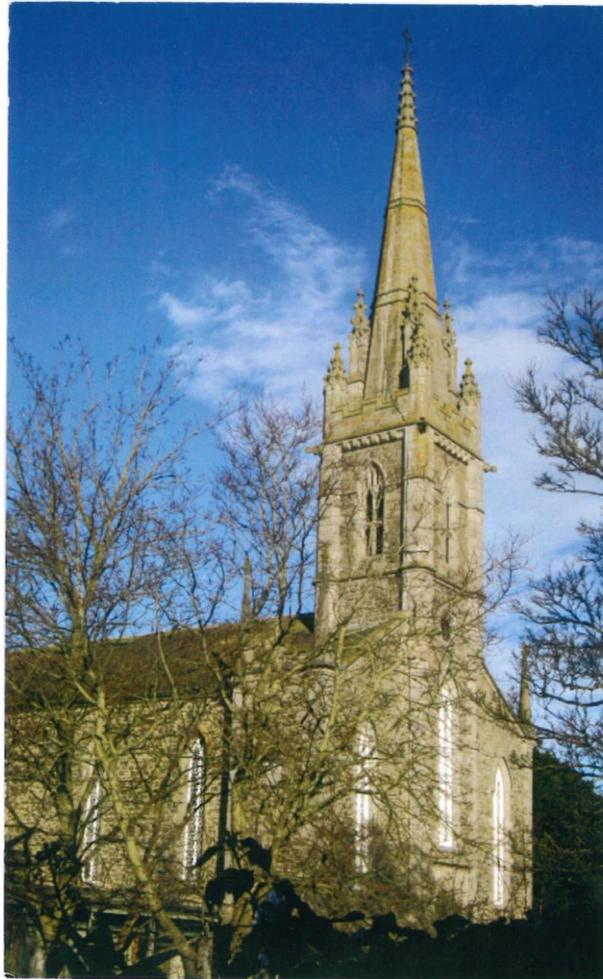


An Evaluation of the Activities of St Sylvester's Parish Groups

On behalf of

St Sylvester's Parish Pastoral Council, Malahide, Co Dublin

31st January 2017



St Sylvester's Parish Mission Statement

The mission of St Sylvester's Parish is to seek and proclaim a meaning for life based on the Good News of Jesus Christ.

Vision of St Sylvester's Parish

Through the Power of the Holy Spirit, our vision is to build a community of love and respect by helping and supporting each other to grow in our relationship with Jesus Christ.

St Sylvester's Parish Pastoral Council (PPC)

Report Findings from Questionnaire

25th January 2017

SUMMARY

This report presents a review of the work of the 35 groups working in a voluntary capacity serving the parishioners in St Sylvester's Parish, Malahide. The Report is presented by the Parish Pastoral Council (PPC).

During the PPC Meeting in November 2015 a decision was made to meet with co-ordinators of the groups undertaking pastoral work in St Sylvester's Parish in order to acknowledge their pastoral work and to offer support. The Council believes that meeting with co-ordinators will provide the Council with greater insight into the valuable parish work being undertaken so that they may provide future support, should groups/individuals want this support. It was acknowledged by the Council that a previous PCC had undertaken a similar exercise but that it was now timely to seek Parish group members for updates as a new Parish Council had been appointed in September 2015.

Each coordinator presented the groups primary activities, many of which are multiple. All group members work in a voluntary capacity providing a valuable service to the community and provide their time in a selfless manner that is exemplary and often hidden from public view.

Questions centred on group demographic details; current and future group aims; how the Parish Pastoral Council may assist the group in achieving their goals; the main forms of communication used within the group; how parish activities are undertaken; frequency in determining group activities; supports provided to the group by the Parish Council and resources the Parish Council could provide that would allow the group achieve better outcomes; how new members are recruited and training undertaken or needed for the role. Future group activities, including services being offered in the immediate year and planned, are outlined and are mainly determined by the needs of parishioners.

A range of skills are offered by groups including spiritual, planning, implementing, communicating and fundraising. The challenges facing each

group are presented and range from time constraints and the need for more resources to ensuring PPC members as well as individual groups feel their individual contributions are needed and worthwhile. Maintaining group momentum and vitalising energy for remaining PPC and group terms of office are considered. Details of comments provided by co-ordinators are presented in **Table 1**.

