

St Vincent's Parish Church

Minutes of Annual Review Meeting 29 October 2015

1 Welcome by Father John

Fr John received several apologies from parishioners who are unable to attend because of other functions such as school parents' evening

There is a photographer who will take pictures during the meeting. All were invited to let him know if they would prefer not to be included

Fr John led an opening prayer.

2 Report by Fr John on the previous 12 months of parish life

Since the last annual meeting, the parish has seen

- 41 weddings
- 121 baptisms
- 54 confirmations
- about 100 First Communions
- 5 adults received into the Church
- 55 funerals

All must recognise that a lot of work is done by many parishioners (as well as our clergy) to support and enable each of these events

There have been many newcomers welcomed into the parish, coming from countries throughout the world. We are truly a multi-cultural parish. But we must constantly ask whether these people have been able to integrate into the parish as well as we would want. Whilst the recent Welcome Sunday was popular and well-attended, we need to make sure that we are welcoming to all 'strangers' every week of the year

We are fortunate in the beauty of our church and our parish and we must not take this for granted. So many parishioners work hard to maintain the church, the gardens, the linen, the altars, the services...

- We practise our liturgy in many different ways and we do it well, with about 1,200 people attending Mass each week
- Our SVP and Justice and Peace groups continue to perform services that all Christians are called to in supporting people inside and outside of our parish and our Catholic community
- Our Parish Office is well run and supportive
- We have good schools that our children attend for their education and enjoyment
- Fr John feels well supported by the Parish Pastoral Team. And how could Fr John possibly cope without the support he gets from Deacon John? He also

has the regular help of Fr Keith who frequently celebrates Mass at St Vincent's

But we must challenge whether we are doing enough for the development of our own faith. Can we do more? pray differently? The Service for Peace that we held last summer was an innovation for us and for the LPA. It was a very successful experiment and one we will repeat. We must also push ourselves to encourage greater ecumenism

Another challenge is to plan and prepare for succession in our key lay-volunteer roles. E.g. the production of the parish magazine and the provision of school governors need more 'younger' parishioners to step into the roles

3 Youth Chaplain

Fr John introduced Kate Wilkinson who is the Chaplain at Blessed Thomas Holford school. In response to repeated requests that we 'do more for our young people' Kate has taken on the additional role of Chaplain to the young people in our LPA.

Kate explained that she has started in this role by creating a new group called iBelieve for young people who have completed their Confirmation programme. She explained how the group runs to facilitate prayer, social activities, discussion of current issues... The group draws people from the 3 parishes of the LPA and encourages newcomers to join. Three points key to Kate's current plans are:

1. The development of stronger links between BTH school and the parishes – especially St Vincent's
2. Creating links between iBelieve and the local primary schools to find ways in which each can help the other
3. Encourage a young adults group to form. This could be as simple as a group that meets to talk or go for a drink after Mass. One benefit of this group is that it may help with planning succession in lay roles in the parishes

Kate invited questions and comments about her work and received many supportive and complimentary comments

4 Finances

Fr John talked through the Financial Statement that had already been distributed in paper form. Points raised:

- Sunday collections have increased despite the financial hardships that some people are experiencing
- The amount donated to the parish has also increased but this is largely because of a single gift specifically to fund work on the organ
- A recent financial audit run by the Diocese identified no problems

Fr John invited comments on the following two specific issues:

- 4.1 A parishioner has written to the Diocesan offices to complain that there are too many retiring collections at St Vincent's. The letter also challenged the selection of the charities that benefit from these collections

A list of the retiring collections that the Diocese recommends was distributed and Fr John made the following points:

- That we do not conduct all of the collections on the Diocese's list
- That the number of retiring collections we have is greater than the Diocese recommends
- That we reject many requests from charities for retiring collection

Fr John then invited a show of hands of whether we have too many or too few retiring collections. The votes were:

- Do we have too many collections? – 1 vote
- Do we have too few collections? – 0 votes
- Is the number of collections about right? – many votes
- Also, should we have a wider range of beneficial charities? – 12 votes

Further points made by the meeting:

- All retiring collections are optional and there is never pressure to give
- When crises occur around the world, parishioners look to CAFOD to help and to provide a focal point for collecting donations

