

Summary of Feedback from the 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.

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.

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.

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