

St. Thomas More Parish Consultation

Parish Synodal follow up meeting

8 May 2022

Attendees: Nalini Almeida, Joe Borg, Belinda Brown, Mike Donovan, Liz Donovan, Sheila Faucher, Sylvia Francis-Mullins, Cecilia Gillott, Philippa Graham, Tara Healy-Singh, Barbara Leigh, Mossie Lyons, Kimungu-Mwambazi, Patricia Obano, Mary O'Connor, Adookwhere Rosemary Palmer, Christina Read, Caroline Russell, Elizabeth Rylance-Watson, Timothy Stroud, Junita Ying,

Introduction and opening prayer by Fr. Bart.

Liz stated that there are three things taken from the previous meeting in November, which were Communion, Participation and Mission. She said that there is a need for the laity to participate actively in parish life as if all the responsibility is left to the priest many things will not happen.

Communion

Fr. Bart introduced the topic by outlining the need to re-establish the welcome roster along with the need to move from the 'policing' to a welcoming role in the church for stewards in the Sunday Masses.

Mary: explained the need for people to give out the newsletter at the start of Mass, a possible role for children.

Phillippa: called for the specific welcoming of newcomers to the church, informing them of the tea and coffee available after the 10.00 am Mass along with the opportunity to collect-contact details.

Liz: inquired if a wheelchair might be acquired for use in the church to assist befriending drivers who have difficulty loading and unloading these from cars.

Tim: suggested idea of children handing out flyers

Mossie: Pointed a to a number of newcomers coming to the 8.30 Mass. Stated that welcoming role was already embraced by the stewards and it works well.

Patricia: calls for the need to find people willing to support the welcoming missions in the parish similar to pre pandemic practice.

Philippa: suggested the creation of a questionnaire which was used in the past.

Cecilia: suggested the creation of a newcomers form to collect contact details.

Elizabeth: points to the wealth of experience in the room suggest support name badges and other systems of support. She is willing to help, but not lead.

Joe: Mentioned the problem that with safeguarding and data protection laws the children would not be able to give them more detailed information, but supported the inclusion of children where possible.

Nalini: mentioned adults accompanying children in such a role is important and a requirement.

Fr. Bart: mentioned the importance of coordination, people don't have to be part of the welcoming group, but if it's left only to the priest, it will slow down. Added that children should be working only if their parents are involved for safeguarding reasons.

Creche and Toddlers groups

Fr. Bart mentioned the need for more people to get involved, as the initial meetings have been held. The group is being constantly renewed over the years, with the biggest roadblock being that of completing the safeguarding process. The parish currently has two safeguarding officers, but can use two more, no specific professional training is needed except the one provided by the diocese, and the work is mainly about taking details.

Fr. Bart met with 9 parents who were interested in the children's liturgy, some planning meetings started, but was side tracked by Covid, some DBS checks have been done, at least two more need to be in place before the June start date.

Sylvia: suggested that something should be done with children who can be difficult during Mass and raised the possibility of the JP centre being used for infant children. Stressed the role of liturgy for children, should not be dumbed down.

Fr. Bart: explained the reason, why children are separated for their liturgy, which is to express the Gospel in their child friendly language, toddlers need to be in the church with their parents.

Tim: no need to dumb down Mass for children, especially in music, called for better links with St. Anthony's school.

Fr. Bart: Is inquiring about using our ladies chapel on Sundays as a 'cry' chapel with soft toys. The idea was generally accepted by the group, but concerns were raised that we should not be excluding children, but develop a means for parents to briefly come in and out.

Support for parents

Liz: What is the best way for working parents to get more involved in the church and support each other?

Philippa: suggested having marriage support weekends.

There was also calls for programs of Catholic teaching.

Tara: Suggests the use of afterschool clubs maybe in the church or the school.

Christina: states that the best support for families is meetings with other families. Such a program would be most helpful for the parish.

Participation

Follow up on the confirmation program

Fr. Bart: States that the time after Confirmation is the most important time and the most challenging time is when young people enter universities. He finds it very difficult to recruit people and to find ways to support young people. He asked about the possibility of employing a youth officer if there wouldn't be anyone willing to do it voluntarily. He also called for follow up from First Holy Communion programme and Confirmation, but in all of this the Church mission needs to come first and socialisation is secondary.

Sylvia: suggested that youth can be involved as well in the follow up discussion. Suggested possible advertising in the newsletter.

Cecilia: raised possibly of a moving youth club going to different churches.

Christine: mentioned, that if people were asked, we should have a number of people to get involved.

Mary: raised possible themes like pizza night with themes would help to renew faith; used example of Fr. Joe's group. Structure is important.

Mossie: raised the example of the Alfa program if lay led, it's also important to receive clerical and financial support.

Adult catechesis and formation

Fr. Bart: raised the need to identify, what is needed for the adult members of the community. Need a time of structured formation. Asking for ideas over, how to do adult formation and is there a hunger for such a formation.

Elizabeth: supports the idea of possible programs from CTS or other programs, this is now more important.

Belinda: Suggested asking people from outside the church to attend adult formation.

Tara: points out several programs already out there, no need to re-invent the wheel, and we can invite groups to visit

Mary: suggested study courses on the Bible.

Tim: suggested to study the readings from Mass that would be open to everyone.

Caroline: teaching some fundamentals of the Catholic faith would be important

Nalini: supports it, but not necessarily for mixed groups or ages.

Juanita: Added the role of group discussion.

Fr. Bart clarifies that RCIA is for a specific group of people, coming to the Catholic faith.

Cecilia: mentioned a Catholic book club is a possibility.

Fr. Bart: has two ideas/suggestion possibly starting from September. Catholic Alfa program ten weeks needed; another is the Sycamore program.

Discussion around the group mentioned that the Sycamore program is more of a pre alfa course, so the Alfa program seems to have more support. It was agreed that the Alfa programs will be further investigated.

Fr. Bart mentioned the use of the lay-led Eucharistic Apostolate and the possibility of a parish hosting team for longer hours of adoration in church.

This was supported strongly by the group.

Fr. Bart: agreed to put the initial team together.

Reach out to the housebound, vulnerable

Fr Bart: was inquiring what was happening before the pandemic on this issue.

Was told that it mostly rested with the clergy and eucharistic ministers but also with the UCM.

Fr. Bart mentioned as a priest, that a friendly person-to-person contact is very important. Creating a group of people who will just outreach socially was supported by everyone

Cecilia: mentioned Link Age Southwark a charity that does this work and agreed to get more information.

Mission

Engaging with local churches and interfaith

Barbara: Mentioned that events going on through Churches together locally got side-lined due to COVID but is coming back. Encouraged others to come to meetings as well. Maybe lay people should take a more active role. Meetings are at Trinity House at St George's Cathedral.

Fr. Bart suggested forming a committee in the church regarding inter church events. Two main forms in which we meet is through charity and prayer

Cecilia: suggested school prayers for the students before exams as an example.

Support for Charities

Others coming to us for help

Fr. Bart: states we are currently supporting Manna Centre and Ukrainian refugees, how do we revise these requests? What criteria do we use?

Little Sisters of the Poor have been suggested as a religious group that might be contacted in order to help arranging things.

The need for the parish council

Fr Bart asked about the potential need for the Parish Council in the parish. He described briefly what role it could play in the parish.

General feeling was, that the group like this as it could be very helpful in running the parish.

Meeting ended with a closing prayer by Fr. Bart.

Follow meeting planned for early July