

St Joseph's Catholic Church, New Malden

Minutes of Parish Open Forum, Saturday 6 July 2019, 7.15 p.m

Present: Approximately 25 parishioners, together with Fr Uche and Deacon John-Simon;

Fr Uche welcomed those present and invited Allan (our resident seminarian) to lead an opening prayer.

Fr Uche then invited anyone to add to the list of Suggested Items for Discussion, appearing at the end of the booklet produced for the Forum. The following further items were suggested:-

1. The future of the Youth Club (Matthew Cruickshank);
2. The Year of the Word (Sister Margaret Donovan);
3. Next Year's follow up to "The Gift" (Cashel Riordan);

Accordingly, the following items came up for discussion:-

A) **Parish Handbook**

It was generally agreed that the idea of a Parish Handbook was worth pursuing. It would include all the groups and activities in the parish, both the spiritual and the social. It was suggested that it could be put on the website and, as such, could be regularly updated. Some questioned whether, in that case, there was a need for a "hard copy" Handbook at all but the consensus was that there was still a place for such a Handbook (copies of which could be left at the back of the church for visitors to pick up) but that, due to the likelihood of it being regularly revised and updated, the print run of each edition would need to be quite limited to avoid waste. Each edition would also need to be dated and it should be made clear that the situation described therein was "as at [the date of printing]" and readers could be invited to visit the website for any updates since publication.

The booklet produced for this Forum could serve as a good starting point for the proposed Parish Handbook. There were a few aspects of parish life not touched upon in the Forum booklet (such as at the Youth Club) but Agnes could email all

parish groups and activities not mentioned in the Forum booklet for their contributions. Ideally there should be telephone and/or email contact points for each parish group/activity but one would need to ensure that those whose contact details appeared in this way had agreed to their inclusion in the Handbook.

B) Parish Mission Follow-up - Need for somebody to volunteer to co-ordinate the road reps.

The idea of road reps who would be the face of the parish to those in their street/road was one which had come out of last year's mission. It was a suggested revival of an idea which had operated many years ago. Then it had been found useful as a means of keeping in touch with those who were elderly and lived alone. Without it there was a perceived danger that such people might cease coming to church through age or infirmity and then they "dropped off the radar" and could be forgotten about. Cashel Riordan (who had raised the subject for discussion) had already gathered a small group of such reps but did not have the time to co-ordinate them and build the group himself. He urged that someone (or it could be two or three people) be found who were willing to do this.

There was some suggestion that the role of keeping in touch with the vulnerable and housebound could be filled by the newly formed Legion of Mary but it was doubted if they would have the necessary local knowledge. It was also questioned whether the term "Road Rep" was appropriate or whether some more catchy name could be found.

Cashel suggested that one way to recruit volunteers for this (and indeed other) volunteer post(s) would be to place a large mirror in a prominent position in the church surmounted by a large caption with the words "What are you doing for the parish?" This idea was approved in principle by the meeting and it was suggested by Fr Uche that Cashel and Deacon John could get together and discuss the most appropriate, and safest, position in the church for such a mirror with a caption of the sort suggested which should be set within a campaign asking for volunteers generally.

C) Follow up to "The Gift".

Fr Uche clarified that this was already in hand. Philip Cook, our Evangelisation Co-ordinator, has already been asked to come up with ideas for next year. It might be something from Catholic Voices whose "Reframe" meeting a few weeks ago had gone down very well and who had expressed an interest in returning to deal with specific points of church teaching in more depth.

It was pointed out that "The Gift" is intended to lead to a life-changing, permanent, experience on the part of those who received it. It may not, therefore, necessarily be appropriate to see it as just part of an annual evangelisation programme.

D) Year of The Word.

Sister Margaret explained that Pope Francis had designated a “Year of the Word” to start in the Autumn. The question was how we at St Joseph’s should celebrate it. Fr Uche suggested that if anyone had ideas they should put them forward. Perhaps, it was said, it could be an idea for next year’s Evangelisation Project. Fr Uche came up with the idea of a Bible Quiz with prizes. Sister Margaret felt it was important to come up with ideas as to how to make the scriptures more alive.

E) An Easter Church, celebrating the Risen Christ (1 Cor 15: 13-14).

Cashel urged that an image of the Risen Christ, by way of proclaiming the truths taught by Paul in 1 Corinthians 15: 13-14, should be placed behind the Altar in church to replace the existing crucifix. The meeting thanked him for this suggestion but some doubt was expressed whether this was the right approach, it being said that it was not so important which images were placed where but whether our faith community was seen to be bubbling over with an enthusiasm for spreading the good news of salvation through Christ.

