, physical and mental welfare.

The importance of **social contact** (activities together, eating together, talking together) as a 'draw' into praying together. There is a need to look at transport available, to look at the demographic makeup of the parish.

(A parishioner who could not make the meeting wishes to make the point that for many years the great cohesive events in the parish have been the Pantomime and the Christmas bazaar.)

**Could we have a social representative on the council?**

A parishioner described the new way of sharing a sign of Peace – allowing for mutual acknowledgment across the whole congregation – as a positive change, and general agreement was voiced.

**'Churches Together'** and the potential for more communication and shared activity with churches in the area was mentioned.

We need to know what groups there are in the parish. A booklet was being prepared and finalized just as lockdown started in 2020. This can be reviewed.

Noted that we must not forget what we already do in the parish – there is already a lot of good work undertaken.

### **Young People.**

There was much discussion around being welcoming for young people and on how to engage them.

It was suggested we work harder at giving young people responsibilities and making them part of the liturgy and the community.

It was also pointed out how wonderful our young parishioners are already at taking responsibility eg older servers mentoring the younger ones, helping to clear up and doing sacristan duties after Sunday Mass. Many have been involved in the annual church pantomime in the past. Their involvement in the music group has always been positive. There is always a presence of young people on the Lourdes Pilgrimages.

A point was made that mission for young people 10-18 years old needs to reflect the current concerns of the society in which we live, such as climate change and inequality.

The SVP arranged a healing Mass which took place immediately prior to lockdown which involved the mini-Vinnies from St. Marie's. **Could another healing service form part of the proposed Mission- eg during Advent? –possibly involving the mini-Vinnies once again?**

For children there was a suggestion made to provide a box of instruments at the front of the altar for them to come and take to play during the final hymn at Mass.

There was a query about the practice in some churches of young children receiving the sacraments of both First Holy Communion and Confirmation at primary school age – considered too early for children to be confirmed. Young people at St. Vincent's are not confirmed until age 13 or later and there are no plans to change this.

Father said a Youth Mass or Liturgy would be ideally accompanied by showing a film. Best time for this may be Sunday evening.

Communal activity for young people at St. Vincent's tends to take place through confirmation classes. The confirmation group had a successful retreat at the Hub this year.

**The Hub** (Solly Street) has a dynamic youth presence. Can we bring this together with a social event for the elderly? (There will be health and safety regulations to consider if providing food.)

Some ways of engaging young people seen at other parishes/faith groups were social activities or drama. Noted that other faith groups often employed paid youth workers.

Hallam Diocese recently employed a paid youth worker for the Diocese based at the Hub. **We could ask her to come and speak in the parish.**

There was a challenge made to the idea that young people are only drawn to faith through fun activities or concerns such as the environment. The reverence of the students at the Hub was described: if the youth witness this reverence, they will talk about it, and that is what will keep their faith alive for the future. Suggested that we could ask students from the Hub to come and talk to young people in our parish.

A display was planned for St. Vincent's about the young man Blessed Carlo Arcutis who particularly revered the Eucharist. Its original date this year had to be postponed –can a new date be planned?

Could contact with students from the Hub form an event as part of the proposed mission?

**Russell to contact both Father Lee and Diocesan Youth worker at the Hub.**

### **How to be welcoming to those coming to Mass?**

Noted that we now have 'Welcomers' as a regular ministry at Sunday Mass; this is a positive development, but not enough in itself.

Advertise that tea and coffee are available after Sunday morning Mass and invite people in person to come. A reminder and welcome to newcomers from Father after Mass might help, and a word from parishioners involved in the coffee rota. We need more people volunteering for the coffee rota after Sunday am Mass.

It was suggested that all of us need to approach each other more to say hello, especially those who we may be new faces to us. **Offering a welcome is up to us all as parishioners.**

### **Children's Liturgy.**

Orla Burke introduced herself as the **Children's Liturgy organiser**. The fact there is a children's liturgy needs more publicity –it is something families appreciate but they don't always know it is available. For example: advertising on website and by word of mouth; posting photos on the walls (according to safeguarding principles) of children's activities; celebrating the children's return into Mass and acknowledging any work they have done. Need to think about timing of the children's return to mass after their liturgy, such that they can process up with what they have produced and present it to the priest. **Reinstating the Offertory hymn would make the timing of this return easier.**

Links between the reception class at St. Marie's and St. Vincent's is already established and will continue to develop.