INTRODUCTION

This research was undertaken between November 2015-February 2016 and data were collected between March and June 2016. Results were analysed in May/June by Marie Carney. Draft 1 of findings was presented to the Pastoral Council for discussion during the June Pastoral Council Meeting. Preliminary findings were sent to PPC members on May 24 for their perusal. The Report findings were discussed during the September and October meetings of the Council. The Final report was sent to all co-ordinators in November and placed on the Parish Web page in December 2016.

Development of Questionnaire

This work was underpinned by the development of a questionnaire the purpose of which was to seek information from group coordinator's regarding their parish work. Marie Carney, PPC member developed a questionnaire designed to seek group co-ordinators views. Three Council members: Marie Carney, Ann Lyons and PJ McAllister volunteered to meet with co-ordinators and undertake this work. Questionnaire types were developed and two examples were designed for small and large groups. The group met in the Parish Centre in November when a set of draft questions were discussed, following which some revisions were made. This revised questionnaire was forwarded to Father Kevin Moore, Parish Administrator prior to presentation to the PPC in December 2015. Following a long discussion on the structure, format and content the PPC at the December and January meetings agreed that the three members mentioned and three additional members: Regina McHugh, Ray Daly and Dorothy Hickey would each arrange to meet with a defined number of group co-ordinators and discuss the questionnaire content which could be completed by the individual or by the co-ordinator on their

behalf and then sent to Marie for analysis. A shortened questionnaire was developed for small groups of two persons and a more detailed one for larger groups.

Sample size: Thirty coordinators who are members of St Sylvester's Parish.

Timeframe: The research was undertaken between November 2015 and September 2016. Questionnaires and interviews took place between March and July 2016.

Findings and Discussion

The title of each Parish group and its chairperson/coordinator were identified.

Group activities: Each group coordinator was asked to identify the main activities undertaken by the group. Activities are determined by the group who provide a service to the parish of St. Sylvester, Malahide and are multiple in nature.

Year group formed: The approximate year that each group was first formed within the parish was established. This ranged from 1910 for the longest standing group (church choir) to 2014 when the most recent was formed.

Average number in group: The average number in each group was identified and ranged from 2- 120 (one prayer group has 400 members).

Time spent by group members on parish work: This varied and ranged from 2 to 15 hours per month, per group. It was also understood that time spent was often underestimated and depended, in many instances, to that required for specific activities.

Group's Current Activities

Aims and activities are determined by group purpose. A strong thread running through each group's aims is to support the priests of the parish in pastoral and community work, acting as a reflective planning group with a spiritual dimension, to serve, support and offer friendship to parishioners and to ensure planning for future parish building and restoration. Pastoral support for parish activities includes groups involved in recruitment for new members, scheduling servers for Eucharistic Ministry, Meditation, Church Masses and Reflection on

the Scriptures. External Spiritual community activities include providing 62 daily meals on wheels, organising the monthly St Padre Pio Devotions, yearly pilgrimages, driving people to hospital for doctor visits, assisting persons in their own home and offering respite to care. Specific church groups include welcoming parents to Baptism and Bereavement meetings and ministering and singing at Masses and various Parish Ceremonies. Holding Taize Evening Prayer Meetings and providing reflection, bible readings and preparing liturgy for funerals are also important activities. See Table 1

Future Group Objectives

Coordinators were asked what they were hoping their group would achieve during the next five years. Many talked of re-focusing spiritual aspects of their parish work and fine-tuning good practice by the group. Planning groups will focus on overseeing new building refurbishment, fund raising and maintaining healthy parish finances. Spiritual groups will continue to provide music for Masses and enhance choir activity. Recruiting new members to MYYAM for musical Masses and for spiritual work, whilst providing social, spiritual and service based activities in different areas/parishes, will take place. Ministers of the Eucharist will continue to administer the Eucharist during church Masses and other groups will help the sick and elderly, provide Meals on Wheels services and continue to raise money to bring the sick and elderly on church pilgrimages through church collections. Lectio Divina Prayer will continue one morning each week. The Bereavement Group will continue to support the bereaved and assist families with funeral liturgy preparation. Providing social, spiritual and service based activities in different areas/parishes will continue whilst keeping the church looking beautiful. See Table 1

