

SYNODAL PATHWAY MEETING NOTES – TUESDAY 29TH OCTOBER 2024

The meeting started with a prayer and Fr Philip welcomed everyone.

An agenda and copies of the notes from the last meeting were made available.

Update from the last meeting –

The Washing of the Feet group meeting with Fr Philip will take place shortly. Simon will also write an article for the parish magazine.

Youth Group is going extremely well and now has been 30/35 young people attending each session.

The support group for Let the Children Live has been set up and they have held their first coffee/cake fundraising event with more to follow. They meet on the 1st Saturday in the month in the parish centre.

HCPT Local Stourbridge group has now received authorisation to move forward as a group. Fr Philip met with the 2 leaders for a very informative and productive meeting.

Cemetery update – We have appointed a bricklayer and the repairs to boundary walls are a work in progress. The first section is now complete at a cost of £10K. As we are so pleased with the work he has been asked to provide a new quotation for a second wall. This will be significantly cheaper than the quote provided by a contractor of £70K. Parishioners commented on a “1st class job” Cemetery Maintenance – We have now appointed a new contractor, to complete work on the cemetery throughout the year. He gives weekly updates to the parish office, and we are happy with progress so far. Anyone with any concerns should contact the parish office.

AGENDA ITEMS

PARISH CENTRE

The current parish centre is costing an enormous amount to maintain. We have 2 large halls when we only need one, plus a parish room. We need a better catering size kitchen and options for a smaller kitchenette just to serve refreshments. The parish centre committee (comprising of Fr Philip, Sarah Price – who deals with all the bookings, and Bob Hudyba who has over 30 years’ worth of experience overseeing projects) met with 3 Architects. BHB Architects who have worked with the parish before and also have significant experience of working with the Archdiocese of Birmingham and Dudley Planning officers were appointed. At our second meeting they presented 4 plans, 2 of which showed the option of keeping alternate sides of the building – however due the building being held up by tie bars this is not feasible, so would be used to show Dudley Planning we have no other alternative but to knock the whole building down. Of the 2 other proposals the 2nd one was the preferred option. This would include a large hall, large catering kitchen, toilets, a plant room – for the equipment needed to make the parish centre environmentally friendly and more cost effective - a storage room, a small hall (situated where the garages are) and a second smaller kitchen. Moving the centre closer to the presbytery would make the access to the toilets from Church easier. We are meeting with Architect again in 3 weeks. All the plans produced

increase the parking. Another consideration is the VAT – on a project of £1 Million this would be £200,000. We would not be charged VAT if we can prove that the building is used for Charitable purposes and only hired commercially for 5% of the usage time. Over the last year the centre has been used for 1000 hours for charity purposes and another 50% of time it has been hired by users. This raises approximately £6,000. At this rate it would take us a long time to claw back the loss of £200,000. We have spoken to the Diocese who will give us the details of the VAT expert. Guidelines issued by the diocese in 2018/2019 – state no VAT will be paid if 1- New building is adjacent to an existing building (not attached), 2 – Up to 5% only of occasional lettings. 3 – Two phrases of building may cause VAT to be paid as the 2nd building would be classed as attached. We are also currently investigating temporary accommodation through recommendation from the Emmaus MAC. Questions were asked about what size the hall would be? 80 seated in the main hall and 30/35 in the smaller parish room. Once we have a plan we like, we will make it available to parishioners to view.

PARISH PASTORAL COUNCIL

The Archdiocese has mandated Parishes to have a Pastoral Council. An introduction written by Fr Philip and a draft suggestion of the constitution have been shared in the newsletter the 26th/27th October. This can be found on the newsletter page of our website olas.org.uk. Fr Philip encourages everyone to read it and to give prayer and thoughts. As a parish we need to look at the suggested guidelines and decide

- Who should be on the Parish Pastoral Council?
- How often the Parish Pastoral Council should meet?
- How many members make up the Parish Pastoral Council? We are hoping to invite parishioners to nominate others to be council members after Christmas. A discussion was held about the process of nominating members, details of officers, and terms of office. The Pastoral Councils will follow the Diocesan Mission as its main purpose. Responding to the needs of the parish this includes – Catechists, Evangelisation, Spiritual nurturing, practical support and the needs of the sick and marginalised. Membership will be made up of members of the parish who are concretely engaged in the life of Parish. It was noted that anyone can attend the Parish Pastoral Council meetings. Each parish would have an individual parish council however it is suggested that they mainly follow the same format – ie using the same constitution but including the individual needs of the parish. Parishioners were asked to keep reading about it and Fr Philip asked for any feedback. Deanery Pastoral Parish Councils will also be set up.