More photo boards were advisable in general – for parish activities as above, for identifying council members and so on.

**The Synod:** a reminder that the synod is ongoing as an exercise for the Church to hear and discuss the concerns of the people of God. Starting as a consultation exercise at parish level, these responses would be brought together in synthesis by each Diocese, and passed to the Bishops Conference for further synthesis. The final destination for response is the Vatican. A written questionnaire was delivered by hand to all known parishioners of St. Vincent's. It was also provided online. Other means of sending a response straight to the Bishops or to the Vatican were also advertised. Two parishioners accepted the task of arranging the responses together and presenting them to the parish. They described the response rate as high, but associated with some scepticism that laypeople's words would get a true hearing. The response synthesis was put on the parish website, and a meeting arranged for parishioners; nine people came.

It is not clear what the next steps are – the Bishops Conference synthesis has been published and there will be further global stages. The synod is due to complete in 2023.

Russell acknowledged on behalf of Father that some concerns commonly expressed, such as women's priesthood and LGBTQ rights, were not going to be taken up in St. Vincent's. But we can work on areas where we can make a difference. How do we have discussions that match those concerns reflected in the responses? How do we listen to and hear each other?

It was suggested that, given the good turnout this evening, it might be worthwhile approaching parishioners again, asking them to be involved in taking things forward on the Synod.

Father emphasised that all are welcome in our church. He has written a piece on Equality Diversity and Inclusivity for the parish. It is on the website and was distributed at the meeting. Father read some of the piece on inclusivity, and quoted Cardinal Francis George's reply to a question whether all people are welcome in the Church: 'Yes, but on Christ's terms, not our own'. Some questioned the Cardinal's confidence that he knew what Christ's terms were? It was commented that many of us would be horrified at the company Christ kept if he came to the world today. Furthermore, young people were 'way ahead' of the Church when it came to inclusivity and 'that's why they are not here today.'

Other questions: What can we do as a parish? Are Christ's rules being superseded by Church rules? Who would Christ include nowadays? Is the church still in touch with what is important?

### **Time for volunteering.**

People's lack of time for volunteering has had a significant effect on what they can contribute to parish community work. For instance in past years, women timetabled such work within their

other commitments –childcare and housekeeping. Both parents need to bring in a wage these days in order to cover their family cost of living. Pensioners - another past source of voluntary help, are now often taking care of grandchildren.

### **Parish Environmental Policy.**

There is no formal environmental policy for the parish. However the need to manage a regular cleaning routine as the church reopened after lockdown allowed for progress with using environmentally friendly cleaning materials, reusing containers, and encouraging reduced plastic use. Work is ongoing in the church grounds with regard for creation care and outdoor meditation: there has been help from many parishioners with this – practical groundwork, donations of money and plants and much encouragement. Suggestions have been received that the parish begin to grow food to share.

The meeting was scheduled to close at 9pm. A final emphatic point was made about **St. Vincent's and Sacred Heart Hillsborough being sister parishes:** we should be drawing on this potential more and communicating more.

Many stayed for a drink and further conversation after the meeting closed.

### **'Post-it notes'**

There was the opportunity to write suggestions which were given as follows:

- I think we need to resurrect the parish handbook (groups, activities going on, etc)
- Could we have a notice board so people could put their names down under the various groups with their contact number if they wanted to help?
- Can we have welcome cards for new (or old) attenders and possibly some volunteers to make contact with people who'd welcome that.
- I worry that we may end up with a 'two-tier' system, between Sunday 9.30 Mass and 6.00pm with its shortage of volunteers, no coffee, no opportunity to talk to people after Mass.
- How about setting up a 'warm centre' where people can come and get warm when they can't heat their homes?
- Big Challenge is to get 'younger blood' involved to go forward and drive some of these new ideas.