

**PARISH ASSEMBLY
2021**

***PROPOSALS &
REPORTS***

**ST ALBAN &
ST STEPHEN**

INTRODUCTION

In this booklet you will find the outline timetable for the Parish Assembly to be held on Saturday 12 June. This meeting will be held on zoom. It is possible that we will have a repeat 'face to face' meeting in the Parish Centre on Saturday 3 July. You will also find three sets of documents

1. The Proposed Pastoral Priorities
2. A summary of the feedback received in response to Fr Michael's vision statement
3. Reports from the outgoing Parish Pastoral Council and Strategy Groups

There is quite a bit of reading here but it is offered in the hope of informing and stimulating discussion.

St Alban & St Stephen Parish Assembly 2021	
Saturday 12th June 11am via Zoom (details below) https://zoom.us/j/94963374158?pwd=Tzd2VDdnQ3U1dzVkZmlhODNtK2tHZz09 Meeting ID: 949 6337 4158 Passcode: 754047	
Possible Repeat Saturday, 3rd July 2021 11am in Parish Hall	
Time	Activity
10.45	Open meeting room, welcome people as they join
11.00	Open the assembly - welcome and opening prayer.
11.10	Talk to proposed priorities
11.25	Breakouts groups discussion
11.35	Share feedback and questions from breakouts
12.00	Break
12.10	Breakouts 2 - by priority areas
12.35	Feedback
12.50	Explain next steps
12.55	Closing Prayer and Close

PROPOSALS IN LIGHT OF FEEDBACK ON VISION STATEMENT

I am very grateful to Hilary Topp for summarising the feedback offered in response to the vision statement I set out in preparation for the Parish Assembly 2021. I have read through the responses as they came through, but it is extremely helpful to have this summarised and fed back by an independent voice. Hilary's summary is provided immediately after this set of proposals. Here I set out a series of 'headline' proposals outlining our priorities for the new Parish Pastoral Council (PPC) and the years ahead. The detail of how to take these forward is something which the various interest groups and working parties will need to flesh out, but in doing so my hope is that they will take Hilary's summary as a starting point.

WELCOME

Safeguarding In terms of delivering a welcoming environment the implementation of all the necessary safeguarding checks and procedures remains an absolute priority.

Establish a Communications Group Mindful that the church porch is not the only place of welcome, and that knowing what is going on is part and parcel of feeling welcome, we will establish a communications group whose principal aim is to communicate what we are doing, what we hope to do, and to celebrate what has been achieved. The latter is an important aspect of highlighting the part which we as individuals and as a parish contribute to the life of the local community. The communications group would be represented on the new PPC.

Establish a Volunteer Co-ordinator As part of our being a welcoming community we will establish a volunteer co-ordinator to help parishioners, especially new parishioners, make their way into parish life. The primary purpose of this voluntary role is to develop the culture of volunteering and to encourage and facilitate volunteering. An initial project would be to compile a directory of volunteer roles which parishioners, especially new parishioners and those looking to get more involved, might wish to explore. The volunteer co-ordinator would work very closely with the parish safeguarding reps to ensure that before commencing any role volunteers complete the necessary safeguarding requirements.

Establish a Social Committee The need for more social events and activities to build up a sense of belonging and connectedness is highlighted at several points in the feedback. The role of the 'Social Committee' would be to organise three social parish socials. The Social Committee would be represented on the new PPC.

Church Porch & Frontage Concerns were expressed about spending money on buildings, however the extension and refurbishment of the porch area, including the introduction of glass doors, and the creation of a more welcoming, less austere frontage, gained considerable traction. A working group to take forward the planning for and fundraising related to this project will be established.

WORSHIP

Co-ordinating Groups The proposal is to establish a co-ordinating group for each of the Sunday Masses, thus replicating the structure found at Marshalwick. The co-ordinating group would ensure that all is in place for each Mass eg. welcomers, readers, eucharistic ministers, collectors, offertory, tea & coffee. Where there is music, this will remain the responsibility of the relevant music group. Initially we will look to establish co-ordinating groups for the 9.30 am, the 11.30 am and the Sunday 7 pm. The hope is that a co-ordinating group will take responsibility for their particular Mass, that this will promote a sense of welcome and community. The individual co-ordinating groups would each be represented on the new PPC.

Parish Liturgy Group In addition to a ‘musical’ representative from each of the Masses, the Liturgy Group will be comprised of a representative from each of the ‘co-ordinating groups’. The Liturgy Group will take responsibility for whole parish liturgies eg. Christmas and Holy Week. It will have an eye to the formation and training of those involved in liturgical ministries. For this purpose a co-ordinating reader and co-ordinating eucharistic minister will also be appointed to the Liturgy Group. This Parish Liturgy group, and in particular the co-ordinating eucharistic minister and co-ordinating reader will have a particular concern for whole parish liturgies. The Parish Liturgy Group would report to the Parish Priest. It would also have an eye to the devotions and liturgies eg. penitential services, associated with the various times in the liturgical year.

Church Building Working Party Reflecting on the responses it is clear that there is a concern about spending on the sanctuary at this time and that the refurbishment of the porch, and the creation of a more welcoming environment, is a higher priority. It is likely however, with the extension of the porch that some seating will be lost at the back of the church. This will need to be compensated for. It is proposed at this stage to establish a working party to look at the refurbishment of the sanctuary but not to initiate any works until the work on the porch and front of the church is completed.

