

Minute
of
St Anthony's Parish Meeting

8th June 2018

1. The meeting began with prayer

2. Context

Fr Jamie Boyle named the purpose of the meeting, to respond to Archbishop Leo Cushley's proposal regarding the merger of St Francis Xavier's and St Anthony's and the closure of St Mary of the Angels. Citing 'We have found the Messiah', the Archbishop's Pastoral Letter of 2015, Fr Jamie used a PowerPoint (please see attached) to show how we arrived at this moment. The pastoral letter lays out 'causes for concern' regarding priestly and attendance numbers, saying 'we have undeniably reached a turning point'. Fewer, more concentrated parish centres, which are 'powerhouses' of devotion and outreach, were called for, along with the 'mutual reinforcement' of our communities.

Having laid out the stages of the Archbishop's meeting with priests and people of the diocese, Fr Jamie revisited the final report written by our Cluster after a year-long series of meetings. That report calls for increased, intentional collaboration and a renewal of our apostolic outreach, in order to decrease the burden on our priests and better fulfill Christ's mission. Too few of our parishioners are actively involved in serving our community. The cluster's needs emerged as catechesis, stewardship and lay leadership. Though implementation of these had begun, they had been 'put on hold' as we waited for the Archbishop's pastoral plan to be announced. This has been slower than hoped for.

A 'radical idea' had emerged at the Cluster meetings that one parish be 'mothballed', to save resources.

3. Current situation at St Anthony's

Thanks to a strong team of people in St Anthony's and the efforts of John Redding, the buildings at St Anthony's are well maintained. The parish bank balance is healthy, though people have asked to be better informed financially. Internally vibrant, the community is less vibrant 'ad extra'. There is a need, as with the other parishes, to bridge the gap between attendance and participation. Much of the streamlining a merger would demand had already happened eg shared admin/Joint Pastoral Council.

4. Responses

These included questions around **Our Lady and St Bernadette's in Larbert**; why, though part of our cluster, the proposal did not include this parish; why Fr John's pastoral contribution had halted after the meetings, though he was the Chair; why the parish was being treated 'in isolation. Was it because it was a more 'affluent' area?

Fr Jamie knew of no reason why this was the case. Larbert parishioners who had attended JPC meetings had not returned, though an agreement continued that the four parishes of the Cluster would continue to build together; 'Personnel' had to be taken into consideration; indications from the Council of Priests were that Larbert continued to form part of our cluster, but would not be part of the new, emerging parish.

Mass Times: within five years there would be an additional 40, 000 people in the area around St Anthony's, many commuters.

- Despite new builds, the Mass population had gone from 300 to 200 in the past ten years.
- The unfavourable 11am Mass time was mentioned, as commuters travelled out with the area to maximise their Sunday.
- Parishioners asked for a vigil Mass or to alternate the early Mass time.
- Why was 'Falkirk prioritised all the time?' They felt they were 'struggling to get pastoral support'.

Fr Jamie responded that three priests were now saying the Masses previously celebrated by five. As part of the new parish Mass times would need to be revised. Numbers in St Francis Xavier's fluctuated at evening weekend Masses; a Mass might be moved. However, as a Church we are called to be 'much more than a worshipping community'. Fr Jamie addressed apostolic outreach; a great team of parishioners gave their 'heart and soul' but the process needed to be a 'wakeup call' for everyone' to live out our faith through action. This was the same in the other parishes too, which had heard the same message from him.

Support for Camelon parishioners arose. Though it was felt change could be good, and we need to look forward, the impact on the **Slammannan** community of it was discussed; that community, when closed, had been lost to the church, its members 'devastated'. St Francis in particular was not perceived as welcoming. What would we do to support the Camelon community? What about Canon Urquhart?

Fr Jamie was clear he still had pastoral care of all the souls in the community, every effort would be made by him. Canon Urquhart would be well cared for, hopefully close by.