The meeting agreed that the Parish Pastoral Team should consider this matter further and propose what changes we should introduce

- 4.2 Bishop Mark has advised that he has engaged a firm to raise funds for the Diocese. All Parish Priests will be interviewed to ask them to support a programme of fund-raising. Details of the programme have yet to be released and Fr John will update the parish as he learns more. The meeting voiced a general concern about a commercial firm taking a % of whatever is raised

5 Group discussions

Deacon John introduced the topics that were to be discussed in groups and invited everyone to contribute to whichever question(s) they are most interested in

After the discussions, each group spoke to the meeting to summarise what had been said and any recommendations they want to give. The points raised by each group are documented below

6 Close

Father John closed the meeting and thanks everyone for their time and their contribution to the meeting

Notes of the questions for discussion

1 **How, as a community, do we respond to and welcome refugees who are coming to this country?**

- Raising the general level of awareness of the problem and the ways people can help
- Encourage local groups to discuss and identify actions – iBelieve, J&P, CAFOD, schools
- Adopt practical solutions such as
 - Support Manchester as a member of the 'City of Sanctuary' network
 - Support the Boaz Trust that is supporting refugees / asylum seekers
 - Support the Amnesty International guidelines on refugees
- Publicise the plans that are being developed by our Diocese and encourage our congregation to participate in these
- Shrewsbury Diocese should consider using existing support channels rather than spend time to create something new. E.g. the *Revive* programme in Salford **

2 **How can we strengthen inter-faith and inter-denominational relationships locally?**

- Recognise the good work that is already done by Fr John
- Encourage our parishioners to see it as their Catholic duty to support inter-Christian relationships
- Follow the experience of the Altrincham Churches Together group that the group works best if it has a shared project that all can contribute to e.g.
 - Christmas carol service
 - Shared table events

3 **How can we encourage parishioners to lead social events within the parish?**

- Do we have a shared view of what social events people want? There are many things organised already, where are the gaps?
- If someone suggests some type of event then ask them to make it happen
- Look especially to new parishioners who may need extra encouragement to boost their confidence

4 **Are our youth-based events meeting the needs of young parishioners?**

- We do have activities aimed at young people and the iBelieve group now fills an important slot. Things to encourage for the future:
 - Having music at youth masses chosen, organised and run by our young people
 - Having strong links with other parishes inside and outside the LPA
 - Increased publicity around what is available in the parish for young people
 - Raise awareness of the national youth events that take place
- We need to make sure we are consulting young people themselves about what they want. Perhaps through questionnaires or via the secondary schools in the parish **

5 **How can we make the most of opportunities to encourage all Catholics to go to Church?**

- Many who have excluded themselves return (at least partially) when they have children. Others visit the church for baptisms and weddings
- We could make more opportunities for people to gain absolution without individual confession
- Consider whether the practice of going up for Communion row-by-row highlights people who do not go and leads to embarrassment

6 In the light of recent announcements from Pope Francis, are we genuinely inclusive and open as a parish? Could we host events to open our church to the wider community?

- Some of the good things that take place are to be recognised:
 - SVP visits to isolated people
 - Eucharistic ministers' visits to isolated / lonely people
- But our short-comings are illustrated by the comment that a parishioner reported that after 14 months in the parish he/she still only knew 4 people here
- We should support the food banks more and encourage more participation by our parishioners
- Be mindful of the practical needs of some people – wheelchair access, locations for wheelchairs that are a part of the congregation **

7 How do we, as a parish, develop our lay ministry and support the clergy in their work?

- Encourage more young 'ministers'. It is especially noticeable that we have fewer young readers at our Masses than other parishes
- A direct approach is called for
- Use the Youth Masses to contact potential 'ministers'
- Older 'ministers' should bow out
- What is important is to repeat the invitations to ministries but recognise that individual parishioners cannot respond if their lives are very full at that time **
- Could *The Vineyard* have some articles that highlight the roles and needs of different ministries? **

8 Any other ways in which parish life could be improved

- Could a Rosary Group pray the Rosary on all first Fridays as well as more frequently in the months of May and October? This could be offered prior to 7.30pm Mass

** points marked with asterisks were made by written submission rather than discussed at the meeting