WITNESS

Adult Faith Formation Accepting that the aim of the parish as a whole is to evangelise, the ‘Mission’ group will be refocused as an ‘Adult Faith Formation’ whose primary purpose is to promote and facilitate faith formation outside of sacramental preparation. The group will be represented on the new PPC with Small Communities, parish retreats and pilgrimages, ‘spirituality’, Lent and Advent courses coming under its remit. Going forward a key area of faith formation would be peoples understanding of the Mass and what is meant by full, conscious and active participation.

Action: Parish Friends & Justice & Peace On the road to Emmaus Christ accompanied his disciples by walking with them. This ‘walking’ with them, his concern and outreach, found a practical expression. There is a clear desire on the part of our parishioners to be involved in some form of outreach; that we should be seen and also known to live out the gospel we proclaim, walking with others as Christ did. Initiatives such as You Can Be Santa, the Christmas Dinner, Knit & Natter and Turkey & Tinsel, when combined with the ongoing support for the work of agencies such as CAFOD, are indicative of this outreach or social conscience, as is the work of our Justice and Peace group, our SVP, and our support for projects such as Open Door, Centre 33, The Catholic Worker Farm and the Living Room.

It is proposed to continue our support for such initiatives, and in terms of our communications, to highlight and celebrate what we as a parish and as individual parishioners do in this area. An annual autumn appeal to support a local cause one year and an international project (perhaps one aligned to the MSCs) the next will be established. Representatives of the Justice and Peace group and Parish Friends will sit on the new PPC. The PPC will nominate the beneficiaries of the autumn appeal.

Going forward a renewed emphasis will be placed on our ‘walking with’ or ‘accompaniment’ of young people, young families and the elderly. It is clear in the feedback that our outreach to these groups is a key concern as is the sense of welcome and connectedness that people experience.

‘New Parishioner’ working party It is hoped that the establishment of a communications group will do much in terms of a sense of connectedness and welcome. In addition I would like to establish a working party to look at the welcome afforded new parishioners and how they are included in the life of the parish. In particular I would like the working party to consider what role a rejuvenated Neighbourhood Links scheme might play in improving the sense of welcome and connectedness.

Youth It is proposed to appoint a Youth Worker whose primary role will be to develop our ministry to young people, our support of young families and the role and involvement of young people in the life and ministry of the parish. A representative of a Youth and Young Families group will sit on the PPC. To ensure that the youth worker's focus remains on youth work a clear plan for the delivery of the sacramental programmes (especially First Communion & Confirmation) will need to be established. This could entail the employment of a part time catechist. In terms of our ongoing support for and connectedness to our parish schools there will be a particular emphasis a) on the recruitment of Foundation Governors and b) how we as a parish community might support the formation of parents and our schools Catholic ethos.

The Elderly Much, in terms of our outreach to the elderly, is already accomplished under the umbrella of Parish Friends, while the recent development in streaming and newsletter deliveries has done much to incorporate the housebound into parish life. To augment our outreach to the elderly in residential care I would like to extend our 'visitor' programme and establish a link person with each of the residential care homes situated within the parish. Their primary aim will be to ensure that those transferring into residential care do not lose contact with the church and to ensure that that catholic residents (and their families) are aware of what is going on in the parish and the possibility of receiving Holy Communion on a regular basis.

ADDITIONAL PROPOSALS

In many respects the emphasis which the feedback received and these proposals place on our being a welcoming community with a social conscience has everything to do with our being an outward looking rather than insular community. We cannot forget our brothers and sisters in Christ and we cannot forget the community at large. An ecumenical representative, drawn from among the many parishioners involved in ecumenical activities, will sit on the PPC, while the PPC will have an eye to our involvement with / standing in the community at large.

Parish Council - Going forward it is proposed that one of the first acts of the new Parish Pastoral Council will be to review the existing constitution and that the Parish Pastoral Council be comprised ex-officio of the Parish Clergy and the following members:

- Communications Rep
- Social Rep
- Adult Faith Formation Rep
- Youth & Young Families Rep
- Parish Friends
- Justice & Peace Rep
- Ecumenical Rep
- Representative of Marshalswick Mass
- Representative of Saturday 6 pm
- Representative of Sunday 8.00 am
- Representative of Sunday 9.30 am
- Representative of Sunday 11.30 am
- Representative of Sunday 7 pm

Sunday evening Mass To bring this forward by an hour to 6.00 pm.

Friday Morning Mass Currently there are at least three Masses offered in the parish on a Friday. Two in the Church and one at the Abbey. In term time there are often further additional Masses on a

Friday. Going forward I propose to cancel the regular Friday morning Mass. Friday mornings would then offer an opportunity for devotions. We would however continue to hold Funeral Masses on a Friday morning when needs be.

Property Working Group - The presbytery is a large building which used to house several priests, but now houses two. The plant or property on which the Church, Presbytery and Parish Centre sit is one of our most valuable assets. It is proposed to establish a working group to consider the ongoing use of the plant on which the Presbytery sits. In particular I would like the group to explore how the presbytery, aside from housing the parish clergy, might be used a) to further our pastoral priorities and b) generate an income so as to help consolidate our long term financial position.

SUMMARY COMPILED BY HILARY TOPP OF FEEDBACK RECEIVED IN LIGHT OF VISION STATEMENT

Introduction

Ahead of the Parish Assembly, feedback was sought from parishioners, parish groups, schools, parents and others. Over 40 individual responses were received, as well as feedback from several group discussions. Over 80 pages of feedback were received. It is clearly not possible to include every good idea, or every comment, but I have tried to identify the patterns, looked for things that weren't mentioned so much in the vision statement, and highlighted ideas that were suggested by a few people or groups.

