

Report of Parish Gathering, St. Thomas the Apostle Parish, D15.

Monday 12th November 2018

INTRODUCTION

In September 2018, following the World Meeting of Families, Archbishop Martin wrote to all parishes in Dublin. In his letter, Archbishop Martin said: “The question now arises: where do we go forward now in the challenge of renewing the faith we carry in our own hearts and renewing the life of the Church?” He invited each parish to find concrete ways of reflecting on this challenge. “The aim” he said “is not to provide instant answers but to begin to set out a realistic agenda for renewal of the Church in the years to come.”

Archbishop Martin suggested that questions which might be considered include the following;

- Why are we no longer captivating so many of our young people for the message of Jesus Christ?
- Which models of pastoral activity and reflection are most likely to win the hearts of young people for the message of Jesus?
- How do we teach young people about prayer?
- How can our parishes respond to these challenges?

The Archbishop asked each Parish Pastoral Council to organise some form of parish gathering to discuss the future and forward a short report of the findings to him. Once the reports have been analysed, the Church in Dublin will look at what processes we can adopt to move forward. In response to this request, the Parish Pastoral Council of St Thomas the Apostle, Laurel Lodge, Dublin 15 held a Parish Gathering on Monday 12th November 2018. The event was publicised on the parish website www.laurellodgeparish.ie and in the Parish Newsletter on two successive Sundays. In addition, members of the Parish Pastoral Council spoke at all weekend Masses. Approximately forty people attended the Gathering.

FORMAT

The format of the Gathering was as follows;

Following an Opening Prayer and Reflection by Fr. Brendan Quinlan PP, the Chair of the PPC gave a short presentation on the Archbishop’s letter. The group were then invited to consider two questions as follows;

Group Discussion

- ▶ LISTENING EXERCISE 1: Focus on NOW (15 mins)
- ▶ Reflection question for the group: What currently works well?
- ▶ LISTENING EXERCISE 2: Imagining the future (15 mins)
- ▶ Reflection question for the group: What needs to be developed and/or strengthened?
- ▶ Focus on specific suggestions which could be sent to Archbishop

Feedback from Groups (15 mins)

Those present broke up into six sub-groups of approximately seven each. Each sub-group was facilitated by a member of the PPC. After 30-40 minutes discussion, the whole group reconvened. Each facilitator gave a short presentation on the discussion in their sub-group. Other members of each sub-group were invited to add comments if they wished to do so. The reports from the sub-groups have been distilled into a series of themes below. It is not suggested that any of these represent the view of the whole group or even of a majority of the group. They are simply a record of issues raised or points made in one or more sub-groups.

What currently works well?

It is clear that most people understood this to mean what currently works well in our parish.

1. There was general agreement that there was a strong sense of community in the parish. Issues raised included;
 - Sense of goodwill/welcome/friendliness
 - Presence of priests in Church courtyard after Mass
 - Presence of Sisters of St Clare
 - Generosity of parishioners to e.g. Be Kind Ireland, St. Francis Hospice, St, Vincent de Paul.
 - Tea/Coffee after 10 o'clock Mass on Wednesdays
 - Use of Day Chapel and physical closeness of Community Centre to Church
 - Le Chéile social group for older people
 - Bereavement Group involvement in funeral ceremonies.

2. There was general agreement that 10'clock Children's Mass on Sundays is done well. Parish involvement in sacramental preparation for Baptism, Communion and Confirmation was also mentioned. However, more volunteers are needed to maintain and strengthen these Ministries.
3. The strong emphasis on Child Protection in the parish and the contribution of an active Safeguarding Children group were also referred to.
4. The number of choirs in the parish, the variety of musical styles they practice, and the contribution they make to the spiritual nature of our ceremonies were much commented on.
5. The range of opportunities available for spiritual development were mentioned; weekly prayer group, Ignatian group, Lectio Divina, Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, Rosary before 10 o'clock Mass on weekdays.

What needs to be developed and/or strengthened?

1. Comments in this area mainly focussed on the Church generally rather than in the parish, though there were suggestions that there was a need for better communication within the parish and for a period of meditation/reflection after Communion.
2. The Church must do whatever needs to be done to draw a line under the child abuse scandals, including statements of apology, opening up all files, and whatever else is required to win back trust.
3. Most sub-groups recognised a need for parishes to take on a greater role in faith formation of children and young people. Suggestions for children included film nights, Bible Groups (using "ordinary" language in Bible stories), Sunday Schools, Family Days/BBQs.
4. For young people, it was suggested that we ask them directly why they no longer practiced their faith e.g. organise a professional large-scale survey at national level and frame actions around the findings.
5. Social Justice projects or other challenges were seen as a means of harnessing the idealism of young people e.g. "Be Kind Ireland" in our own parish. Other suggestions were Youth Masses/Retreats or a Youth Forum, possibly shared between adjoining parishes.
6. A consistent theme was the need for the Church to reach out to those who are not there. A number of suggestions were made here;
 - Explore why some groups of people feel alienated from the Church,
 - Consider how we can convey a positive message about God's Love on occasions when large numbers of irregular attenders are present e.g. Baptisms, First Communions, Confirmations, Funerals, Christmas, and other family occasions,

- Seek novel methods of appealing to many people's innate spirituality through the senses of sight and sound e.g. "Drop-In Evenings" in Churches where people are invited to reflect or light a candle accompanied by music, images etc.
 - Adult Faith Development so that people are in a better position to defend their Faith, or other forms of parental support,
7. The existence of scientific evidence of the positive effects of religious practice is a factor which should be given greater prominence.
 8. The role of the media was raised. In view of the almost universal hostility of the established media in Ireland to the Catholic Church, greater use of Social Media is required e.g. homilies on You Tube.
 9. Our Bishops were urged: "Don't be afraid. Tell the TRUTH."

The evening concluded with a Closing Prayer by Fr. Brendan Quinlan PP.