Challenges Facing the Group

Challenges facing the groups are wide ranging. Group coordinators presented the challenges they believe will limit their pastoral work in the future. They had analysed these issues and discussed them with group members. Challenges are related mainly to spiritual, motivational, planning and operational matters. At the forefront of most coordinators vision is the need to recruit, renew, rejuvenate, sustain and maintain committee membership into the future. Motivational needs range from PPC members and group members desire to

feel their individual contribution is needed and worthwhile to vitalising individual musical energy and developing leaders within groups.

Financing issues are important and will do so in the future. Coordinators concerned with financial matters advise on the need to provide a structured fund raising function with specific responsibility for this role whilst balancing current building development finances and ensuring re-payment of capital leading to a self-financing state.

Operational challenges include the need to secure sufficient voluntary drives to support the group's charitable work, maintaining altar servers, choir members, and attracting new members to continue to provide bereavement Services and to MYYAM to enable them to provide their musical support to other groups and to provide Taize involvement in the Parish and in the North Dublin Hub. Ensuring the parish Newsletter continues its weekly publications and the need for the PPC to make future decisions regarding the way forward and the material to publish is important.

Spiritual activity was mentioned by several groups as being challenging with the need to obtain Spiritual Directors to assist during pilgrimages and in praying and meditation and devotions to the Way of the Lord including reflection, bible readings and preparing liturgy for funerals. See Table 1 for future group challenges.

How the PPC may assist Groups

When coordinators were asked how the PPC could assist group members in reaching their goals thoughtful replies were presented as well as discussion with the Pastoral Council members seeking the responses. Responses focused on leadership, motivational, spiritual and operational requirements. Recognising individual strengths and in providing support in fostering and utilising their talents were mentioned by several coordinators. Leadership support is needed by both the PPC and by individual groups. The need to value individual and group contributions and to offer support when needed by the PPC and group coordinators in chairing, supporting and assisting members in staying- on-track and remaining focused on future objectives were viewed as important. Recognising the hard work, skill, time and lifting undertaken by

group members including the church floral arrangers, church carers and meals on wheels members were mentioned.

Financial needs are also to the fore with the need for greater awareness of, and promotion of parish centre facilities thus ensuring that the profitability of the Parish Centre is maintained as well as providing required funds for group needs. Needs ranged from supporting fund raising to funding spiritual directors to accompany Pilgrimages to providing funding for Child Protection Course for members as TUSLA previously funded this work and this funding is no longer available. The Finance Committee seek PPC support in continuing to support any initiatives undertaken by them and in maintaining a Finance Committee member on the PPC, as in the past. See Table 1

Planning of Group Activities

Planning and organisation of group activities were discussed. Planning takes place in collaboration with other groups and with the Parish Office and Parish Centre manager mainly and with Father Kevin Moore and Sister Margaret, recently retired. The Meals on Wheels and Finance Groups undertake their planning activities in close collaboration with the Parish Centre Kitchen/coffee shop managers. Planning is a key feature in the Spiritual work of MYYAM in providing Faith Based education and training for young persons. Introducing training to individuals in the skill of meditation in order to assist leaders acquire this skill and in providing confidence-building work on a practical level for potential leaders and facilitators. This could include running a seminar on group facilitation and leadership and possibly assisting other parish groups with those skills also. Spiritual training from external experts is mentioned. Promoting Christian Meditation, Bethany Bereavement and Baptism groups in addition to providing in-service training and support for World Youth Day are viewed as necessary for group spiritual development as well as planning speakers for Annual Remembrance Service.