Overall, the vision statement was very well received. There was broad support for the headings of Welcome, Worship and Witness. People appreciated the efforts being made to involve all parishioners, the reference to bringing the Marshalwick welcome to the main church and the mention of the MSC legacy.

People also mentioned the many good things already in existence in the parish, and one respondent urged us not to forget all that has already been achieved.

“Over the course of my life, I have lived in 5 parishes. I have to say that this parish is, by a very long way, the most welcoming, accepting, tolerant, active and forward looking one I have been in.”

Section 1: Welcome

The first area covered by the vision statement is Welcome.

The response to this was overwhelmingly positive. Again there were many things that people felt were already going well. The new 'welcome' poster was praised, and people already felt that the church was a welcoming and friendly community.

Strengthening relationships and community

One theme that came through strongly was the importance of building community and strengthening relationships - that welcome is about people, relationships and personal contact. Conversations over cups of tea were mentioned lots of times, and the importance of listening to others, and to new ideas and suggestions.

There were a number of suggestions for how this relationship and community building could be strengthened and enabled:

- Create a place where people can chat to others after mass, 'a 'mingling' space at the back, not just coffee in the café area.'
- A more open church front with glass doors and a more welcoming entrance area, with a child-safe gathering space in front of the church.
- The nearby meeting rooms could be opened up as play-rooms to allow the parents to meet more peacefully while the children could be noisy and free, away from the hot drinks.
- The elderly could be given a named person/parish neighbour, to keep in touch with them etc.
- Reinstate the neighbourhood links scheme
- New parishioner coffee mornings, training for welcomers and a welcomers rota, providing the Parish Directory to new parishioners.
- Encouraging people to volunteer, with the various roles clearly explained - personal invitation works best.

- The parking was felt to be a problem because people had to rush off afterwards so that they didn't block someone in. Could it be reserved for those not able to travel by other means and people encouraged to come by public transport, or by foot?

Social activities

One aspect of Welcome that several respondents felt was missing was the importance of social activities in the life of the church. They felt that it would be good to have events that bring people together for regular fellowship such as bazaars/fetes, musical evenings, coffee mornings/chats over coffee, family picnics with games etc. There was a suggestion to form a social group to coordinate this.

Social events were also seen as a gentle way of inviting people back to church - where they could meet people, and perhaps then start to attend mass.

Communications and publicity

Several people mentioned ideas related to improving communications and publicity:

- Expand use of social media to promote activities/welcome people and engage more young people
- Ensuring that the website works well on a mobile, and that it can be updated by a number of people, so groups can update their own pages.
- Installing a banner facing the station, that would be seen by commuters.
- Shortening the parish bulletin and only highlight "news" items. This could then be more easily shared on social media etc.
- Having a couple of short welcome videos on the website.
- Clearly signpost church involvement in other church groups, foodbank, homeless etc

Accessibility

One area of concern that came across from a number of responses was accessibility and inclusion. This relates to every area of the vision, but perhaps most to Welcome.

Points raised included:

- The need to make sure that any changes to the entrance area of the church made it more accessible to those using wheelchairs or with limited mobility.
- Provide comfortable seats for the elderly.
- Suggestion that the priest approach those who are disabled to give Holy Communion.
- Hand rails in middle of stone steps
- Make sure the buildings are accessible to all - therefore no need for different doors etc
- Diversity - very white community - welcome and education part of addressing this.
- Need to continue with online streaming of masses and courses - makes it more accessible.

Children and young people

Overall, the area where there was agreement, and a lot of energy and enthusiasm, was children and young people. Employing a youth minister was an absolute priority for many, and one group commented that this was a much higher priority than any physical changes to the building. People were anxious that this should be taken forward with some urgency.

As well as employing a youth minister, many emphasised the importance of involving young people in the life of the church and encouraging young people and their parents to take up roles within the church. The John Paul II awards were suggested, where young people work both in the parish and in the community to earn their bronze, silver or gold award.

The Children's liturgy was seen as a success, and something to build on. There was a lot of support for running fun children's activities and family focused events, to attract particularly children and families in the schools who don't attend mass.

Several points were raised about children and families attending mass and how they could be made to feel welcome:

- Important that families are never made to feel unwelcome. If their child is noisy find ways to accommodate them such as live-streaming the service in the coffee area, with adequate seating, children's bible story-books and soft toys.
- Some felt that inclusion of families was important but also that parents and young children should use screened partition outside of family masses.

One respondent highlighted that Young Adults hadn't been mentioned and that they need to know they are not forgotten, even though they might not have time to be very involved.

Building closer links with the schools was seen as being important. Some of the ideas included:

- Holding more PTA events in the church buildings - getting school parents used to being in the church buildings for fun and friendship.
- Using the church hall for children's events such as birthday parties would entice the children to associate the place with fun and make them want to be there.
- The church could work with the parents as well as with the children. e.g. with FHC programme, through priests visiting the schools to work with teachers and parents.
- Cross publicising school and church events.

Section 2: Worship

Something for everyone

There was a feeling that it was important for the different masses to be in different styles so that there was something for everyone. This might also extend to different identities and communities, different languages, youth masses led by young people, and masses at different times, like a Saturday morning mass for those working on Sundays. People were also keen for there to be a variety of music, and also some quieter Masses.

