

Tynemouth Priory Partnership of Catholic Parishes

Minutes of the meeting of the Partnership Development Group held on 18th October 2017.

Present: Mgr. A Faley, Ian Pearson (Chair) Andrea Hall (Vice Chair) Fr. John McElhone, Deacon Terry McGann, Joe James, Damian O'Connor, Michael Thompson, Theresa Anderson, Margaret Dodds, David Leane, Andrew James, Michael Wade, Lynne O'Hare.

Apologies for absence were received from Frs. Chris Hughes & Martin Stempczyk, Andy Merchant, Terry O'Brien, and Pat Brennan.

The Chair welcomed everyone and thanked the members for contributing to the shared table which we had just enjoyed.

After opening the meeting with a prayer, Mgr Faley reported back from the Vicariate meeting whose theme had been "Why Partnerships? Some key messages." With 33,000 churchgoers and 185 churches in the diocese, the falling number of priests underlines the importance of tackling the present challenge rather than dreaming up projects. On the positive side, we have a wealth of active lay people; 20% of the laity undertake some form of service or ministry. The challenge is how to energise the remaining 80%, most of whom are simply asking "Will there have to be fewer church buildings?" People are now talking in terms of 'church' rather than 'parish'; and 'church' can mean school, community, the gathered people.

Fr. McElhone stressed the need to learn from the past and manage growth, not decline. Where and what are the pathways of growth? It is the community that makes the church, not the buildings. What brings and holds the people together?

Ian Pearson asked should we close church buildings just because there is no Sunday Mass, or is there some way in which these buildings can be used to grow the community.

Joe James described a model of a church that thrives through being open to the needs of groups of people; young mothers (and fathers) with toddlers, senior citizens, youth; and drawing them into community through activities, serving social needs rather than placing emphasis on attendance and rules.

Margaret Dodds urged us to adopt a welcoming approach, rather than an exclusive or judgemental one.

Mgr. Faley stressed the importance of evangelisation through outreach, asking 'What are (young) people looking for in "Church"? Sadly many older ones simply want a (Requiem) Mass provided.

Fr. McElhone suggested that the diocese has a lot of information about each parish that we do not have, but need in order to make good decisions.

Andrew James and Andrea Hall both spoke of the importance of establishing and sustaining relationships, from which effective partnership will emerge.

Andrea reminded the group of the need to identify the strengths of each parish, and to consider how these can be shared to grow a relationship of parishes.

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held on 18th October 2017. (Continued)**

Fr. McElhone asked 'How do we continue the work of Jesus?' and suggested that this is through prayer, and then living out prayer through action.

Mgr. Faley asked us to consider

- how we should report back to the parishes;
- how to plan a way forward by looking at parish strengths and challenges;
- and how to tease out a shared vision to promote a lively and effective church.

Margaret Dodds announced that she had decided to stand down as a member of the Group, and that Damian O'Connor and Pat Brennan would continue as representatives for St Columba's parish.

The next meeting was arranged for 15th November at St.Mary's, Cullercoats, at 7.00 pm. At this meeting we are to report back on parish strengths and weaknesses, to plan a response to the reduced number of clergy, and to take a brief time for each of us to share our own perception of our own individual past experience and our hopes for the future of the Church and of our Partnership.

The following meeting will be on 20th December at St Cuthbert's.