

Minutes of Joint Diocesan Consultation Meeting for Holy Rood and Our Lady & St James

Held in Holy Rood Church Hall on 22nd April 2024 @ 7.00pm

Present

Monsignor Desmond Sexton, Fr Damian Humphries, Deacon Paul Green, 22 Parishioners from Holy Rood and 6 Parishioners from Our Lady & St James

Welcome

Fr Damian welcomed everyone present.

Deacon Paul Green opened the meeting with a prayer.

Fr Damian gave a brief synopsis of the purpose of the meeting.

Fr D stated it was appropriate to hold a joint meeting as the two parishes are already working together. This collaboration is beginning to bear fruit and it would have been a retrograde step to have met separately. The underlying 'philosophy' to this approach is 'stronger together'. Both parishes can be described as 'fragile'. HR has a large debt, whilst OL & SJ has a small congregation. Notable changes in church life have taken place, especially since the Covid19 pandemic in 2020. The collaboration already taking place has given everyone an opportunity to work more closely together, to maximise our resources and provide increased opportunities. Greater collaboration will need to be a 'mark' of the church locally, and at wider Deanery level, in the future. The collaboration between our two parishes is bearing fruit as evidenced in the parish statistics. Mass attendance is increasing. The number of children and young families is on the rise and there is a greater diversity of nationalities present at Mass. These all greatly enrich the life of our parishes. Another positive sign is that parishioners are willing to travel to the other parish when Mass is not celebrated in their usual place of worship. Deacon Paul in a recent homily mentioned the desirability of the two parishes working closely together. Past Joint Parish Life Group meetings have discussed possible parish amalgamation as a way of securing the future of our parishes and building on the 'stronger together' approach. What would change if amalgamation is implemented? Not much! Many of the changes that would need to be put in place are already present, such as the co-ordination of Mass times, Gift Aid organisation, Catechesis (including Baptism, First Holy Communion preparation, Confirmation preparation and R.C.I.A.) and joint celebration of the Sacred Triduum. What remains outstanding is amalgamation of parish finances, canonical formalities and the creation of the new parish. In this new scenario both churches would keep their existing names.

The Parish Statistics and this meeting's Questionnaire sheet have been provided for both congregations giving every parishioner an opportunity to submit questions and comments if they were unable to attend the meeting. These, along with Minutes from the meeting will be forwarded to the Diocese in due course. Three questionnaire sheets were sent to Fr Damian prior to the meeting.

QUESTION 1 Good Signs

(Including Comments/ Questions from previously submitted questionnaire sheets)

There are good signs in the Parish. Daily Masses still being celebrated. Friendship, Good attendance, Approachable Parish Priest, and enjoyable Liturgies.

SP (HR) Fifteen regular readers at Holy Rood, mostly female. The Altar Servers are also mostly female and are well trained. The Liturgy is flourishing at Holy Rood. Thanks were expressed to Deacon Paul for his work in the Parish.

GG (OL/SJ) There is diversity at Our Lady's. It is a friendly welcoming Parish and Our Lady's has money.

AB (HR) There are frequent Baptisms and a diverse congregation. The Polish Community are attending regularly. Questioned why the Syro Malabar and Polish Communities don't attend meetings.

AW (OL/SJ) Said that Post Covid the Parishes are growing and doing well. HR is flourishing and both parishes support one another, amalgamation is already well underway in many areas of Parish life. OL/SJ is a small friendly parish whilst HR is an impressive Building with a special ambiance.

EV (HR) Finds the parishes very welcoming. The present Mass timings meet family needs. A good future can be foreseen for both parishes. There are lots of opportunities for future growth and success.

EG (HR) Appreciates the warm welcome she has received since arriving in Barnsley. She is looking forward to the future.

QUESTION 2 Concerns

Continuing falling numbers (Fr D stated that the statistics proves this to be a false statement).

Lack of young people, Not enough emphasis on Catholic Schools, Not many teenagers, No new Priests, Too many passive parishioners, a need for more commitment to the church.

JL (HR) Stated that there is a fall in congregation numbers. (Fr D stated previously that the statistic sheet proves this to be a false statement)

Mons DS Answered - This a Diocesan issue, indeed a countrywide problem. People have got out of the habit of attending church, especially post-covid. ill health, aged parishioners and deaths are all reasons for falling numbers. There are some improvements being seen - building closer friendships with one another is one example. Do we personally know who the missing people are? How many people do we know at church? Some people are still afraid to attend Mass because of Covid and it's after effects. Some young families haven't returned. Outreach is important.

JL (HR) Data could be kept so that we recognise who is missing from the congregation.

Fr D Registers quickly become outdated. The community is not a settled/rooted community.

JL (HR) Suggested cards could be filled out with the contact details of congregation members.

CO'S (HR) Many people have lost their confidence in attending church, especially vulnerable members of the congregation.

Mon DS Answered - Data keeping is a very complex process, which does not always work for the good.

AB (HR) The pandemic meant we lost a lot of people who have not returned. The housebound are not necessarily known to us. People with dementia are particularly at risk of slipping beneath the radar.

Deacon P Families are not as involved as they once were for a variety of reasons. He agreed that Dementia is a very common problem for members of the church.

AB (HR) There is an ageing population at church and no one is taking over from them. The younger members of the older congregation are active and being used, but no new young people are volunteering to do the work.

SA (HR) Links between Parish and School are worryingly low. Suggested that more families should be involved in reading or the offertory.