How masses are organised

There were also suggestions for how masses could be organised

- Important that each mass has its own feel and identity.
- The 9:30 mass should be self-organizing. Readers, Eucharistic ministers and welcomers could all be organized within this mass, rather than in separate rotas.
- Mass co-ordinators: suggested to have a coordinator for each mass to pull together rotas for welcomers, readers, collectors, Eucharistic Ministers, musicians, social, etc
- There could be less masses, and therefore more time for socialising after mass.
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There were several suggestions of how the mass could be made more welcoming:

- There could be a short informal welcoming chat by the priest before mass starts.
- The priests could ask us to say Hello to someone we don't know at the end of mass, and talk with them, as we go out and also at the sign of peace.
- Priests should encourage people to be more 'social'. Priests should come down into the congregation, make eye contact.
- Helpful if the priests talk more about parts of the mass eg the Eucharist & other areas of the mass in the homily or at an appropriate time during the mass. 'Drip feeding' this type of instruction so we can be more vocal in sharing our Faith.
- The priest not celebrating mass could be outside welcoming parishioners.

There were several points made about the involvement of children in the mass:

- The children's liturgy groups work well. It is important to get them up and running again as soon as we can safely do so.
- Worship tailored to the age 8-13's would be most welcome too.
- Children should be more involved in the mass and a rota could be formed, possibly by school year groups, where those children, with appropriate leadership, took ownership for the mass.
- Children who have done FHC should have a ministry in the mass to keep them involved.
- The 9:30am mass should be a children's mass, run for them and largely by them; with the sermon being tailored to them too,

Some felt that it was important to remember that worship is about more than just the mass.

People mentioned the Rise theatre productions, music productions and things like 'sharing the light' services.

Physical changes to the building

There were mixed feelings about the proposed physical changes to the building, There was quite a lot of concern about spending a lot of money whilst so many are struggling, particularly after the pandemic, and some were opposed to any changes to the building. There was more support for the idea of glass doors and less for changes to the main body of the church. Several felt that seating capacity was very rarely an issue and were unsure that more capacity was needed.

There were also concerns raised about the increased carbon footprint of making any changes to the building, and a request to keep energy efficiency in mind if any changes are made.

The main points raised about changing the layout of the church were:

- Suggestion to make the porch area larger by losing some benches at the back of the church.
- There were differing views on the position of the Baptismal font.
- Some people felt that the church layout was not very community orientated and suggested bringing the altar forward and have benches enveloping the altar.
- There was a suggestion to have more comfortable, modern chairs and brighter lighting.
- A prayer room/small chapel is needed for quiet prayer.
- There were other suggestions too for brightening up the interior of the church with displays, art etc, and having visual displays outside the church too.
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Several people were keen that any plans be costed, and these plans made widely available. Not everything has to be done immediately and there could be a list of things which we would like to do with their costs in a 5-year plan.

One respondent mentioned that when another local church did a lot of building work they matched their spending to support a church in Zambia and a church was built in that community. They wondered if SS Alban and Stephen could do something similar, perhaps through MSC links in other countries or supporting a local community project.

There was support for annual training for all the ministries.

Section 3: Witness

The church as a place for the community

People felt it was important to be able to listen to people and give them time so we can really understand what their needs are so we can best support them and support the vulnerable in the community. Suggestions included opening the building, using the parish centre as a drop in, having a nice coffee machine. The downstairs of the parish centre could be used as a community cafe a few mornings a week. There could be certain days where volunteer chaplains are available for a chat or to pray with people who come in. The church could offer courses on bereavement/divorce/trauma etc.

Social and environmental justice

There are plans to become a LiveSimply Parish, and encourage young people to take a lead on this. Concerns about the environment and climate change were also raised in relation to physical changes to the building and thinking about how people travel to mass, whether they could use public transport etc.

In terms of supporting local projects, some were anxious that the support was sustainable over the longer term. Some identified a need to tell people about what the church is already involved in, e.g. the foodbank, work with the homeless etc. Some felt that individuals were doing a lot, but often it went unnoticed, and it would be good if the work was more visible, and the church community as a whole more involved.

Learning and speaking about faith

There were several comments about the importance of being able to speak about faith and the reasons people go to mass and are part of the church. Would a course help? Could also make space for personal stories - to hear testimonies of faith, prayer, action.

There was support for continuing Adult Faith Formation and catechesis and running courses like Alpha and the others mentioned in the vision statement.

Section 4: Other points raised

Decision making and the PPC

There were some concerns about the composition of the PPC. Suggestions included the next PPC being made up of various people in the parish – not necessarily the priority groups, and trying to reflect the age profile, ethnic and cultural mix of parishioners. The PPC could also have representation from the Marshalswick Mass Centre community and from the schools. There needs to be transparency about how decisions are made.

Finally, there were a few concerns raised about whether priorities had already been decided, and whether it might be a good idea to delay the Assembly until everyone can meet together physically, so that those not on Zoom (or who don't want to be) are not excluded.

REPORT FROM THE PARISH PASTORAL COUNCIL

The last 4 years in the life of our parish have been particularly eventful: we have suffered the loss of much loved priests and the subsequent departure of the MSC community after 120 years of service; we have warmly welcomed our wonderful new diocesan priests; said a fond farewell to our Parish Youth Coordinator; and at the time of writing we are emerging from a debilitating viral pandemic that has shaken the world, and caused the sad loss of a number of parishioners. Throughout these tumultuous times, the catholic community at St Alban & St Stephen carry on in the faith and love of our Lord, Jesus Christ.

