

A REPORT ON LAST SUNDAY'S ST JOHN'S OPEN PARISH MEETING

Pentecost Sunday, 19 May 2024.

31 parishioners met with Fr Jock in St John's church hall. Donald Scott, Chair of the Parish Pastoral Council, welcomed everyone. The meeting began with the reading of a poem, written by the late Canon Andrew Monaghan, entitled 'Pentecost'. Fr Jock then offered a prayer for a fruitful, spirit-led evening.

Donald noted that the Minute/ Report from the last OPM on 12 November 2023 was available online. The agenda for this OPM would overtake many of the issues raised six months ago. Donald reported that apologies had been received from Catrina McGillivray and Catherine McAnenny and then outlined the agenda and timings for this OPM. He highlighted the continued focus on a 'synodal' approach to discussions, allowing time for everyone to be heard and to speak.

A brief 'group sharing' discussion then followed, where parishioners were invited to consider the question 'what are you hoping for tonight?'.

Fr Jock then summarised events since the last OPM on 12 November 2023 and outlined some future plans. His comments were made in the context of the Key Areas of Parish Life document, copies of which were circulated.

Liturgy, Celebration of the Sacraments, Prayer

Since the last OPM, the parish has celebrated Advent, Christmas, Lent and Easter. There have been monthly Healing Masses, which continue to attract nearly 100 attendees from across Edinburgh and Fife.

Bereavement Masses, organised by the Bereavement Team led by Colette Dempsey, continue to offer support to the recently bereaved. As part of this Ministry, individual letters of invitation are sent out. The Bereavement Team also sends cards to mark the first anniversary of a death, as part of ongoing outreach. Fr Jock paid tribute to the enormous amount of work done by Colette. In the last 6 months, there have been funerals, weddings, baptisms, Quarant'ore, monthly Holy Hour, Cluster Retreats and Name Tag Sundays. Deacon Eddie mentioned the strong, supportive live-streaming team which continues to offer online access to most services for parishioners near and far.

Future plans include consideration of more 'adoration' opportunities. Tied in with this is the proposed further development of the Blessed Sacrament Chapel, to make it a more welcoming space for private prayer.

Faith Formation

At the Easter Vigil, 8 people who had been part of the RCIA course were variously baptised, received, confirmed and/or made their First Communion. The new Sacramental Preparation Teams for Baptism, First Communion and Confirmation continue to work with young people and also with their parents. An Alpha Course has been completed by a number of parishioners. During Lent, there were 3 house groups viewing and discussing 'The Chosen'.

Future plans include a possible training course for new Eucharistic Ministers.

General Governance

Fr Jock paid tribute to Paul Macpherson, who, over many years, was a stalwart and greatly appreciated member of the Fabric Committee. Having moved to Musselburgh, Paul is no longer in a position to be actively involved.

Chris Vinestock (Chair, Fabric Committee and Pastoral Team member) gave a brief update on progress on the church central heating situation. Since the heating system was condemned in early December 2023, discussions have been ongoing with the Archdiocese about a replacement system. There have been site meetings and a Project Manager, Graham Dalziel of Dalziel Design Associates in Musselburgh (Engineering Consultants), has been appointed. It is likely that the new heating system will be a hybrid, capable of using both hydrogen and natural gas. The Archdiocesan Trustees, who will decide on which of 3 or 4 tenders should be accepted, will need further clarification and details before sanctioning the work. It is hoped that a new central heating system will be in place by the autumn.

Chris also described the improvements to and refurbishment of the hall kitchen. There are some outstanding snagging issues, for which a retention of the final payment is being held. The hall itself has also been redecorated and now has wifi. An Archdiocesan Health and Safety inspection will be carried out this month, to review our existing policies and practices in light of the Archdiocesan Health and Safety Policy, published in June 2023.

Gary Zoltie (Chair, Finance Council) gave a brief overview of parish finances. During Q1 of 2024, the Offertory Collection dropped by 5% compared to Q1, 2023. Gary speculated that this may be due to a combination of factors, namely the impact of cost-of-living increases on parishioners' finances and a drop in Mass attendance because of the cold church. Parish costs have increased in 2024. Significantly, with the industrial heater being used to take the chill off the building, electricity charges have increased dramatically. Regarding the replacement costs for the central heating system, Gary is budgeting about £250K, to cover new boilers, flues and radiators and a new boiler for the Parish House, which will need to be replaced very soon.

Gary paid tribute to Enrico Fertini, the Parishes' Administrator, who is finalising the Gift Aid reclaim submission from HMRC. This should realise about £12.5K.

Outreach 1, 2 and 3

At the instigation of the Inclusivity Group, during Lent there were 5 discussion evenings on a very broad range of inclusivity themes, which were well received by those who attended. Earlier in the year, new parishioners were invited to 'welcome to your parish' events, an initiative which is being developed. An oral history project, looking at parish life and experiences, is under development. Eucharistic Ministers regularly visit nearly 40 housebound parishioners with Communion. The Legion of Mary, the SVdP and The Thursday Club all continue to offer support to parishioners and the wider community. Parishioners continue to support local Food Banks through the Justice and Peace Group. The Edinburgh L'Arche community was welcomed in early January for its Epiphany Meal. The parish priests from the local Cluster Parishes meet to support each other. Fr Jock has recently hosted a meal for the staff of St John's Primary School.

Geographically wider outreach has included generous support for the Justice and Peace Group's initiatives such as the St Andrew's Night Fund Raising Concert, the SCIAF 'Water for a Village' Christmas fund raiser and the J&P auction night. Monthly Monday charity coffee mornings, organised by Maria Igoe, raise funds for a wide range of good causes. Fund raising for this year's agreed charity (the STEKA Skills Women's Hostel in Malawi) is underway, with the monthly prize draw starting soon.

The ecumenical Portobello Summer Holiday Club will run again in July. There was a brief discussion on ways forward to develop a support group for parishioners aged 20-30 and also to develop a youth initiative. In August 2024, Fr Jock will preach at Duddingston Kirk as part of its 900th Anniversary programme of events. Rev Dr Jim Jack (minister of Duddingston Kirk) will preach in St John's the following week.

There was brief discussion about a provisional request from Rev Canon Dr Sophia Marriage, Rector of St Mark's Episcopal Church in Portobello, to hold Sunday morning services in St John's while St Mark's is undergoing extensive renovations later in the year. There was overwhelming support for this proposal, not least at the idea that Tea and Coffee after 9.30am Mass might welcome St Mark's parishioners before their Sunday Sung Eucharist service at 11am.

Donald then introduced 2 questions for small group discussions.

- In what ways have you experienced the Holy Spirit at work in our parish community and in your life as a whole?
- What might the Spirit be calling us towards over the coming months?

After a minute of stilling silence, parishioners were invited to share their thoughts within their group.

After brief feedback, which included discussion about the possibility of introducing an occasional Saturday morning Healing Mass, thanks were expressed to Mary Iannarelli for the refreshments to be enjoyed by all after the meeting.

The meeting ended with the Our Father being sung.