Fr D Answered that there are two young governors on the governing board. The school is far more involved at this time than in the past. There are young people involved in the Liturgy, reading and serving on the Altar.

Deacon P Stated that he had visited the school that morning, he received a warm friendly welcome. He found there to be a good foundation to build on in the future.

Mons DS Explained that there are often issues between various schools, and that the Parish cannot tell the school what to do.

GT (HR) Suggested that Sacramental preparation for First Communion candidates should take place in the school setting.

JG (HR) Stated that the First Communion Programme was going very well with 26 children regularly attending.

Mons DS Responded that the best place for Sacramental preparation is always in the parish.

Fr D Said that the numbers of Catholic children in the school is quite low. Work is being undertaken to improve the links between the church and the schools. Fr also said that the number of children attending the newly restarted children's liturgy sessions is encouraging.

CH (HR) It is the responsibility of parents to raise their children in the practise of the faith. Geography and other family dynamics and activities also play a part in when and how parents can bring their children to Mass.

JO'S (HR) Do we stand alone in decision making or are we answerable to the Diocesan processes.

The demographic of churches change when priests retire or are moved.

Fr D Explained that the discussions taking place locally will become a part of the Diocesan process.

Amalgamation is already taking place within the Deanery - Wombwell has three churches, one parish with one priest.

VA (HR) There is a lack of youth activity in the parishes. No call for a Youth Club, activities could be offered for early senior school pupils.

SC (HR) Groups could be formed according to age for example 7-9yrs, 11-14yrs. There is a need for people to commit to help on a regular basis.

GG (OL/SJ) Said that the commitment needed for a particular activity is usually more than just the hour a week that the activity is planned to take.

LV (OL/SJ) Stated it isn't possible to just 'start a group'. Many safeguarding and H&S rules and regulations have to be complied with to successfully start and consequently manage a group.

BM (HR) Said that his own family don't attend church. Lack of transport and geographical issues may play a part in people being unable to attend. Community feel has disappeared.

GT (HR) Also stated that the community feel had disappeared.

AB (HR) The dynamics of Barnsley Town Centre have altered a lot in the last few years. Life has changed and we need to change too.

SC (HR) Has tried to organise several social events, but the response has been generally poor. The Table Top sales held on the Feast of Christ the King, over the last few years, have however been more successful. Sharon is going to try a few different social activities to raise money for charities as well as the parish. The Syro Malabar community have been invited to join in with the May Procession. There is a need to rebuild.

GG (OL/SJ) Enquiries could be made from other churches about what works well for them.

GT (HR) International Events should take place.

SC (HR) We could have discussions with Sue McDonald for Diocesan advice.

Fr D Said that the 15yr and older teens are missing from the churches throughout the diocese and the country. We should be working hard to hang on to them for longer. There is a need for the youth to feel supported.

Mons DS Stated that many resources and information can be found by using the Google search engine.

PG (OL/SJ) Made enquiries about the Diocesan newspaper which had been available in the past.

GT (HR) Asked how the parish could afford to pay the organist £10,000 per annum for his services.

Fr D Answered that the organist was not paid £10,000. Fr explained that the biggest problems in regard to financing the parish is the current cost of living crisis. Fr D said that the everyday costs of running the parishes is constantly rising. The heating costs at HR have increased by approximately £6,000 in the past year. The church is difficult to keep warm and the heating is on for many hours to try to make the church a comfortable space for people. Fr D also stated that a Parish Priest has to be sensitive to peoples' financial situation and has to be aware that many give as much as they can possibly afford each week.

Question 3 How to prepare for 2025

Some things may remain the same as they are now. A need for an active congregation. There are facilities in place for improvements to be made for 2025.

AB (HR) Would like the number of Masses to remain the same as now. Parties for First Communicants and Baptism children could be arranged. The baptism course encourages young families.

CH (HR) Asked what length of time is needed to complete amalgamation.

Mons DS It is not necessarily a long process. Sharing together is the most important aspect of the process. There is a need for the two churches to work more closely together.

GT (HR) Asked if the HR debt has to be cleared before amalgamation can take place.

Mons DS We are a Universal Church and working together is far more important than money.

SP (HR) The Jubilee discussion was unexpected. He had thought that the meeting was about the next step towards amalgamation.

Fr D Plans will be organised by Deacon Paul for the Jubilee celebrations. The amalgamation could go forward by the the celebration of the “Pilgrimage of Hope” Jubilee.

Mons DS Stated that there are ways to move forward with the amalgamation plans of the two parishes within the Diocesan plans for the Jubilee year of 2025.

Question 4 Actions for the Parish to take.

Communication between clergy and people needed to help towards the plans needed for 2025.

EV (HR) We need to look to ourselves to see how we can support the parishes. We should not be judgemental of other peoples’ participation in parish life.

Deacon P We have to look to ourselves to see if we can do more to support one another.

Fr D Quoted “Be the change that you want to see in the world”.

Mons DS Ask yourselves What can I do as an individual? What can we do as a community?

GG (OL/SJ) Suggested organising a Parish Retreat. We could ask our lapsed friends to return to church. Make sure that we know who is attending church.

Fr D It is all our responsibility to work for the benefit of the parishes.

Deacon P The family has the most influence on the faith life of their family, his own experience with his mother had drawn him to be an active member of the church. We need to be that positive person to others.

Father Damian closed the meeting with a prayer and thanked everyone for their attendance and participation in the meeting.