The Parish Assembly held in June 2017 agreed that the existing priority groups: Liturgy, Mission, Parish Friends, Youth and Justice & Peace, should continue their work, and that communication, support for young adults, and leadership of the laity were important topics to address in the coming years. The parish strategy groups have continued to focus on what they do well, and each has produced its own report summarising the group's activities over the last 4 years. The entire parish thanks the members of each group for the work they do and the many hours they give in helping us to deepen our faith and to put it into action in our community. We are indebted to our priests, and to the Liturgy group, musicians and our parish web administrators in particular for ensuring that we have been able to continue worship throughout the liturgical calendar, both in normal times, and more recently when we have sometimes relied on streamed services.

The PPC exists to support and advise the parish priest in building our community of faith and in representing the views of parishioners. It has met almost every month, since July 2017 with the meetings continuing via Zoom during the pandemic lockdown, and a report of each meeting has been published. Members of the PPC belong to one or more of the parish strategy groups, and they have also given more of their time in leading or contributing to a number of additional PPC-led activities over the last 4 years, when an additional year of service was required. The appointment of our very able parish caretaker has made a huge impact on the maintenance of the church buildings.

Following a review of ways to improve communication in the parish in 2018, the parish website was redesigned to modernise its look and feel, and to simplify finding parish information. An electronic noticeboard, displaying parish news items on a loop was mounted in the parish centre. Rotas of volunteers ensured that both the website and the eNoticeboard were kept up to date. The bulletin was made available electronically as well as in hard copy and the parish Facebook group continues to be used regularly by its loyal group of parishioners. Since the Covid-19 pandemic forced the closure of all churches nationally in March 2020, live streaming of mass from our church was enabled in May 2020 using a Zoom – YouTube temporary arrangement, before the more permanent cameras could be installed in September. Welcome posters have recently brightened the external front wall of the church although an external parish noticeboard remains a future development.

A social committee organised a lovely parish summer garden party in July 2018, but a further parish party organised for September 2020, had to be put on hold. Get-togethers to welcome new parishioners continued throughout each year up to 2020 and Christmas Day lunches have been organised every year, although as a takeaway during the Christmas in 2020.

The Youth Team has continued to support the children's liturgy and priests, lay catechists and parents in the preparation of children and young people to receive the sacraments of Reconciliation, First Holy Communion and Confirmation. It is recognised that the appointment of a Youth Coordinator is a key priority for the parish.

A meeting on the future of our parish held in November 2017 and follow up discussions highlighted the desire for more support for personal prayer and faith formation. A member of the PPC published a parish prayer leaflet and the Mission team's report highlights the diverse range of opportunities provided

for adult formation over their 4 year plan. It has been wonderful to welcome additional volunteers into existing ministries in the parish as a result of the 'Sharing your Talents' campaign and more recently in the calls for stewards to join the rota to enable our church to open again safely for public services following the pandemic lockdown.

Our involvement in Churches Together in St Albans, Churches Together in Marshalswick and City Centre Churches has led to participation in a number of ecumenical events during the last 4 years, with members of the PPC organising the Good Friday Cross Procession and the annual Autumn Prayer Walk and our participation for the first time as a parish group in the annual St Alban's day pilgrimage. A number of parishioners joined other local churches for Lent talks and reflections and Youth Team members have organised ecumenical events for children. Our first pet's blessing service was held in Autumn 2019.

The parish has provided financial support to a number of local and overseas charities, and individual parishioners volunteer with local organisations that support the homeless and otherwise disadvantaged members of our community. The Justice and Peace team has ensured that our parish has joined in local and national events focused on protecting our environment and supporting people living in difficult situations in developing countries.

The annual Sunday mass counts were relatively stable at around 1100 people each year from 2016 to 2019. The church was closed for much of 2020 and the early part of 2021, and the Marshalswick Mass Centre remains closed at the time of writing. However, it is encouraging to see attendance at Sunday masses growing gradually. We pray that this will continue and we once again see our entire parish community coming again to church.

Finally, the PPC is grateful to Fr Michael and Fr Julian for their vision in leading our parish and for their spiritual guidance and good humour during their first 18 months with us during what has turned out to be an extraordinary time.

REPORT FROM THE LITURGY GROUP

Before Lockdown, the Group aimed to help ensure that all church services functioned reverently and efficiently. Meetings took place to plan and review events and guidelines; covering Ministers of the Word and the Eucharist, music groups, etc. Different liturgies for special seasons and celebrations: Advent, Christmas, Lent, etc. were coordinated by Group members: music arranged, extraordinary ministers and welcomers appointed, and literature prepared –including the special leaving Mass for the MSCs with order of service with biographies – all appreciated.

During Lockdown, the Group kept in contact using e-mail meetings and surveys to canvass people's views on services, etc. This proved very successful and a great way to keep people engaged and valued as more responded than ever attended physical meetings, and many said they felt free to air their opinions.

An enormous effort went into producing the 2020 Easter Triduum services to make them available online (before live-streaming). Readers and musicians from all genres contributed remotely and the services, strung together expertly, were really inspirational, particularly as people could follow the text available online.

Responding to the Lockdown survey available to all parishioners, a list of resources and a Guide to prayer were published on the Liturgy Group page on the website.

Live streamed services Live streaming, begun via YouTube in May 2020 and via the church's camera in September 2020, has been welcomed, particularly by those unable to physically attend church.

