

## Parish Assembly 2021: 12<sup>th</sup> June and 23<sup>rd</sup> July Meetings

### Notes from the 12<sup>th</sup> June on-line discussion with 60 participants

**Group 1:** If you are interested in exploring the experience of new parishioners, visitors and the welcoming nature of the church environment (porch & frontage)

#### What are your ideas for work in this area?

- Open doors - add glass doors and include in modification / repair of the cracked lintel above the entrance door.
- External banners - give a message to draw people in. Front and back (viewed from railway station).
- Parking - next door business - not open to it now. Alternates - Loreto Parking needs improvement.
- Concern raised with teachers and their own cars in presbytery taking space
- Quiet area / coffee area - location to be determined
- Disabled access location into church - where is best place
- Lighting of church - believe it is fine in body and on altar, however porch does not have suitable lighting.
- Use outside of church to draw people in - coffee / stalls in good weather
- Do we need the half wall in front of church - remove and allow greater access to entrance?
- Adjust sanctuary area to allow more space for pews.

#### How could these ideas be taken forward? What are the next steps?

- Parking - council
- Council - approach for approval for banners
- Consolidate one group looking at presbytery and welcoming / porch adjustment.

**Group 2:** If you want to explore how we can develop the social side of parish life

#### What are your ideas for work in this area?

- Coffee/tea in porch after mass
- Refreshments for confirmations candidates/FHC plus parents after sacraments
- Dances/ Ceilidhs?
- Quiz nights
- Summer garden party/ BBQ
- Christmas Fair
- Easter event
- Welcome new parishioners' events
- Musical events

#### How could these ideas be taken forward? What are the next steps?

- Form a social committee
- Engage schools to lead on something- e.g. harvest festival with donation to foodbank
- Youth worker to retain involvement of young- discos? Youth club activities
- Trips to the theatre/ concerts/ sporting events
- Locations for events? - Loreto? (Parish hall is quite small.) Hire a local hall?

## Parish Assembly 2021: 12<sup>th</sup> June and 23<sup>rd</sup> July Meetings

**Group 3:** If you want to consider how we accompany our youth and young families

**What are your ideas for work in this area?**

- Youth Team
- Two separate ministries: to youth and to children are needed
- Fun- more to raise money
- Parish and schools- stronger links e.g. use parish hall for parties
- Young families- not very many in assembly
- More for children
- Reach parents

**How could these ideas be taken forward? What are the next steps?**

- 9.30 for families
- More for children/youth (16-25yrs)
- Reappoint Youth Minister ASAP (previous funding to be used)
- Youth Mass
- Explaining Mass to Youth
- Get volunteers

**Group 4:** If you want to explore how we as a parish reach out to those in need locally and abroad

**What are your ideas for work in this area?**

- A lot of parishioners already involved in Centre 33, winter beds project, etc. Useful to have volunteer co-ordinator for people to find out possibilities.
- Parish should create new projects if there is a need, but not overlap with others already doing so but join together.
- Supporting MSC projects and publicising them in parish.
- Chevalier Family proposed washing machine in parish for those in need, homeless without access to washing facilities.
- Women's World Day of Prayer
- SVP very important, especially with finance for people in financial difficulty. Would welcome new members.

**How could these ideas be taken forward? What are the next steps?**

- Job description of the volunteer co-ordinator will be important. How is that to be done? Will it link to the volunteer sector in the city? City centre churches? CTSA?
- Job description of the youth co-ordinator will also be very important

**Group 5:** If you are interested in exploring Adult Faith Formation

**What are your ideas for work in this area?**

- There was a feeling that there is a need for a group that can help to facilitate catechesis on the essentials of the faith, the sacraments, etc. Many people feel that there was a lack of emphasis in this on their catechesis as children.
- Faith formation is central to the sense of belonging, as is the need for groups to help facilitate prayer. A group that could help to share different ways of prayer and spirituality would be very useful.
- It would be helpful for faith formation to help develop a better understanding of the Mass. This could be led by the priests explaining what's going on during the Mass in addition to a group that could allow parishioners to discuss and develop their understanding of different types of the Mass.
- Adult Faith formation should lead on from RCIA but be distinct from it in that it should enable adults to go on developing their faith.
- Information on resources to facilitate adult faith formation could be made available to help people identify relevant online courses, books, etc. But also needs to be 'humanised' and offered by people within the parish.