Any evangelisation efforts should be evaluated on whether they helped to bring about this change in mindset or whether they simply had the effect of making people more inward-looking. Some stark and depressing statistics were produced about decline in religious belief and practice, across all faiths including Catholicism, over the past thirty years. This is what we are up against. Unless we are prepared to be proactive and to seek to counter these trends we may as well pack up and go home!

Fr Uche, however, offered words of encouragement. He contrasted the spirit, dedication and enthusiasm of people in this parish with that he had previously encountered elsewhere. He felt we were doing the best we could to be a missionary parish and should not be discouraged but to seek to build on it. There was certainly a need to (re)educate some parishioners in the faith but The Gift had already made an important start. Indeed it may have been the first catechesis that some parishioners had received for many years.

Allan, our seminarian, had found that 90% of people don’t have the confidence to evangelise. It was said that such confidence in discussing one’s faith could be built up by joining small groups (such as cell groups).

Deacon John felt that our faith should be something that we would want others to have. Other faith groups - he mentioned Muslims and extreme evangelical protestants - might urge people to convert on the basis that if they did not do so they would be damned, whereas we, as Catholics, had the love of Jesus to offer as a reason to convert and believe. Consequently we should be prepared to talk about our faith when the situation arose. He gave as an example how he had discovered, when talking about his Diaconal training to colleagues at work, that not only his boss, but also his boss’s boss, were both Catholics. He had previously had no idea that this was the case.

F) The Youth Club.

Matthew introduced the topic by explaining how the Youth Club had been successful in attracting good numbers of young people twice a month to their meetings. It was seen as an important part of parish life in providing a safe environment where our young people could meet and socialise and have some spiritual development. However, our part-time paid Youth Worker had recently resigned, having decided that the job was not for him and, consequently, a stand-in Youth Leader was needed until (hopefully) a new Youth Worker could be appointed - although that was unlikely to happen this year.

Mary and Matthew had been involved for some time and were now looking to take a step back which was why they were appealing at all Masses this weekend for new adults to volunteer to help. They would still offer support in the background but did not feel they could any longer be there twice each month.

Fr Uche expressed disappointment that the Youth Worker had decided to leave, especially as there seemed no doubt, from the numbers attending, that the young people wanted the Youth Club.

Mary Cruickshank mentioned that they had already tried emailing 24 parents of young people who had been regularly attending the Youth Club, seeking their help, but this had only produced one response so far. In any event, some may doubt whether it was necessarily appropriate for the adult leaders to be parents. They had sometimes been in the past but there was an argument for saying that one of the benefits of the Youth Club was that it gave teenagers and their parents a break from each other!

On a more positive note, Matthew revealed that, following his initial appeal at the 6.00 pm Mass this evening, he had already received three offers of help. He also felt that the new Youth Leader (assuming one could be found) could be an older person. They did not have to be in the 18-25 age group.

G) Finance Report.

Wendy Wentworth, Parish Treasurer, presented this briefly. The full report will be posted on the Parish Website. In 2018, income was at £269,000 and expenditure at £220,000 (although it should be added that this income figure did include one individual very large donation). By comparison, the figures for 2017 were income £237,000, expenditure £242,000. There was a slight decline in offertories generally so the need to control expenditure remained. Fr Uche remarked that, compared to many parishes in the Archdiocese, our finances were very healthy. He also mentioned that there had been an audit last week and that everything was found to be OK.

H) Safeguarding.

Andrew Stables, the Parish Safeguarding Representative, stated that there had been no concerns or incidents reported. Progress had been made in ensuring that all

Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion were now DBS checked as the Diocese had recently required. It was mentioned that safeguarding was not just a question of completing DBS checks. People needed to know how to report any concerns they may have. However, Andrew pointed out that his name and phone number was displayed prominently on a poster in the Pastoral Centre corridor outside the bookshop. It also appeared at the foot of the front page in every edition of the Newsletter, which was distributed free after all Masses each week, and which was also posted up on the parish website. While safeguarding did not have a specific entry in the booklet produced for this Forum, he would be putting together something for the proposed Parish Handbook and passing it to Agnes.

Finally, Fr Uche thanked everyone for attending the Forum and also for the many valuable opinions which had been expressed.

The meeting closed at 8.20 pm with a prayer led by Deacon John.