Carols by Candlelight continues to be a highlight of calendar, in particular, 2020 was a magnificent joint effort between our church and Northmoor CoE church with music from both choirs and readings recorded remotely and linked together skilfully; more than 1,400 views on YouTube testify to its popularity.

Christmas 2020 Masses were live streamed only with just readers and musicians in attendance; the cribs under the altar and on public display from the porch received very positive comments.

Stations of the Cross 2021 prepared by different groups each week live-streamed on a Saturday morning with just Readers present. Good Friday services at 10am and 6pm, open to all, eased congestion at the 3pm Passion.

Holy Week Services and Easter Services 2021: Limited numbers could attend, services were abbreviated but very reverent, augmented by musicians from all genres, and many different readers participated. Penitential Service was based on the Way of the Cross. Easter Sunday Masses were at normal times with 11.30 as a quiet Mass. Easter garden commemorating deceased loved ones on bamboo flowers, and empty tomb under the altar proved popular.

Ministers of the Word and of the Eucharist: Ministers of the Word have volunteered to read in church at Sunday Masses during Lockdown and on weekdays when the church is open. **Ministers of the Eucharist** have been unable to fulfil their ministry in church for more than a year, although when regulations permit, could distribute Holy Communion to the housebound, but parishioners in care homes have not been able to receive for over a year. We look forward to the time when Ministers resume distributing the Blessed Sacrament in church and their patience is greatly appreciated. The caveat is that extra training regarding safety will be necessary.

Commissioning and recommissioning of Ministers had to be postponed but they renewed promises of commitment remotely during live-streamed masses: at Pentecost for Ministers of the Word and at Corpus Christi (Feast of the Body and Blood of Christ) for Ministers of the Eucharist.

Newsletter: Biographies of Saints for Feast days supplied are included when space permits, readings for Mass and CTSA prayer are sent in each week. Sunday Mass readings are delivered to the housebound each week.

Children's Liturgy: The Liturgy Group took the lead in ensuring that each week a Children's liturgy is publicised in the Newsletter and can be viewed on the Liturgy Group page on the parish website.

Future Planning From 23 May, music is being re-introduced at 9.30am, 11.30am and 7pm Masses including some led by Marshalswick musicians. The longer term future and format of music needs careful thought and discussion once the pattern of Masses for the future is finalised and restrictions are lifted.

The challenge remains to encourage the congregation to physically attend church, rather than via the internet, and how attendance might impact on the Mass schedule.

REPORT FROM PARISH FRIENDS

Pre-Lockdown: The Parish Friends Group started in the parish in 2008.

Lifts to weekend masses were arranged on a rota basis for vulnerable parishioners and we visited or phoned vulnerable parishioners regularly.

We organised 3 or 4 Tea Parties each year, including a St Patricks Day Party. We also arranged a Turkey and Tinsel New Year Lunch each year and a variety of Film Shows to cater for all ages, that were always considered hugely successful. Lifts were arranged to all these events.

Every Tuesday afternoon we held Knit and Natter meetings which were very well attended. The group provided jumpers for children in an orphanage in Africa; hats for new born babies; forget-me- knots for the Alzheimer Association during dementia week and scarves for homeless people in winter.

We organised outings for parishioners – either a day trip to the coast, or a river trip with a ‘cream tea’ whilst onboard.

We continued to support the Neighbourhood Links scheme until its demise – after which we took on the task of contacting newly registered parishioners to provide an additional welcome to the Parish. We often helped and organised coffee in the foyer of the parish centre after particular ‘special’ Masses.

Over the past 3 to 4 years the ‘You can be Santa’ scheme (YCBS) has continued to grow and flourish. With the ongoing very generous response of our parishioners and the hard work of our volunteers, we have been able to support a large number of children and families from within the Parish, plus those being supported by the Life houses, a particular school in London, the St. Albans Refuge, Homestart, the Catholic Workers Farm and the Intensive Family Support team. We have worked closely with the SVP. We have provided gifts or vouchers for the children at Christmas and eggs or vouchers at Easter. In addition, we have supported a number of adults with learning disabilities at Christmas time.

During Lockdown: We arranged that all the parishioners we knew of, who did not have internet access (approx. 50 in total): had a copy of the Parish Bulletin and the Sunday Readings delivered to them each week, by hand. Fifteen volunteers have continued to do this over the last 14 months and have befriended those they deliver to. Friendships have developed and support has been given by the volunteers.

Together with Fr Julian, we initiated daily praying of the rosary during the first Coronavirus lockdown period. We participated in the Stations of the Cross during Lent. Unfortunately, we have been unable to offer lifts to mass, or have any social events during the lockdown, but we have tried to ensure that all vulnerable parishioners have had a phone call at least once a week. YCBS presents and Easter Eggs to the less fortunate, were replaced by vouchers and the YCBS team organised a group of volunteers to deliver the vouchers. The 2020 Christmas scheme saw us helping 154 children.

The ‘Knit and Natter Group’ has flourished throughout the lockdown, with several parishioners and non-parishioners kept busy knitting scarves, hats and squares for blankets. The squares have been croqueted together to make blankets that have then been delivered to all our parishioners in Care Homes and also to the refugees and migrants at the new Catholic Workers Farm in London.

Post Lockdown:

To restart providing lifts where needed to Mass and social events

To continue to provide friendship and support to as many people in the parish as possible

To provide telephone support and visits for those in the parish who are housebound for whatever reason.

To continue with our social events which enable senior parishioners to meet up, catch up and have fun.

