

ST PETER'S PARISH PASTORAL COUNCIL

OPEN MEETING ON PROPOSED REORGANISATION OF PARISHES/CLUSTERS PARISH ROOM, WEDNESDAY 22 APRIL 2015

Present

Parish Pastoral Council Office Bearers: Mgr Kerr, President; Peter Nicholson, Chairman; and John Wastle, Secretary; and 28 parishioners. Five parishioners had sent apologies.

Introduction

1. Mgr Kerr opened the meeting with a welcome and a reminder that the meeting had been arranged by the Parish Pastoral Council (PPC) to give parishioners the opportunity to discuss the implications of the proposals for parish/cluster reorganisation set out in the Archbishop's letter of 10 January 2015. The meeting would be led by the Peter Nicholson, PPC Chairman, and a note of the proceedings would be made by John Wastle, PPC Secretary.

Recent developments

2. The Chairman recalled that, following publication of the Archbishop's letter, he had spoken from the altar at Mass on Sunday 25 January. He had summarised the contents of the letter, copies of which were distributed after Mass, and gave an assurance that the PPC would be active and proactive in the consultation process in co-operation, as far as possible, with the other parishes in the proposed cluster. He also undertook to keep parishioners informed of subsequent developments. Since then the issues arising from the letter have been closely considered at meetings of our own PPC, and also at a meeting which we arranged with representatives of the other parishes - St Columba's, Sacred Heart and St Mark's - on 25 February.

3. The cluster meeting was, as we intended, friendly, co-operative and open minded and revealed different stages of progress at that point. The outcome was an agreement that a joint response should be sent to the Archbishop setting out our questions and concerns about his proposals. Copies of the note of the cluster meeting and the joint response were made available to parishioners. The Archbishop sent a very brief acknowledgement on 9 March, indicating that he would soon issue a Pastoral Letter which he hoped would answer many of our concerns. In the event, the Pastoral Letter *We have found the Messiah* published and distributed on Palm Sunday, 29 March, revealed no obvious change of direction.

4. In the meantime, the open meeting originally scheduled for Monday 9 March had to be postponed in the light of changed circumstances. However, we were able to keep in touch with wider events including an all-day meeting on Saturday 14 March at the Sacred Heart organised by the Vigil Group (which has a commitment to pray for the renewal of the Church) on the theme *Sharing Vision - the future of the Church*. This event was attended by the Chairman and other parishioners. The Chairman concluded his review with the news that the Archbishop intended to embark on a series of consultation meetings with each parish cluster, starting in the Autumn 2015 and extending over some 7-8 months.

Open discussion

5. Opening the meeting to questions and discussion, the Chairman reported that the PPC meeting on 13 April had agreed that a detailed response, informed by this meeting, would be sent to the Archbishop. There followed a series of questions and comments on the Archbishop's proposals and a lively exchange of views on their implications for St Peter's, the proposed cluster and the wider Archdiocesan community. A number of key points emerged:

- it is clear that things must change but we should see the way forward in a positive, constructive way, as in the 2006 consultation around *Now is the Favourable Time*, rather than be constrained by plans based solely on negative factors;
- the most positive step is to recognise that our body of lay people have already proved to be a most valuable asset which, led by the Church authorities, should be strengthened further to meet forthcoming challenges;
- it is vitally important to plan to sustain parish communities over the longer term, based on a revitalised laity and an acceptance that it will be necessary to be co-operative and constructive in relation to the wider community, for example by sharing financial and other resources;
- it follows that much more detailed information about the condition of the Archdiocese is required to be able to put forward planning on a sound footing.

6. In discussion a number of other points were made. The Archdiocese should:

- recognise the important, different characteristics of parishes in the city, small towns and rural areas;
- increase efforts to attract local vocations, deacons and priests from overseas; release clergy from non-priestly duties and consider paid pastoral workers;
- continue to press the case for married and women priests;
- realise assets, including property and parish "treasures"
- adopt the continuous planning required to cope with evolving circumstances.

7. In relation to St Peter's, we should assert our commitment to the wider community at cluster level and beyond. At the same time we should not hesitate to promote St Peter's as a vibrant, financially sound parish community, well able to sustain itself into the future and willing, if called upon, to take the leading role in a cluster of local parishes. We can cite a committed and supportive parish priest, and a laity which already takes responsibility for leading a wide range of liturgical, pastoral and social activities, services and organisations. Our relationship with St Peter's Primary School is a key feature of the parish.

Conclusion

8. The meeting endorsed the PPC's proposal that we should send a comprehensive response to the Archbishop's proposals, drawing on the discussions at PPC and cluster meetings and, in particular, on the matters set out in paragraphs 5 and 6 above and others raised at this open meeting. The Secretary undertook to draft this response which would be distributed to parishioners in due course.

9. The Chairman thanked everyone for attending and for participating in this very important consideration of the future of the Church. Mgr Kerr closed the meeting with a prayer and a blessing.