Operational requirements include supporting the Parish Newsletter team by advising and helping with editorial direction and content. Running the monthly St Padre Pio devotions requires that notices relating to this work needs to be read out at the Sunday Mass before the 1st Friday of every month and posted on the Parish Notice Board. The need to replace old musical equipment and

microphones were mentioned as a future need on possibly a phased basis. Placing message on the Parish Newsletter and on the Parish Web site are mentioned as a valuable means of communication with parishioners particularly in seeking new members to groups, more voluntary drivers and helpers for Meals on Wheels. Planning takes place with internal and external groups and individuals and at diocesan and parish levels for example in consultation with the local public health nurse or relevant bodies connected with Pilgrimage traveller and priest recruitment. Linking in with Taize Group during planning of seminars and Meditation and with the News Letter group editors are viewed as important planning activities. See Table 1

Fostering Sense of Connectedness

An important factor in group sustainability is fostering a sense of connectedness with PPC and parish groups. This is maintained through an open approach to dialogue by promoting, inviting and working with other parish groups whilst promoting St Sylvester's Parish as a welcoming and inclusive parish that recognises the value of group contributions.

A key function in fostering group cohesiveness is viewed as facilitating and promoting group connectedness thus ensuring that groups feel well connected with other groups and with the PPC. Spiritual cohesiveness includes promotion of social, spiritual and service in the parish and outside with for example, the Priests of the Parish, Spiritual Director, Parish Office and Parish Centre in coordinating group activities.

Planning groups mention the need to meet occasionally or regularly with the PPC at monthly meetings and with the Parish Office/Parish Centre Manager on a regular basis. Buildings Development committee members see the need for close collaboration on the use of the Parish Centre kitchen.

MYYAM group members feel well connected with other groups and are grateful for the facilities offered by the PPC. They seek to perform to the best of their abilities on all occasions and to assist in promoting and working with other musical parish groups.

Group Communication Forms

The main communication forms used by groups are meetings, face-to-face, e-mail, telephone, Parish News Letter, Parish Website, church announcements, and having regular contact with Father Kevin Moore, the Parish Office through Sister Margaret (now retired) and Sharon O' Sullivan, Parish Centre manager. Some groups would like to reinstate contact previously in place and to meet on a regular basis with relevant groups within and external to the parish including with the PPC and the Parish Finance Committee. The number of time spent by groups on meetings and communication forms is set out in the first column of Table 1 and is testimony to the extraordinary work undertaken.

Specific external group communications include the Parish Pilgrimage Group who meets with bus and coach tour organisers relating to travel for parishioners, MYAM who relate to young people for Youth Day and the North Dublin Hub and linking in with Taize and with other groups for night and special music events. Other groups meet with Garda who undertake the Garda vetting processes needed for members to undertake their activities or ministry. Meditation groups mention communication with Spiritual Director Fr A. O Neill OFM and with San Giovanni Rotondo, Italy who support them in promoting meditation and liturgy.

Informal meetings are held on a regular basis by for example confirmation, liturgy, Mass and Sacristans groups, with Father Kevin and with hospitality groups. See Table 1

Resources Provided by PPC to Groups

All groups acknowledge the resources provided to them in various forms by the PPC including the physical, financial and spiritual resources provided within the church, Parish Office and Parish Centre that is invaluable in allowing them achieve their objectives. Support received from the Priests of the Parish, particularly Father Kevin and Sister Margaret, are mentioned as motivational and inspirational.

The Buildings Committee director acknowledge the financial support offered during the building of the parish centre and say that *"all that was needed during all stages of the building planning and construction phases were provided by the PPC, other relevant groups and individuals"*. The group also acknowledge that monies raised from draws, Christmas Fair and Standing

Order contributions from parishioners supported the project and ensured the completion of a beautiful Parish Centre.

Resources Need by Group

Several groups are seeking PPC support in the coming years in order to allow them achieve future aims and deliver excellent services to the parish. Supports needed are spiritual, communication, financial, organisational and leadership. Some groups would like to meet with the PPC in order to present their activities and to see how the PPC may support the group in their Ministry.

Motivational support from the PPC would be appreciated by the Meditation Group as they believe that this would be helpful in assisting new and existing members to overcome their reluctance to take on leader roles and in developing member confidence.