To continue with the YCBS and Easter egg schemes

To continue with the Knit and Natter Group

To recruit more volunteers to take part in the planning and delivery of all our events/services

It would be great to have more young people involved in helping and organising our tea parties and films.

REPORT FROM THE YOUTH STRATEGY GROUP

Reminder of our mission statement - Our Mission is to provide the young people with space to grow in the care, friendship and love of Jesus, so that they can be active in their community and confident in their faith.

We are a small group of just four to five members. I have been on the committee for about five years; and have been the PPC youth rep for about 3 years.

What follows are all the things we did before Covid. A lot of the activities are on hold, with some happening on zoom. But in a non-Covid world, the below is what we do.

There are many things that we do well such as the running of the courses for the Sacraments of Baptism, First Holy Communion / Reconciliation and Confirmation. We also have very successful children's liturgies at the 9:30am Mass both for the under 6's (Little Lights) and the 6-8's (Awesome Angels). On Monday mornings in term time we run a lively Toddlers group after the 10am Mass.

We have re-union gatherings for the Confirmation groups to try and keep them in touch with each other with a hope that they continue to grow in their faith. Before the pandemic we had 20 of them gather for pizza and drinks. By trying to focus on the post-Confirmation age group, we are looking to build a community of young adults for the future.

We have a Youth Club for largely year six children which was taking place about once a month in the upstairs church hall.

Every two years we take the Confirmation groups to Flame, an event in Wembley Arena for young people from all over the country.

We co-organise an ecumenical event for 7-11 year olds called X:site. Held on Saturday evenings, once a term in St. Luke's Anglican church, it is two hours of fun, games, crafts, messy play, live music, songs and actions, prayer and worship.

In the last summer before Covid, we held a Parish Summer Party which was fun for people of all ages with a focus on families with younger children. This was planned to be an annual event.

We had planned to run the John Paul II awards in the parish. This is similar to the Duke of Edinburgh's award with bronze, silver and gold schemes involving 16-18 year olds volunteering to help in the parish and in the community. When we are able to, with the new team in place, I very much recommend this as soon as is practically possible.

REPORT FROM THE JUSTICE & PEACE & INTEGRITY OF CREATION

The world is awash with people whose lives are blighted by a lack of basic things – peace, security, work, land, shelter, food, water, health, clothing, education, respect, poverty, love, self-worth. There are countless others facing the terrors of war, violence, abuse, intimidation, hatred, slavery. These people – ordinary children, women and men – exist in every country, city, town and village – including the UK and St Albans. Too many of them are invisible. Our home, planet Earth, is suffering its own torments caused by greed, neglect, waste, lack of care. And all this overshadowed worldwide by the Coronavirus pandemic. The task facing us is enormous. It would be easier to look the other way and yet Jesus's invitation to serve is always on our minds and in our hearts.

As Justice & Peace (& the Integrity of Creation) we meet to pray, to discuss our concerns for the world around us, to encourage each other and to decide collectively on initiatives and actions, inspired by the Gospel and motivated by Catholic Social Teaching. We are greatly encouraged by the Pope's Encyclical "Laudato Si".

We are very interested in the possibility of our Parish working towards the Livesimply Parish award organised by CAFOD to enable all of us as parishioners to live more sustainably and tread more lightly on this Earth.

For the past few years we have participated in St Albans Sustainability Festival, previously with a bread-making workshop and this year with a self-guided walk on the theme of Live Simply from our church to St John Fisher School, host to Marshalswick Mass Centre. We were thrilled that the pupils of St John Fisher helped by contributing posters on the theme of Live Simply to be displayed along the route.

Twice a year we hold a day of reflection on the link between the Gospel and action for justice, these have included workshops on climate change and non-violent communication.

Along with other Parish groups, we have contributed to the Parish Lenten Stations of the Cross. In the past these have included linked prayers to the women of Nablus in Palestine and the Cathedral in Damascus, Syria. This year we chose to follow the Stations of the Cross created by CAFOD.

In August we arrange a short service of remembrance at the Abbey Japanese Peace Obelisk for the victims of the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. In 2019, in response to J&P in Scotland and our local CND group, we contributed to the making of 1,000 origami cranes (a Japanese symbol of peace) to send to children in Hiroshima.

We have attended rallies on climate change and vigils against the arms trade outside the Ministry of Defence. We have distributed leaflets for Medical Aid for Palestinians. We have attended talks and distributed information on modern day slavery and human trafficking. We have corresponded with our local MP on issues relating to human rights, refugees and climate change.

We are in contact with Pax Christi, Caritas, CAFOD and the Catholic Worker Movement (CWM), including the CWM Farm here in the UK.

We have supported CAFOD appeals and collections, and twice a year, to complement the CAFOD Family Fast Day, we have put on a film with a thoughtful social message and served home-made bread and soup. The feedback we have received has always been very positive.

The Fairtrade stall has been organised by two of our members for over 25 years. They also run coffee mornings for CAFOD, maintain the Parish Fairtrade status and this Lent raised an astonishing £3,600 for CAFOD by walking every day for 40 days.

We have helped organise collections of goods for the local food bank, local homeless charities and for refugees and have been overwhelmed by the immense generosity of our parishioners.

Like many of our parishioners, Individual members of our group volunteer in specific local charities such as The Living Room and other local enterprises.

In November this year the UK will host the 26th session of the Conference of the Parties (COP 26) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. Lasting for two weeks, it would be the largest summit the UK has ever hosted, with up to 200 world leaders expected to attend for the final weekend. It is designed to produce an international response to the climate emergency. Along with CAFOD and using their materials we will campaign for the success of this conference.