5. The Building

Fr Jamie gave the following information:

- The Church would not 'close the door and walk away'
- It was hoped the building would be sold on
- Historic Scotland would have a large say in what happened next
- Restrictions to the building were many eg no external changes
- The timescale was unclear, 'a few months' according to the proposal

6. Finances

Discussion included:

- That the 'temporal goods' of the St Mary of the Angels had to be 'justly and fairly managed'
- Assets would travel with the parishioners to their new parish
- After repaying their loan to the Archdiocese, a deficit of £71, 000 remained, which would also be transferred to the new parish
- The parish's actual debt to the diocese, due to historic roof and heating repairs, was £102.467 as of the 2017 end of year accounts
- After sale of the building it was hoped that debt would be cleared
- One window alone, due to Historic Scotland restrictions, would cost over £28,500
- A local councillor had suggested the Council could cover that cost
- The moral implications of that, given the deprived area and its needs
- A merger would mean one bank account, potentially with each church retaining a building fund, and responsibility for maintaining that
- The perceived injustice of well stewarded parishes taking on debt
- Central banking still allows for oversight of the needs and issues of each community

7. Priestly resources

Reliance on foreign priests, now needed in their own countries, was not the solution; bureaucracy meant visas etc were increasingly difficult to organise. Retired priests should also not be relied upon, though they helped as much as they could.

8. Other suggestions and concerns

These included:

- **How much interest was there from the Archdiocese in deacons, and equipping laity to take care of pastoral centres eg chapels of ease?** Fr Jamie explained men were already in formation, including local man Kenneth Manunga who would become a deacon soon, and would hopefully stay in the area. Kenneth is still employed for the next few years, which will necessarily impact on his ministry initially.
- **Lay empowerment:** it appeared clergy were waiting on lay and lay were waiting on clergy, and little was happening 'in that gap'. There was a great need for lay formation. In the meantime, Fr Jamie challenged the laity to come to him and would find him very open to suggestions. An issue emerged that no one really understood what was possible in terms of lay leadership and empowerment.
- **Camelon was an area of great need;** as Christians we are to go out to the margins. It was felt not enough research had been done to consider ways Camelon could go on to serve the community, eg addressing poverty, drug addiction
- **The closure process was too fast, with not enough time for prayer and reflection**
- **Need for more such meetings to share ideas and make the priests more accessible**
- **Large parish assemblies, so parishioners can get to know each other and share ideas**

- **Ministries: there was concern these would be lost due to the closure.** Fr Jamie gave his assurance people would be invited to continue to live out their ministries and enhance their new parish

With regards to St Anthony's:

- **St Francis Xavier's was the longest established parish, canonically**
- **Parishes are required to have a saint's name**
- **St Anthony's would keep its name, as a 'church within the parish of St Francis Xavier'**
- **Constitutions would have to be amended, but parish groups would continue as now**
- **If Camelon closes, would St Anthony's no longer be under threat?** Fr Jamie said every parish needs to look to this as a new beginning and to live out Christ's mission more fully. Ideas proposed included setting up a social justice group and running the next Alpha, which is working well in Falkirk, at St Anthony's.

9. Parishioners response to the Archbishop's proposal:

There was a great deal of discomfort at voting for the closure of another parish, also at voting when so few parishioners were present. Parishioners asked that that be relayed to the Archbishop.

It was made very clear more research into Camelon's possible future was necessary and 'more questions had to be asked'.

There was a call to show the people of Camelon 'great sensitivity' but also a sense that we should not wait 'until our backs are against the wall' and it was wiser to act now, carefully, than wait until under pressure.

Parishioners asked to see the minutes of the meeting before the response was sent.

In terms of merger, the vote was unanimously yes, with the proviso, 'we keep our name'.

In terms of closure, closure received two more votes than those voting against closure. Two parishioners abstained.

10. The meeting ended with prayer asking the Holy Spirit to make us a much more welcoming community that also reaches out with the joy of the Gospel.