

St Joseph's, Malvern

Parish meeting to discuss the future planning of our parish in the context of fewer priests

Introduction

EH provided context to the meeting following on from the Annual Parish Meeting. An introductory prayer was led by Canon Brian McGinley. Fr Naz welcomed Dom Patrick Lobo and Deacon Shaun. Fr Hugh is unwell and unable to attend.

Apologies were received from some parishioners who wanted to be there: Anne Lewis and Roger Watson.

The introduction slide deck showed the diocese and deanery make-up with other statistics highlighting what we have locally in terms of schools, churches and clergy.

Canon Brian opening remarks

What we are doing here is welcome and proactive. We have a 12 active priests in the deanery right now but this will fall to 6 within 5 years and therefore plans need to be put in place now for what this will mean in terms of parish priest provision. The role of the laity will be more important than ever.

Bidford-on-Avon and Pershore have no parish priest currently. Temporary measures are a sticking plaster and a longer-term vision is needed.

There is a diocesan vision which is aligned to the Synodal process. The Archbishop is aware of what the issues are and how different parishes are responding in different ways.

Trained, responsible and empowered laity catechists are seen as an important role within parishes where there are no clergy. Parishes should be on the lookout for people to fulfil this role: a leadership role. (This point was made by others where the role has been called a 'lay pastor' or similar: a central person within a parish or community to whom others can look to).

Innovative ways of worship will be needed. The experiences of African parishes was reflected on: a parish church with mission stations where Mass is offered only once a month or similar.

Questions and discussions

- 1) Will women be allowed to lead Eucharistic Services in lieu of Mass being offered?
- 2) What can we learn from other denominations?
- 3) We need to have 'real' conversations with other Christian churches who are more laity focused and laity led in their worship: learn what works well.
- 4) Anglican parishes are often at the centre of a community or village whereas we are not: how do we change this and become more community orientated?
- 5) Sub-committees are important and can share the load of organising different groups or parts within a parish. (St Joseph's has a lot of these already).
- 6) Where do we want to go? We should be looking to take the Good News out into the wider community – refreshed by the Word and the sacraments we can go into the world and give this priority i.e. outward acts and signs.
- 7) Grass roots laity led parishes can be fruitful: all the baptised have vocations and the church can and should nurture this.

- 8) We should have more laity led prayer groups e.g. Journey in Faith (not just for those looking to join the church but also those wanting to grow their faith and talk about their faith).
- 9) Young people are missing from church. We have to act to encourage them in or back. Having playworkers and dedicated play spaces for young families (both in the Mass and outside the Mass) are important. This is an area to consider putting resource into.
- 10) We need to rethink ideas around married priests, women priests and also rules around celibacy – all of which contribute to the current situation. We do have some married priests (Ordinariate) so this is possible and should be broadened.
- 11) A deanery-wide combined Deanery Council (of laity) should be put in place to pull the threads together from across the deanery and thus encourage more collaborative working and planning.
- 12) Engaging with the wider community through more effective marketing of the building / assets / rooms is to be encouraged.

Conclusion

There feeling in the room was one of engaged concern but with an openness to embrace innovation and change. We can grow in faith even in an environment where there are fewer priests. The Mass is and will remain central to our faith but we may not be able to nourish our faith with Mass as regularly as we have been used to.

The meeting finished with thanks and a closing prayer.

Edd Hogan

Chair, St Joseph's PAC

17th July 2023