

Pastoral Council – Minutes of the AGM held on Tuesday 25 June 2024

13 people attended the meeting including Father Martin Wheaton (FrMW).

Chair Tom Quigley (TQ) welcomed everyone to the meeting and read out a short extract about gifts from the Holy Spirit from the letter of St Paul to the Corinthians.

Apologies

Bernadette Bartlett, Hannah Bartlett, Hilda Fraser, Margaret Taylor.

Welcoming Comments from the Chair

TQ extended a very warm welcome to all attendees. He said that there had not been an AGM for a while now largely because of the COVID 19 pandemic and the various restrictions in meeting in public. He outlined the many changes that had taken place since the last AGM particularly in relation to the clergy. He said that many people in the parish who had given support to various groups and activities over a lifetime of service were now stepping down and we needed to recruit new volunteers. If anyone knew of anybody willing to offer their time to any parish group or activity they would be made very welcome.

Minutes of Previous Meeting 30th April 2019

As the last AGM had been held in April 2019 no minutes were read out.

Matters Arising from the Minutes of Previous Meeting

There were no matters arising.

Parish Finances

Mick Davison (MD) said that he was still awaiting the signed off accounts but that they would be made available soon. He said that Gift Aid still needed to be added.

He said that the parish finances were not good and that there were significant deficits. A lot of the reduction of money was down to the fact that there was now only 1 Mass at the weekend. Pre pandemic income when there had been 2 Masses had been around £600 per week but now it was down to £300 per week but this mirrored the drop in finances around the diocese. He was asked whether the church could apply for grants but he said that the church was classed as a business and did not qualify for running costs. Grants were available for work on the structure of the church but none were available for the running of the church. Pauline Lavery (PaL) asked if the schools would be able to help by asking parents to contribute small standing orders. Peter Lavery (PL) said that there were around 430 school families and the parish had a lot of goodwill among them but parents didn't necessarily recognise the need to contribute in that way. MD said he could put the suggestion to the Finance Committee for consideration

Parish Statistics

PL said that the Diocese expected parishes to provide statistics for births, deaths and marriages and the statistics for 2023 up to 31st December were published in the Catholic Calendar. He gave some statistics:

- Baptisms in 2023 numbered 42 including adults and there had been 15 so far in 2024
- First Holy Communions in 2023 had numbered 40 for children and 10 for adults and so far in 2024 numbered 40+
- Confirmations in 2023 numbered 23 and this included Journey into Faith/RCIA. He said that confirmations were on a 2 year cycle so there would be none in 2024
- Deaths were down. They had been high during the pandemic but there had been very few so far in 2024
- Marriages were very few with 1 in 2023 and 3 scheduled for 2024

- Average Mass attendance had been 122 but this had been increasing in 2024 with more people attending week day Masses.

Parish Groups/Activities - Reports Young People/Confirmation/Lourdes

PL said that Confirmations in 2023 numbered 23 and this included Journey into Faith/RCIA. He said that confirmations were on a 2 year cycle so there would be none in 2024 but some in 2025.

MD said that 4 young people from the parish had been on the Diocesan pilgrimage to Lourdes in 2024 and there would be 6 on the Diocesan pilgrimage to Lourdes in 2025. He said that the young people from the parish had been given special dispensation to attend in 2024 as there were so many adults from the parish on the pilgrimage in that year. He said that overall there were 42 young people going in 2025 and that the 6 young people from Birtley provided a good percentage of those going. He said that from 2025 the Youth Ministry Trust would be organising the Youth Section of the pilgrimage.

Parish Centre

MD said that the Parish Centre was just keeping its head above water with function room bookings and Keep Fit, Irish Dancing and Line Dancing. He said that very few parishioners were using the Centre and appealed for more parishioners to use it. He said that Frank McMahon and Jim Tumelty had now stepped down from the committee and thanked them for their great service over the years. He said that the parish needed the Parish Centre to be used more and said that he couldn't guarantee the centre would be open in five years time. Sandra Neal (SN) suggested putting a cover charge on the successful Monday afternoon Club but MD thought that it would be administratively difficult to collect and may be counter productive.

YMG - Catherine Tumelty(CT)

"The Young Mothers Guild (or as we prefer to refer to ourselves as the "Young-at-Heart Mothers Guild) continues to flourish with 23 inter-denominational members. This month we celebrated our 52nd Anniversary of the Group's inauguration – 52 years of happy memories and mutual support for one another through good times and sad times – quite an achievement!