If you would like to join us, you will be very welcome.

MISSION STRATEGY GROUP REPORT

Mission Group	2017	2018		2019		2020		2021
	Jul-Dec	Jan-Jun	Jul-Dec	Jan-Jun	Jul-Dec	Jan- Jun *	Jul-Dec	Jan-Jun
Advent Talks	Nativity Today Homeless; marginalised; refugees; Joy of Christmas		CTSA (Fr Alan Talk at Marlborough Road Methodist Church)		Advent Talks on Mary by Brian Purfield – link to Rededication of England		Fr Michael & Fr Julian Advent Lectures	Feedback sessions on Fr Michael's Advent Talks and Parish Assembly
Lenten Talks		Eucharist Talk (March); Brian Purfield: <i>Biblical Journey through the Mass</i> (May/June)		CaFE <i>'The Joy of Hope; 'Rejoice and be glad'</i> to accompany small group booklet*		<i>City Centre Churches Lenten collaboration</i>		
Pentecost Talks								
Other Events			Mission Sunday Prayer Bookmarks; Remembrance Sunday Bookmarks	Friends of the Holy Land Talk	<i>Rededication of the Nation's Faith Talk Sr Camila</i>	<i>Pilgrimage to Westminster Cathedral: Statue of Our Lady</i>	List of on-line Resources produced	Sunday Zoom Coffee Sessions; Mauro & Janet Iannicelli Come & See Catholic Evangelisation Ministries <i>Bible Timeline</i>
Finding Silence	Worth Abbey (October)	Worth Abbey (April)		Worth Abbey (May)		<i>Worth Abbey Spring Retreat 27th- 30th April</i>		
Finding Silence days		Bishop John Crowley (Jan)	Finding Silence Weekend Walsingham 19- 21 st October	Film <i>'In Pursuit of Silence'</i>	Finding Silence Weekend Walsingham			
Sharing the Light	November 16 th		November 22 nd	March 27th				
Card distribution	Christmas Card (December)	Easter Card (April)	Christmas Card (December)	<i>Proclaim Prayer Card</i> distribution	Easter Card Christmas Card (April/Decembe r)			
Pilgrimages/ Prayer Walks	Julian of Norwich (July)	Northern Saints II: York (June)	Diocesan Holy Land Pilgrimage (November)	City of London Churches Pilgrimage June 20				Friends of the Holy Land Pentecost Challenge Virtual Pilgrimage
Cross Procession		Good Friday Procession		Good Friday Procession		<i>Good Friday Procession</i>		
Catholic Bible Sunday	December 10 th							
Small Groups	<i>Advent diocesan faith sharing program Pre-Advent</i>	<i>Lent diocesan faith sharing program Pre-Lent</i>	<i>Advent diocesan faith sharing program Pre-Advent</i>	<i>Lent diocesan faith sharing program* Pre-Lent</i>	<i>Advent diocesan faith sharing program Pre-Lent</i>	<i>Advent diocesan faith sharing program Pre-Advent 'A Word for Lent'</i>	Catholic Bible School: Matthew's Gospel (moved to on-line)	Friends of the Holy Land Diocesan Lenten Booklet

Mission Group	2017	2018		2019		2020		2021
CTSA	Autumn Prayer Walk (September)	Christian Unity Week 'Thy Kingdom Come'; St Alban Pilgrimage (June)	Autumn Prayer Walk	St Alban Pilgrimage	Autumn Prayer Walk	St Alban Pilgrimage		
Centre33	Sleep out (December)		Sleep out (December)		Sleep out (December)			
ALPHA			ALPHA Course – October/November/December	ALPHA Course – January (conclusion) and follow-on		Possible ALPHA course		On-line training ALPHA
CaFE	<i>Beloved Disciples</i> (Oct – Nov)	<i>Let it Be</i> (March) <i>The Saints</i> (June - July)		CaFE 'The Joy of Hope' DVD Series		<i>CaFE Global Healing DVD Series Sat March 7th + Sun. March 29th</i>		CaFE <i>The Big Picture</i> ; CaFE <i>Strength to Strength</i> Zoom Programmes; <i>Belong and Believe</i> Review
RISE Theatre	Oscar Romero Drama (October)							
PROCLAIM	Workshop (September)	Workshop (May)		Spring Meeting Sherry Weddell (June)	Tim Stevens: <i>Sharing Faith with Friends and Family</i> Evangelisation Talk		Supporting Faith in the Home Diocesan Zoom meeting	

* Jan-Jun activities were planned but interrupted by lockdown

**PRAYER FOR THE
PARISH ASSEMBLY 2021**

Heavenly Father,
grant us the generosity
of giving our time and energy
to the building up of our parish community;
that by your grace our parish
may be a place of welcome,
where needs are heard,
talent acknowledged and gifts celebrated.

Pour out your Spirit upon us
that we may worship in truth
discovering in the Eucharist
the source and summit
of all that we have and are.

Keep us close to Christ,
that strengthened in faith and hope,
and hearing His call to service,
the witness of our words and actions
may draw others to him.

We ask this in his name
and through the intercession of the saints:

Mary, Queen of Heaven	Pray for Us
St Joseph, Husband of Mary	Pray for Us
St Stephen	Pray for Us
St Alban	Pray for Us
St Amphibalus	Pray for Us
St John Fisher	Pray for Us

Amen.