Spiritual support is cited by the Pilgrimage group who seek PPC support in recruiting Spiritual Directors to accompany Pilgrimages to Lourdes, Knock and Fatima specifically and in raising funds through Parish Church collections, to bring sick, elderly and infirm to Lourdes. Support is also needed to facilitate church meetings with priests and societies connected with recruitment of priests. PPC support in recruitment to groups and in advertising group activities through the Parish Newsletter and Parish Web Site would be helpful. PPC support in promoting group activities as in Taize meditation and spiritual as well as providing music at evening masses is mentioned by the MYYAM group, who also seek support in Inviting young people from other parishes to visit and join MYYAM and to provide support with hospitality. The Hospitality and Christmas Church Fair groups present a warm, generous and welcoming face to parishioners through their group work.

Operational resources needed by groups include providing information on parish notice board and from the altar. Newsletter editors would like the PPC to provide editorial direction in relation to the content and function of Newsletter.

The Building Development Committee acknowledge PPC support in the past and seek their future support in setting up a dedicated Fund raising function so

that future planned church refurbishment may be undertaken. This group also seek to meet with the PPC on a regular basis. The Finance Committee seek to maintain a member on the PPC in order to provide up to date guidance to the group and to allow them provide support for any initiatives being undertaken by the Finance Committee. They seek PPC assistance in creating a succession plan.

Support from PPC in maintaining Parish Centre kitchen support and coordination for the Meals on Wheels service is needed. Meals on Wheels also seek PPC support in providing information on the parish website relating to availability, delivery days and service operations and to communicate this service to the local community. Prayer, Liturgy and Meditation groups seek the continued use of the Prayer Room in order to provide their ministry and in providing parish website publicity. See Table 1

Training and Education

Most group coordinators are confident that the education and training they hold is sufficient for them to undertake their roles within the parish and to achieve group objectives. Some groups would appreciate further training and education for the role. This includes pastoral and spiritual training from the Archbishop's office, ability to undertake Child Protection Courses, Leadership Skills training, Recruitment training, and the Church Carer group would like to undertake training on organisation of work from Nuns if possible, in relation to caring of fine Linens and fine details. Training to undertake the role as Mass Servers would support this group. Leadership training would be acceptable to some group members to encourage new coordinators and members into groups. PPC support is sought in developing the talents of the choir, assistance in developing the role of ministers of baptism, attending diocesan Reflection and other courses, successor training and introductory training before starting the ministry. Support for the continuation of the 12 week training programme in Child and Mother and the 6 week training programme prior to administering the Eucharist Ministry is needed. See Table 1

Process of Recruitment of new members to Group

Recruitment takes many forms. The majority of groups recruit their own volunteers through word of mouth, individual contact, based on individual talents and expertise, through parish support, and by announcements from the altar, church notice boards, via Church Newsletter and Parish Website by visits to local schools for example Mass Servers and to Public Health Nurses and local doctors.

Recruitment by a few groups has not taken place in recent years due to the group having a cohesive, dedicated, committed membership possessing the required talents and experience in, for example building planning and finance. Some group need renewal now but advise that members must have the required expertise needed for the role. Other groups recruit through dissemination of role requirements at Parish team level and by individual meetings with interested persons and from the Altar. See Table 1.

CONCLUSION

All group members are working in a voluntary capacity serving the parishioners in St Sylvester's Parish, Malahide. They provide a valuable service to the community by giving their time and efforts in a selfless manner that is exemplary and often hidden from public view. The amount of time spent on parish activities depends, in many instances, on that required for specific activities and is often underestimated. What is striking is the multiplicity of activities undertaken by group co-ordinators and members. All groups express their thanks to the PPC, Priests, Parish Office and Parish Centre managers and website editors for their continued support. The Parish Pastoral Council offer their thanks and appreciation to all group members for their selfless activity on behalf of the parish.

The Future

The PPC, during their monthly meetings, will discuss how the church groups may be assisted in fulfilling their activities. Some group requirements have been met. A Ceremony of Involvement took place in St Sylvester's Parish Church on the 15th November in which all group coordinators and group members were invited. Father Kevin Moore officiated. He was supported by the PPC and group members. The PPC will continue to discuss group requests

and requirements and will present a short report on the supports offered to groups at the end of 2017.