## Parish Assembly 2021: 12<sup>th</sup> June and 23<sup>rd</sup> July Meetings

### How could these ideas be taken forward? What are the next steps?

- Forming a group that can allow adults to explore different topics of the faith.
- There needs to be an attempt to focus on faith formation for young adults, in particular.

**Group 6:** If you are interested in exploring how we communicate internally as well as the interface between ourselves and the wider community

### What are your ideas for work in this area?

- If set up social media, then must be sustained not stale
- Newsletter must be updated and different each week - not covering the same each week.
- Need to know where to go, but doesn't need to be repeated in every newsletter.
- Churches together in St Albans - advertise what we are doing more. Work with other churches e.g. St Barts
- Make better use of noticeboards - update regularly / each week's bulletin
- Communication
  - With St Albans community and other Churches
  - Within the Parish
- Improving communication between different groups
- Social aspects - events
- How we can be known in the community - social media, Herts Ad, Twitter account, FB group, Noticeboard, newsletter
- Difficulty of keeping all the different types of communication going e.g. Parish magazines etc.
- How do you attract people back to the Church - maybe initially on a social basis?
- Website
  - Can be labour intensive
  - Not necessarily rendering on different devices
  - Must be "mobile first"
  - Should be updated by lots of people, each group owning their own pages
- Communication around volunteering
  - GDPR can be a bit of a blocker in this regard e.g. publishing a Parish directory
- Maybe we need to encourage networking across the various groups in the Parish
- Perhaps get Neighbourhood Links started up again e.g. local WhatsApp groups
  - More communication with the housebound
- Good to know what's going on in other churches locally
- Reintroduce Parish Magazine annually or bi-annually.
- Use digital media to save time/printing costs - limited in-house printing for distribution to parishioners without computers. Alternatively purchase a few inexpensive digital readers that could be circulated around those without computers - could be done at same time as distributing the printed News Bulletin or even replace some of the printed news bulletins.
- Behind the scenes news - liaise with schools to produce 2 or 4 sided sheet each term with interviews/photos by some of the school children to describe what it's like to be a volunteer (eg church cleaning, flower arranging etc)

### How could these ideas be taken forward? What are the next steps?

- Survey for preferences of communication - difficulty keeping it all up to date, relies on hard work of a few people
- Need a core group that can call upon other parishioners to take on a small piece of work - e.g. news article, poster/flyer design, FB posts, etc

