

Annual Report for Newry Parish Pastoral Council 2018

Our annual report reflects the Church year (December to November) but in this case I will add the last three months of 2017 as the PPC was reformed with new members in September 2017.

Naturally the first few months of the reconstituted body was a settling in time for the new membership. The members worked on their vision for the parish and took training from the Living Church organisation based in Down & Conor. You may remember the open meeting we had in September 2017 where the insights of the parish were sought following a series of presentations, these insights served as corner stones of our strategy development meetings in the autumn of 2017. The strategy document reflects three core influences, the findings of our public meeting, insights gained from the book "Divine Renovation" written by Fr. James Mallon and "Living Communion" published by the Irish Bishop's Conference.

A series of initiatives were instituted based on an operational plan derived from the objectives stated in the strategy:

- Our Baptismal Calling
- Discernment of pastoral and spiritual need
- Mechanisms for Renewal
- Reflection and Review

Early Months

In these early months our activities were focussed around The World Meeting of Families" (WMOF), Congregational Singing, and the Sacramental Programme for schools.

We hosted ten meetings for parents covering the six primary schools, offering support in Eucharist and Confirmation preparation. The WMOF project was an awareness raising project. The big finale was the conference in Dublin in August 2018 and the Papal visit, but there was a year of preparatory activities designed to pick out the key themes of Pope Francis's book *Amoris Laetitia* "The Joy of Love". We ran a series of talks and ceremonies in the parish culminating in the Diocesan launch of the Conference on August 21st in Newry Cathedral.

Bishop John was very keen to have congregational singing in the churches of the parish. We felt that the opening and closing hymns were prime congregational opportunities. Using both leaflets or hymnals we pressed ahead with this initiative. It obviously takes time to raise a culture of participation. There is the old saying "He who sings prays twice" attributed to St Augustine.

St Patrick's novena has been a tradition of recent years. It falls at a cold, grey time of the year. Last March the primary schools did a marvellous job in portraying the life and mission of Patrick in words and song. Congregations were well improved on previous years. We must thank the sterling efforts of the schools and parents in bringing this off.

In early March the shock of Bishop John's resignation with immediate effect took us all by surprise. It was a dark time, the scandals shook the faith of parents and parishioners all across the diocese. We pressed on, and Bishop Philip Boyce was appointed Apostolic administrator at the end of March. His first public appearance in his new role was at the Chrism Mass on Holy Thursday.

Summer 2018

We had just settled back into the routine of planning and delivering on our plan, when Canon Brown announced on 19th May he was stepping aside due to allegations of an historical nature. This further disrupted plans until the new administrator Fr. Des Loughran arrived in July. Traditionally the PPC does not meet in the summer months, but we continued our training on Alpha, which is a video course on the basics of Christianity, highly recommended in the book Divine Renovation. This allowed us to report to the meeting in September that we liked the course and found it useful and then proceeded to plan our first public course in the pre-Christmas period. I am pleased to say that the first course is running well. We would hope to repeat the course in the new year. In September we elected a new secretary Brian O'Donnell as Michael Burns withdrew due to pressure of work. Parental sacramental briefing is now placed in the hands of the school chaplains.

Our plans to repeat our parish meeting in 2018 did not find consensus but we pressed ahead with the rest of our plans for the year. Our meetings with organisations in the parish is progressing, both ACCORD and St Vincent de Paul meetings went well. We had organised a general recruitment campaign, but this was postponed until January 2019. The "Meet and Greet" is being piloted at the Saturday vigil mass and seems to be working out quite well as is the book club for spiritual reading.

Autumn 2018

In October we welcomed the arrival of Fr. Robert, and look forward to working with him in the months ahead. At this time of year - closing days of November - our thoughts naturally turn to Advent and Christmas events. The new administration is taking some radical decisions in this regard and we await developments.

In summary we have had a roller-coaster year, from month to month we had had to replot our course, but we have continued to deliver on our plan where possible. We look forward to a more settled 2019 and wish you all a Happy and Holy Christmas and a fulfilling New Year.

Fred Hollowood Chair of Newry Parish Pastoral Council

Brian O'Donnell Secretary of Newry Parish Pastoral Council

Fr. Desmond Loughran President of Newry Parish Pastoral Council