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Parish Priest: Fr Philip Griffin

Retired Priest in Residence; Fr Stephen Pimlott

OUR LADY AND ALL SAINTS CATHOLIC CHURCH

13 NEW ROAD

STOURBRIDGE

WEST MIDLANDS

DY8 1PQ

1<sup>st</sup> March 2024

### Planning for the Future – the Parish Centre

As a parish we must always be looking to the future. This has been at the heart of the Synodal Pathway – parishioners and clergy gathering together, listening to one another and finding ways together to move our parish forward positively. This year we are focusing on community engagement, and our Parish Centre plays a central role, as a place for gatherings and activities for the Church community, as well as a much-used resource for local community groups and individuals who need good quality facilities in a central location, with parking and close access to public transport and the town centre.

After many years of service as the parish school, the building of St Joseph's Primary School in Lea Vale Road enabled the school to become the Parish Centre. It is a building which has played an important part in the lives of many parishioners, as both the scene of their Catholic education, and for many years as the Parish Centre. However, there are increasing issues which may cause us to question its long-term suitability.

The Centre has significant structural and maintenance issues which have meant it has required considerable expenditure over the years. The girders and pinning are a reminder of its structural problems. There is minimal, if any, insulation. The windows are all single glazed, with wooden frames. The flat roofs are a continuing issue, and water penetration, despite repair work, continues. The kitchen is too small, and lacks storage and space for catering groups. There is poor storage - cupboards, storage spaces and the Assisi room are all used to the maximum. Heating costs are high, due to poor insulation, the height of the halls, the heating of the corridor and ventilation grills in the ceilings.

We could continue with the Centre as it is, but the difficulties with the building will remain. I have suggested to the Parish Finance Committee that we should investigate the option of doing major work to create a new Parish Centre which is fit for purpose, with a sustainable and efficient energy specification.

A meeting was held with Deacon Paul O'Connor, Head of the Diocesan Planning Department, on Monday 26<sup>th</sup> February, attended by myself, Sarah Price (parish administrator) and Bob Hudyba (parish surveyor, who has overseen the building and maintenance projects in the parish for the last 30 years) We outlined to him the current difficulties and sought guidance on how we could move forward on this.

Deacon Paul told us that the first stage of the process is to produce a Feasibility Report. This will contain;

- Reasons for the need to replace the centre (its current defects and its usage)
- What we would seek to replace it with.
- Plans for the new Centre.
- Evidence of ability to pay for the work and pay for upkeep and maintenance of the new building.

This report will then, if approved by the diocese, be the basis of our application to Dudley Council for planning permission. It is hoped that the report can be produced this year, following consultation with the parish, and discussions with our current centre users from the local community.

### Finance

The Parish currently has significant investments, from legacies to the parish and year on year saving from parish giving, which I anticipate would cover the cost of the building and it's fitting out.

### Design

This is, of course absolutely essential. My own suggestion is for a phased process.

Phase 1 – Conversion of the presbytery garage and storerooms into an independent parish room, with toilet and a small kitchen. This would allow many of our existing activities to continue whilst the demolishing of the centre and its rebuilding takes place.

Phase 2 – Repurposing of the Newman room into a dedicated storage space.

Phase 3 – On the footprint of the current youth hall and Assisi Room, construction of a new parish hall, with large kitchen and toilets.

Phase 4 – Landscaping and expanding of car parking in new available area.

This plan would give us 2 separate units – a large hall with kitchen and toilets, and a separate parish room for small groups.

### Conclusion

No decisions have been made about this proposal. I am writing to inform you about this at a very early stage of discussion and will keep you fully informed as the Feasibility Report progresses. Parishioners will be able to submit their views, and discuss them, during the preparation of the report.

The Parish has done a magnificent job in maintaining the Church, Presbytery and Centre over the years. We are in a very fortunate situation financially, and given the defects of the current Parish Centre, now seems to be a propitious time to give serious consideration to how we can improve our facilities in a significant way to provide a flexible and sustainable building for the future.

With very best wishes,

Fr Philip