## Parish Assembly 2021: 12<sup>th</sup> June and 23<sup>rd</sup> July Meetings

### Notes from the 23<sup>rd</sup> July face to face Q & A in parish hall with 20 participants

1. One parish priority should be the people currently staying at home and who may not come back to the church. Suggest weekly phone calls, delivery of Bulletin. **Response:** Parish Friends Group, once formed, may decide that this is one of their priorities.
2. Why the proposed move from the 7 p.m. Sunday Mass to 6 p.m.? **Response:** The Sabbath is 24 hrs, not 25 hrs. It is a demanding Sunday Mass schedule for two priests – Sunday is long enough anyway. Feedback from some 7 p.m. Mass attendees suggests that they are not averse to the change. **Other attendees:** No strong feelings. One suggested that it could be a better time for young families. Another commented that she was impressed with the size of the 7 p.m. congregation.
3. Comment that it would be difficult to replicate the intimate atmosphere of Marshalswick in a large church. Parking is also an issue. Many people not contributing. **Response:** we need a structured approach to draw people in. Provide a list of opportunities. One of biggest challenges is understanding and catering for the needs of newcomers – for example, St Albans has an influx of Hong Kong Chinese families arriving. When someone comes, we need to change. We should have the attitude that what they offer is what we want. **Other attendees:** New Parishioners Coffee Morning was successful in drawing people in. The website is our “front door”.
4. Suggestion that we should name the position from a ‘Volunteer Coordinator’ to an ‘Invitation Coordinator’. **Response:** We have to be welcoming. Coffee after Mass. We need to make it easy. Reshape the porch to include a refreshment facility. Have people invite others to coffee. **Other attendees:** Comment on the expense of redoing the porch area. Another comment that it was worth trying to change the porch arrangement. Supported by another attendee. Comment that winter may be more difficult with the cold.
5. Comment that the Parish Directory is very useful for newcomers. The Neighbourhood Link Scheme was a good way for newcomers to be contacted by someone local to them.
6. Query on how we can welcome commuters. **Response:** ‘Sharing the Light’ was one way that had been used successfully in the past. The porch could be a transition area, so you don’t go straight into the church which could be useful for those who don’t feel comfortable going into a church. Some people have expressed a reluctance to spend money on the church, more work needs to be done to explain the rationale. **Comment:** Some people on one of the Zoom sessions had also expressed a reluctance to spend money on a building. Others expressed enthusiasm for the ideas. Most seemed to come round to the view that it was worth looking at. We need to have plans and costing put in place. **Response:** We need to do something to the presbytery – it is too big for two priests and we may not always have two priests. Church attendee numbers could go down along with income. The presbytery has to work harder to support the mission of the parish.
7. Comment that the porch area needs to be more welcoming. It could provide somewhere for parents with young children to go and it could be used for children’s liturgy, so they don’t feel separated from the church itself. We have lost the prayer room – we need somewhere for people to go when they need a quiet place to prayer, including out-of-hours. **Response:** Big decisions about the porch need to be made in the context of the whole property – church, presbytery, parish centre. For example, the presbytery currently houses the priests, but it could also provide affordable accommodation for Catholic school Teachers. It is an issue finding accommodation in or near St Albans for newly qualified teachers.
8. Query on the impact of car parking provision. **Response:** it needs to be considered. Also the presbytery offices may need to be moved to the parish centre.
9. Comment on ensuring that we do things sustainably. The environment needs to be considered. We should have a net zero carbon target. An offer to join the property working group to help. **Response:** agreement that sustainability is important. Perhaps have a Youth lead on sustainability.
10. Query about how family life has changed over the past ten years. **Response:** normally Mum and Dad both working. Concerns are childcare and paying the bills. One partner may be Catholic the other not. Lockdown and other issues may have taken the church off their agenda. We need to listen to them, we can’t tell them what the issues are. The Lord on the Road to Emmaus started by asking ‘what is wrong?’

## Parish Assembly 2021: 12<sup>th</sup> June and 23<sup>rd</sup> July Meetings

11. The parish has supported 'Celebrate'. It can be a starting point for getting to know people better. **Response:** we need to find out what people need. Ask what we can do to support them at transition points in their lives – moving house, bereavement, school transitions, etc. It is easy to say, hard to do.
12. The Toddler Group was very good at bringing people together. Children make friends at school, it is the very young pre-school-age children who need to get together.
13. Reanimate the Neighbourhood Links Scheme.
14. Support for Mass coordination group – any experience from other large parishes. **Response:** no, but feedback is that people would like to see 'Marshalswick' replicated. **Comment:** problem is that we have a big church with large Mass attendances. Difficult to replicate small Marshalswick feel.
15. During holiday periods there is only one priest. If both away need a group to set up for a visiting priest. There needs to be a strong sense of ownership within each Mass group. **Comment:** PPC can coordinate across Masses. Social element can help to bring people together from different Masses. Training will be required for those involved in planning and setting up for a Mass.
16. Will there be Social Committee – what will it do? **Response:** they need to have a clear agenda. For example, to plan four social events each year for the whole parish, not for a particular sub-group. That should be their commitment; they should not be expected to pick up any request for an event. **Comment:** Finding dates in the Hall can be difficult – need to plan a year ahead.
17. When will committees be formed? **Response:** probably September. Need 4/5 groups, then recruit for the PPC.
18. Building projects – are loans available from Westminster? **Response:** Possible. Part of the objective of the change in building use will be to raise some income.
19. Social activity cuts across groups. Faith formation should do the same thing. **Response:** the more that goes on outside the Mass, the more the community will come together.
20. How will we populate these groups? **Response:** appeal in the autumn. Invite people to do what they can. Suggestions from the groups need to be seriously considered.
21. Suggestion to use the "Call and Gifted" (?) course to enable people to identify their charism.
22. Lots of people don't want to belong to a group, scared that they will get asked to do more than they want to commit to do. Need to have opportunities outside of a group involvement. **Comment:** find opportunities that people enjoy doing, so that it doesn't feel like an obligation.
23. Use young people for welcomers.