

St Joseph's Parish Synodal Meeting – update

1. Purpose:

In February 2022, we undertook a Parish consultation to feed into the Diocesan response to the General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops in October 2022, “For a synodal Church: communion, participation and mission”.

In addition to a report for the Diocese, in August last year we produced a separate report on the feedback that related specifically to our own church.

As a full year has passed, this paper provides an update on what we have done so far in response.

2. Background:

2.1. While most of the feedback to the Synodal questions related to structural issues within the Church beyond the influence of local parishes, some responses and practical solutions were specific to St Joseph's Parish. There was a sense of the need to “get our own house in order” to meet the needs of Parishioners and increase involvement of the laity.

2.2. Reasons given for this including the need for:

- A more welcoming church
- Increasing lay involvement in the Parish.
- A different approach to young people
- Improvements in communication
- Addressing this in the context of the size of the Parish

2.3. Some actions were progressed immediately however a lack of volunteers delayed further immediate action.

3. Summary of actions:

3.1. A More Welcoming Parish

Feedback included

- Need to consider those who feel excluded and develop ways to address this. This includes taking account of the needs of families who do not have a traditional structure.
- The Parish has no platform for dialogue to address issues facing the Church.
- Importance of listening to people who have different views and how to improve this including for women, young people, and minority groups
- The use of jargon was noted as a barrier to inclusion and involvement
- Support for social clubs and activities is required – this is also a way to support Ecumenism

What have we done so far?

Welcome Volunteers

Welcome Volunteers are present at every Mass including Weddings and Funerals. Established during Covid, this has continued.

Improvements to the social life of the Parish

- Monthly teas & coffees are now available after 10:00am & 12 noon Masses.
- Catering has been re-established after certain Church events however this is limited by volunteer availability.
- Volunteers have been sought for a Parish social committee to support Church and Parish social events. Unfortunately, due to poor response, this has been put on hold.

Improvement to Church hall facilities

- Hall facilities require upgrading and we are looking at potential funding routes. Altho' the Parish debt has been paid off, repairs to the Church boundary wall will take precedence.

What have we still to do?

- Provide a Parish open forum to discuss challenging issues facing the Church and address the needs of those who feel excluded.
- Expand monthly teas and coffees at 10:00am & 12 noon Masses – this is dependent on additional volunteers.
- Continue to improve social life of Parish – a Parish Fete has been proposed.

3.2. Increasing lay involvement in the Parish**Feedback included**

- Need for greater lay involvement is critical, especially for those who feel there is no role for them in the Church beyond Mass attendance.
- There is a lack of information about volunteering opportunities, including for the Pastoral Council where the process for joining was unclear. Information about the need for volunteers beyond the Mass itself is needed along with greater proactivity in requesting volunteers and outlining their potential roles.
- Justice and Peace (and other similar areas) may be a way to engage those for whom the church seems less relevant.
- Currently there is a lack of outreach, with a need for greater proactivity within St Joseph's and with the wider community. The connection to ecumenism was identified, along with maximising scarce resources.
- Support for adult formation to develop the spiritual life of the Parish is required as we recover from C-19.
- The need for greater lay involvement is critical as it is not possible for one priest to manage on his own.
- There are opportunities to learn from and work with other local Churches

What have we done so far?**Establishment of a finance committee**

- This oversees fund-raising and maintenance and refurbishment of the Church and grounds. The Parish debt has been paid off. Work has included increasing Gift Aid, introducing QR codes in the Church; revitalising the 200 Club and upgrading lighting in the church and church hall, including emergency lighting, and smoke/heat alarm systems.

Helping Out in Our Parish Appeal

- The Pastoral Council appealed for additional volunteers for many of our clubs and societies last summer and over 60 Parishioners came forward. All Parishioners were integrated either into existing groups or helped to establish new groups. As an example, The Justice and Peace group was re-established and as well as looking to broaden its membership is also looking for volunteers to set up an Eco-committee.
- Volunteering opportunities can be found in the Church and on the St Joseph's website.

Pastoral Council

- Last summer's appeal led to three new members joining the Pastoral Council. Our minutes continue to be available on the Parish website and in a folder in the back porch for Parishioners without internet access.

- PC meetings are advertised in the bulletin with contact details for a PC member should Parishioners wish to have agenda items added.
- The hall is now fully reopened after the C-19 restrictions and we are keen for this to be used by both Church and community groups.

Clarkston Churches Together

- We have increased our support for the Clarkston Churches Together group but additional help would be welcome.