NEW CLUSTER OF PARISHES – This was included in the opening address of the Visitation so can now be shared with the parish. Each cluster of parishes across the Deanery will have around 4 parishes. We will be part of the Stourbridge, Brierley Hill, Halesowen and Cradley Heath cluster. This will give an opportunity to look at what happens if a priest retires, dies or leaves early due to ill health. In 7 years' time 18 priests will be reduced to 9. We are already part of the cluster of parishes, and changing Mass times meant that all weekend Masses in the cluster could be covered. We are also very fortunate to have Fr Stephen in the parish. It needs to be taken into consideration how parishes can flourish; this is another reason why a parish council is important.

The plan shared by Fr Philip illustrated that by 2028 4 parishes may become one parish community (the cluster mentioned above), with one weekend Mass in each parish. In 2030 the question will be asked; do we still need all our buildings?

We need to embrace and be aware of this. In the diocese there will be one ordination this year and a number of priests retiring. We need to find a way to work together to sustain Catholic Life. In 2025 the clergy cluster meetings will look at we can offer other parishes and vice a versa – i.e. Youth work and Catechist.

PARISH VISITATION

Saturday 8th – Sunday 9th February 2025

Bishop Timothy Menezes will aim to arrive at around 2pm on the Saturday. Over the weekend he will

- Tour of the parish with the Parish Priest. The tour should include a few visits to sick or infirm parishioners.
- An individual meeting with Fr Philip, Fr Stephen and Deacon Tom.
- He will preach at all Masses and will celebrate one or two Masses at the Parish Priest s discretion
- Meeting with the PastoralCouncil/FinanceCommittee/ Safeguarding Representative (this could be combined with the meeting below regarding a Synodal discussion).
- A Synodal discussion to which every parishioner is invited. In this meeting we would seek to discern how the diocesan vision might be implemented in the local area, and how resources and gifts, as well as the challenge of this undertaking, might be shared with other parishes in the locality, working co-responsibly together as a cluster.
- Meeting with individuals and representatives of organisations engaged in social action (SVP, soup kitchens, care of elderly, street pastors, credit unions, etc.)
- Meet with young people of the parish.
- Where possible, meeting with the school representatives: Head Teacher, Chair of Governors, Deputy Head Teacher, RE Coordinator. Fr Philip wants to hold a parish meeting on the Sunday at 2pm where Bishop Timothy can meet with individuals and that any parishioner who want to can attend.

We have been asked to provide some parish statistics e.g. Mass number before and after the pandemic, number of baptisms, marriages and some financial information etc, this will be produced using the annual parish statistics issued to the diocese.

Fr Philip wishes to produce a parish survey asking every parishioner to share thoughts of 3 things we are doing well and 3 things we are not doing so well. He wants to send Bishop Timothy a pack, which includes the statistics, copies of our parish magazines over the last 3 years and the parish survey. He requested help to collate the survey and suggested a small committee be formed to complete this task.

CONVERSATION IN THE SPIRIT –

Sue McDermott gave a short report about Conversation in the spirit, and how it can be used in the parish. Fr Philip has also used this method in diocesan meetings and found it a very fruitful exercise. More information can be found on our parish website.

AOB

CARITAS INTERNATIONAL

Ken Baker spoke about Caritas International. The group help with larger world issues such as rebuilding after earthquakes or flood. However, they are also looking at issues closer to home and in our parish communities. This would be an initiative for the parish which would involve volunteers going out into the local community and putting together an action plan by

working with other groups. If anyone is interested in joining the group, please speak to Ken. Please be aware many of the meetings are held over zoom.

QUESTIONS

With the clustering of parishes is the view to close Churches. Yes, this is a possibility in the future. Synodally this must be a decision committees make. As a parish we need to demonstrate to ourselves and the diocese that we are a viable parish community. A comment was made the parish is not the priest by the community.

DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Tuesday 6th May, 7pm