We meet most Wednesday evenings (excluding school holidays) and always have a full programme of events including speakers, visits to the theatre or cinema, various activities and usually celebrate members "special birthdays ending in a zero or five" with a local bar meal (this year we had 10 special birthdays). We usually give financial support to at least two charities throughout the year and enjoy participating in Church activities like the Women's World Day of Prayer and Stations of the Cross. Two years ago we celebrated our Golden Anniversary with an open air Mass in the church grounds, followed by a celebratory picnic there, and have recently been heavily involved in:

- A Macmillan Coffee Morning
- Coffee Morning to raise money for Church Funds
- Picnics in the Church Grounds for the Late Queen's Platinum Jubilee &
- The King & Queen's Coronation

Over the years our members have thoroughly enjoyed and appreciated the camaraderie and friendship within our Group, but we are "of an age" now. However, we would be delighted if a similar Group could be set up for younger female parishioners, say school mums, and we would be very pleased to encourage and guide them with the experience we have gained over the years."

SVP - Peter Monaghan (PM)

"The Birtley St Joseph conference comprises 8 full members and 1 auxiliary member. We have attempted to move the SVP towards the centre of Parish life so that everyone in the parish is aware of us and knows how to contact us. A lot of our parishioners help out at St Vincent's Support Centre in Newcastle and they provide the bulk of the volunteers at the Tuesday Drop In. Thanks to the sterling efforts of one of our members, a large number of parishioners are also members of the SVP 200 Club which supports St Vincent's Foodbank. Volunteers from the Parish also help out at the SVP Ozanam Camp at Holy Island.

Activities

Parish Visits

We like to visit people around the parish but as we have to visit in pairs that can prove very difficult. Over the last year we have started to visit Lindisfarne Care Home regularly but we would like to recruit more members so that we can do more visits

Help for Individuals and families

We have continued to help families around the parish whether they are Catholic or non Catholic. We have recently bought a washing machine for a family and helped a homeless man.

With the help of the parish and schools we held a successful Christmas Campaign to help provide hampers and Christmas presents for families in the parish. The schools identified the families and the parish collections helped to provide us with the financial support to provide hampers and gifts for 13 families over Christmas.

Help for Organisations

We support St Vincent's and the Deaf Centre which are the SVP support centres for the east and west of Newcastle respectively. We are also allowed to donate to other organisations where SVP members are involved such as the Lourdes Group. We also provide the money for a child place at the SVP Holy Island Summer Camps.

Help for overseas

We are twinned with SVP conferences in India and the Sudan and provide them with money. We also sponsor Indian students and are currently supporting a "petty shops" project in India.

Mass for the Housebound

The conference organised a Mass for the Housebound in 2024 which was the first Mass for the Housebound since 2019. Some problems were experienced but the goodwill of everyone in the parish shone through with the Lourdes Group organising the teas and many other parishioners coming to join in and support us in helping to make the Mass a great success. It's hoped that the Mass for the Housebound will once again become a yearly event.

Mini Vinnies

There are Mini Vinnie Groups in the parish at St Joseph's (2 groups) and St Benet's Junior Schools and we support them. We have had little contact with the Mini Vinnies at St Benet's over the past year due to the RAAC problems but we have visited the groups at St Joseph's and have helped the children plant flowers in "God's Garden" at the Infant School. In past years the Mini Vinnies from the schools have attended the Conference organised annual Mass for the Housebound on alternate years but the Covid pandemic affected that. St Benet's attended in 2019 and it was hoped that St Joseph's would attend in 2024 but they were unable to do so.

Outside Parish

One member runs a Community Project at Leam Lane called EmbellsCIC and the conference has supported that project. EmbellsCIC has also passed leads on to the Gateshead District President which has enabled members of the conference to help people across the Gateshead District. One member is the chair of the Holy Island Camp Committee.

District

Not all parishes in the Gateshead District have SVP conferences but many people in the area need a lot of help which has led members of the conference to operate outside the Birtley area most notably in Wrekenton, and the parishes of St Joseph and St Wilfrid in Gateshead which don't have SVP conferences. Commonly SVP members use district funds on such occasions but this isn't always possible so conferences have also collaborated to provide funds to help deserving cases. St Joseph's most often collaborate with St Peter's Low Fell and have helped families in Wrekenton, St Joseph's in Gateshead and St Wilfrid's.

Conclusion

We are very lucky to belong to a parish which is very generous to the SVP. Parishioners have donated clothes and other items to St Vincent's Support Centre and we continue to be grateful for the donations at our regular collections and coffee mornings. We hope that we have wisely spent the money which we have been given. We never forget that the money we spend has been donated. We have worked in the parish for many years and hope to do so for years to come.

Journey of Faith Programme

PL said that the Journey of Faith had been going for many years and worked very well. He said that reaching out to people through the school had been very profitable and people came from many places and had many reasons for coming. He said that 4-7 people completed the programme every year and they were given great support by parishioners at the meetings. He said that the process concluded with the Rite of Election at St Mary's Cathedral and then the applicants were received into the Church at the Easter Vigil.