Adult Formation

- New members have joined the RCIA group to support adults wishing to join the Catholic Church
- Two open evening meetings are planned for September & October are under the title “In the light of the Gospel” which will be hosted by SCIAF.

What have we still to do?

- Re-establish regular support for adult formation beyond RCIA. This has not been taken forward within the Parish since before Covid-19.
- Explore opportunities to reach out beyond those who attend church regularly.
- Provide additional support for Clarkston Churches Together work

3.3. A different approach to young people

Feedback included

- The disengagement of children & young people from the church was identified as a priority
- There is a need to strengthen the connection between home, school and Parish
- St Joseph’s needs greater involvement of young people in the liturgy and in other volunteering roles within the Church. Some issues of relevance to young people may be a way to promote this e.g. justice and peace or climate change.

What have we done so far?

Involvement of children and young people in Mass

- Monthly Parish Family School Masses have been introduced at 10:00am Sunday
- Canon Stephen celebrates school masses weekly
- Children from St Joseph’s and OLM now volunteer at weekend Mass as part of their Pope Francis Award.

Pastoral council

- St Ninian’s school have representatives on the Pastoral Council
- The Parish Council has established close working relationships with the teaching staff in each of our three local Catholic schools. The PC will continue to be an important forum for discussing and identifying opportunities that could be taken to involve young people in the Life of the Parish.

Young people engagement

- A Young People Engagement Programme has been established with four consultation sessions being run before the summer to explore the challenges faced by our young people, the support currently available and what additional support would be welcomed. A follow up meeting was held for attendees to ratify a draft copy of the subsequent report.

What have we still to do?

- The Parish Council is currently reviewing the feedback from these five sessions with a view to identifying the most appropriate steps the Parish can take to support our young people in the development of their faith.

3.4. Better communication

Feedback included

- Concerns about the quality of the sound system with suggestions including projecting Mass parts and hymns.
- The principle behind the Link magazine was seen as a way to reach out beyond those who regularly attend Church.
- The lack of a forum for people to share news or offer opinions was noted.
- Our young people could support more effective engagement with social media.
- The use of jargon was noted as a barrier to inclusion & involvement.
- Communication with all Parishioners, given the size of the Parish, remains a challenge.

What have we done so far?

Parish Sound System

- During the summer a sound engineer reviewed the Parish sound system. Adjustments were made which have resulted in an improvement in the quality of the sound system.
- Announcements at the end of Mass are now made from the lectern.
- All Readers have been offered coaching and advice on the best practices to adopt in public speaking.

Link Newsletter

- During the Covid restrictions the Parish Link Newsletter was reestablished involving an extensive network of volunteers hand delivering link newsletters to parishioners' houses. This was one of the ways the parish reached out during the challenging times of Covid.
- A review of the Link newsletter system has been undertaken. The list of Parishioners and their addresses is so out-of-date this approach is no longer feasible. The various communication approaches below have replaced hand delivery of the Link Newsletter.

Parish e-bulletin

- This is produced weekly and is available on-line. Signing up through the Parish website means it can be delivered directly to personal mailboxes. Currently over 900 parishioners receive the weekly Parish e-bulletin through this route.
- A limited number of printed hard copies are available from the Sacristy every week, including A3 size for those who have a visual impairment.

On-line Parish register

- The Parish register has been established allowing parishioners to be quickly updated about current and future events within the Parish. To date over 550 parishioners have registered. All families within the parish are encouraged to have at least one member of the family registered thus enabling every household to be kept informed.

Text Messaging

- Eighty percent of those who are registered online also choose to receive parish text messages. These are used to inform parishioners about unplanned changes to parish services or key parish news and events. This is a very direct and very cost-effective means of communication.

Reaching Out

- Through our Parish linkage with our three Catholic Schools, OLM and St Joseph's primaries and St Ninians High School, key Parish news is now be communicated through the schools' communication network. This enables the Parish, with each school's prior agreement, to communicate directly with each pupil's family.
- **Website & Facebook Page**
Our Parish Website & Facebook Page, maintained by our volunteers, are key communication channels to inform parishioners of our activities and provide valuable information.

What have we still to do?

- Continue to promote the Parish register.
- Continue to enhance our communication process wherever possible.
- Involvement of young people in social media.
- The Parish Council is currently reviewing a proposal for on-line streaming of Masses.
- Consider innovative ways to communicate and invite those who do not attend church regularly.