

Parish Meeting

of

St Francis Xavier's Church

7th June 2018

1. The meeting began with prayer.

2. Overview/context

Using a PowerPoint (see attached), Fr Jamie Boyle gave the context for the current proposal for merger and closure of St Mary of the Angels. Citing 'We Have Found The Messiah' Fr Jamie spoke of change being 'necessary for the greater good of all', the need for us to 'set about rebuilding God's household', and a deepened 'commitment to practical charity'. The Archbishop had written in 2015 of fewer, more concentrated parish centres, where clergy and laity work together in our shared mission.

Fr Jamie spoke about the outcomes of the cluster meetings – the need for more lay led ministries, more active engagement and a renewal of our missionary focus. More formation and catechesis was necessary to free up the priests to live out their vocation, instead of being drained by firefighting/maintenance. Our SMART goals were formation, lay leadership and stewardship.

The proposal itself was discussed and its implications eg one bank account, one pastoral council, one finance committee. This process had led to the invitation from the Archbishop to respond to his proposal for merger and for the closure of St Mary of the Angels by June 18th.

There was acknowledgment of:

- this difficult place for parishioners of Camelon and clergy
- challenge to the way we live out our faith
- need for more visibility of our mission across all three parishes
- bigger pools of resources to draw on in St Francis Xavier's
- the process having been a step in self-understanding
- forward momentum having been slower than hoped for

3. Initial responses

A show of hands showed that a majority of attendees had attended the Cluster Meetings.

Responses included:

- A sense that the whole Cluster Meeting process had been flawed
- Parishioners not feeling listened to/lack of needed community discernment
- The loss of diocesan personnel who could have helped in the process
- Parishioners less able to reach out to each other as a result
- A feeling of secrecy
- The need for a Canon Lawyer as we move forward
- Possibility of fundraising to support our brothers and sisters not being 'easy' under Canon Law
- Spreading priests by reducing the number of dioceses being a very slow process and with national implications
- The lack of progress since the meetings

Fr Jamie felt that progress had been made. He gave as examples increased cross parish activity, the 'Art of Accompaniment' and Alpha. He felt it was, 'okay to be making baby steps'. Issues regarding community strength were raised, including:

- Our young people needing more encouragement
- Our very good youth ministry
- The need to ask why young people who became involved in the Cluster Meetings were not part of the journey now
- Non-involvement of the Polish and Syro-Malabar communities

4. Welcome

Our need to 'get better at welcoming' was raised. This led to discussion of the 'perennial problem' of losing the families who bring their children for the sacraments. Parishioners felt that the issue needed:

- Honesty about our internal issues as a church
- Total transparency with the People of God
- The need to reach out to young people 16-late 20's
- Discussion of the lack of all-school Mass at St Mungo's
- More awareness that 'we are the Church'
- The need to look at what we are doing to welcome everyone
- The cost for families without transport to get to Mass from Camelon
- Transport issues being resolved
- A 'wake up' call for all three parishes

Fr Jamie felt the concentrated environment described in the Archbishop's 2015 pastoral letter would help improve these aspects for development, 'but we must do more'. There has to be more focus on lay leadership particularly. Fr Jamie also spoke about the perceived lack of welcome in the St Francis Xavier community and described the potential challenge ahead of welcoming a whole community so they can find a new spiritual home amongst us. This gave rise to discussion of:

- Asking for a priest for 'sixty minutes' for Mass speaking of a faulty mindset
- Our being sent out at the end of every Mass on mission
- Involving the sacred in all the sodalities and groups, before or after meetings
- How do we get our young people to come to Mass?
- Should Larbert be part of the merger? Situation in Grangemouth?
- Priests' retirements delayed due to fears of leaving parishes priestless
- Need to let priests retire
- Concern for Canon Urquhart, which Fr Jamie allayed, saying the best choice for him would be made

5.Sacraments

The Sacraments of Initiation became the focus. Fr Jamie described trying various approaches and the merits and difficulties of each were discussed including:

- Formation being well received this year
- Accompaniment needed as we encourage parents
- The message 'there is a place for you here and we want to walk with you'
- Formation on the Mass
- Something being 'wrong' with the whole system
- 60 baptisms per annum but not 60 new babies in the congregation
- Melee of non-practicing Catholics affecting our worship experience
- Children experiencing First Eucharist with parents from within the parish community
- Impact on parishioners of 'too many' First Communions

6.Needs

Needs which emerged were:

- An ongoing forum to discuss issues
- Need to understand the implications of decisions better
- To speak to the Archbishop and listen to him, not 'talking into a vacuum'
- Building on cluster meeting initiatives
- Need for lots of work

- More lay involvement
- Time management for clergy
- Actions to bring the whole community together eg rent town hall
- Archbishop needs to help 'bridge the gap' with the Polish community
- Acknowledgment of how bridges had been built locally and the Polish community having made good attempts to integrate more

Final response

- We need to look at the whole picture
- 'All Catholics together'
- With good will and hard work, we will try our best to make new parishioners welcome
- It becomes a new parish for everyone
- Need to welcome Camelon parishioners into ministry work
- Need to look at Mass times
- That it would be easier to be 'St Elsworth's' but not feasible
- Financial implications of absorbing loss not being insurmountable
- Need to reassure Camelon parishioners of that
- The options moving forward financially need to be weighed up eg separate maintenance funds

Parishioners felt it was important to note that there was a deep sense of not having been listened to well by the Archbishop and that there were grave reservations about the process that led to the proposal.

The parishioners' response to the merger proposal was an almost unanimous yes.

The response to the closure was, when voted on, fifty-fifty, with a sense that this was not a decision that parishioners were comfortable making, and that it belonged by right to the people of Camelon.

Parishioners felt we had to 'read the signs of the times' and be realistic. Such closures and mergers are happening in other churches world wide, also locally; 'we are lucky to have a church and lucky to have priests'. There was a chance to rebuild community and become more deeply the family of God.