Church Pastoral Council (CPC) Membership

Pauline Pestell (PP) said that she had joined the CPC quite recently and had been learning gradually about the important role it played in parish life. She said that the people of the parish needed to know more about the CPC and suggested that the names and photographs of the members be displayed at the back of church. TQ said that the CPC ended to recruit more people especially younger ones. PP said that new parishioners and especially the increasing number from ethnic minorities needed to be invited to get involved. She suggested that a suggestion box be put at the back of church and CT said that may be a good method of communication between the CPC and the parish. Father Martin Wheaton (FrMW) said that every parish was supposed to have a parish pastoral council but not all parishes had one. Bishop Stephen had said that he wanted all parishes in the Diocese to have a pastoral council.

Safeguarding and DBS

PaL said that 34 people in the parish have a DBS certificate and nearly everyone subscribes to the online service. She was queried about this as it seemed that the parish had a larger number of volunteers than 34 but PaL said that some parishioners held their DBS certificates under different voluntary organisations. She said that DBS was mandatory and subject to regular scrutiny. She said that Bishop Stephen had been delighted to see posters about safeguarding on display when he visited in May. She asked anyone who had any worries about safeguarding to inform her immediately and said that anyone new to parish volunteering required a DBS certificate.

Parish Fayre organising Committee - Anne Marshall (AM)

AM gave the following report

Our last Fayre was held in 2019 and we raised £2192. Sadly we went into Lockdown and we were unable to organise any events.

Some of the group came together and organised a MacMillan Coffee Morning which was a huge success.

The local MacMillan Fundraising group have now taken over this event and it is now held in Birtley Golf Club. This years date is 14th September 9:30am - 11:30am.

Last year the group organised a coffee morning in the Parish Centre on 26th November 2023. A grand total of £900 was raised for Church Funds. This was made up to £1,000 by the Parish Centre.

Sadly we have lost some of the members from our team and would be happy to recruit new members. We are also always looking for new Fundraising ideas

CAFOD & Live Simply

TQ gave a report which Kevin Haigh (KH) and Rachel Prior (RP) had compiled. Although he was still involved in these initiatives, KH was stepping back and RP was now largely taking the lead..

Various fundraising and events were arranged through:

- Family Fast Days
- Season of Lent and Harvest Festival
- The Parish and schools supplement the income.
- Coffee mornings every 4-5 weeks on the parish rota
- Holy Island Pilgrimage in conjunction with the Partnership on Saturday 13th July
- School based CAFOD club at St Benet's.

Live Simply

The parish had received a Live Simply Award which was displayed on the back wall of the church. Both schools had also made applications for a Live Simply Award.

Social Justice and Environment

These were helped by monthly tips from Chris O'Neill a parishioner at OBLI the chair of the SJEC. There was also a recycling box at the back of church and money was raised through plant sales.

Church Cleaning

PaL said that there were currently only 6 people involved with church cleaning so there was a need to get new people involved. She said that it only involved helping for 1 hour after 10:00am Mass on Friday mornings, that it was enjoyable and everyone got together afterwards over coffee and refreshments. She said that she may put a letter out to the schools asking for younger parents to come along and help.

Church grounds

PL said that several people helped with keeping the church grounds neat and tidy and that their work was much appreciated. He said that Norman and Veronica had done a great job with the gardens since the pandemic but unfortunately Norman had been unwell recently so more people were required to help those involved.

Benedict Partnership - Progress Report

MD said that there would be a Mass at St Bede's, Washington at 7pm on 11th July for the Feast of St Benedict. He said that the CAFOD Holy Island Pilgrimage in

conjunction with the Partnership on Saturday 13th July would be underwritten by the Partnership and that there would be separate buses for pilgrims from each side of the A1M.

He said that the Feast of the Martyrs of the Diocese will be on July 24th. He had hoped to organise a Special Mass for the Lamesley Martyrs which would be said by Canon Paul Farrer but unfortunately Canon Farrer was unavailable on the date he had hoped to use so another date would have to be set for that.

He said that there would be another half day of Recollection at St Robert's on September 28th for everyone involved in parish ministries and this would be led by Fr Dermot from St Dominic's in Newcastle.

He also said that there would be an event for Bishop Stephen's request to discern the draft Diocesan vision for parish and partnership but a date had yet to be set for that.

Any Other Business

Christine Johnson (CJ) who organised the Sunday coffee morning rota said that the boilers being used were unsuitable and unsafe and that there was a need for a modern insulated boiler. She said that she appreciated that the Parish Centre was under financial pressure and suggested that each of the groups on the coffee morning rota clubbed together to buy a new boiler.

Open Air Masses

CT asked if there was a possibility of holding an open air Mass in the parish grounds this summer and suggested that the Feast of the Assumption on August 15th may be a possibility. PL said that it would depend on the weather but said that he would consult with FrMW.

Closing Prayer

TQ thanked everyone for coming to the meeting. He said that the meeting had showed that although there was a lot of good work being done around the parish we still needed to cajole more people into action.

Sandra Neal closed the meeting with a "Hail Mary".