

Minutes of the Parish Pastoral Council Extraordinary meeting

10th January 2023

Present.

- Members of the Parish Pastoral Council and interested people of the Parish
- A delegation of representatives from the Diocese of Dunked Fabric and Finance committee including Bishop Emeritus Stephen Robson, Monsignor Ken McCaffrey, Chancellor Malcolm Veal, Father Jim, Father Alex and John O'Meara.

Ann Craig chaired the meeting and invited Bishop Stephen to open the meeting with prayers.

Ann now invited the Diocesan panel to express their views on the future of St. Columba's Parish.

Malcolm Veal opened with an overview of the full state of the Diocese and its funding. He pointed out that the Diocesan financial balances and the ageing nature of the clergy was a concern and that this could make the continuation of so many churches over the next 10 years unsustainable. He pointed out that future challenges with new legal requirements, energy costs and health and safety costs could not be maintained by St Columba's with its low uptake of Sunday attendance.

Malcolm also pointed out that 18 questionnaires on the future of the parish had been returned and he was given 8 since arriving at the meeting, this made 26 returns. He pointed out that 9 of the 18 on time returns indicated that people preferred to have closer ties with St Leonards and Fergus. (Fr Jim has subsequently updated this information and advised that there was a 50/50 split between option 1 and either option 2 or 3)

Bishop Stephen explained the background to setting up the Diocesan Fabric Committee, it was tasked with examining how much of the present diocesan estate could be maintained given the decreasing numbers of Catholics attending church as well as the diminishing numbers of priests. He also stated that it is the people who make up the church. He advised that the process of electing a new Bishop had already begun and that any final decision would rest with him.

The parishioners then began making statements and asking questions.

Angela talked of the lack of evangelisation and leadership since the renew initiatives in the Parish. She also pointed out that we could not do a lot in the Parish because there has been no Parish Pastoral Council since 2008. She also pointed out that there were willing people in the Parish.

Sue raised the fact that the Christian presence in Kirkton was important especially since the riots in Kirkton. She also pointed out concern for the safety of the Church building and possibility of vandalising.

Bishop Stephen recalled that Mgr. Neil had suffered as a result of problems of that nature.

Cath Redford gave a, from the heart, description of what it means to be a St Columba's Parishioner and that it is a way of life that cannot be allowed to die out. She also pointed out that the geographical area that St Columba's serves is large and accessibility to new parishes would be difficult for some.

Angela raised the issue of people still watching Mass on line and the amount of people not attending a real Mass, she put forward that only the sick should have access using a coded access system on Facebook.

Ian stated that following a review of St Columba's building capacities it was likely money would be required for improvements to many of the buildings around the Diocese and pointed out that not only St Columba's was having problems with maintenance.

John O'Meara talked of the full Diocesan estate and its income versus expenditure and the requirement for a business plan to be considered in future discussion.

Father Ken concurred with John's thoughts and added that rising insurance costs were an issue to consider at Diocesan and Parish level.

Irena talked of the difficulties holding a children's liturgy in the hall and the lack of children and the tie to a school in the area.

Sue asked about heat pumps and if the bad flat roofs could be demolished.

John O'Meara advised her that the heat pumps were not viable and why the roofs could not be demolished.

Sharon stated that she felt better having Mass in the hall and felt more of a community spirit, many people in the hall agreed with her thoughts.

Kathleen Tracey spoke about the possibility of harvesting new parishioners from the new housing estates being built in the area and advised that other churches were leafletting the area and she thought we could do something similar.

Susan asked directly if the heating could be restored to get some of the services up and running.

Martyn questioned why, if we as a Parish want the heating on, why can't the panel give us approval.

Sylvia stated that a relatively trivial amount of money was being withheld compared to the funds available.

Ian asked why Cathy Jones legacy could not be released to repair the heating. He asked for a show of hands to indicate if people want the heating repaired, most people put their hands up.

Sylvia asked if the heating is restored would the Church stay open?

Father Alex made a plea to the Diocesan panel to consider that, even without a Church building, a Parish can continue. He also pointed out that if you have a building, you must find and evangelise more people to attend. He said that a balance was required between the numbers of people and the amount of money that can be brought into the church and expenditure. He commented on how he had noticed a difference in the Parish since the Parish Council had been established. He suggested that St Columba's should be a mission to keep God's presence in Kirkton.

Father Jim advised that the Fabric Committee is meeting in two weeks' time and a decision may be made regarding repairing the heating. He also pointed out that Sunday Mass can happen in the Church building but weekday Mass would still have to be in the hall. He also said that this should happen until a new bishop is appointed.

Ann said that she accepted her own part in not doing enough to propagate the faith. She said that being part of the PPC had given her the opportunity to get to know her fellow parishioners and work with them in active fellowship.

Ann thanked the panel and everyone else for their contributions to the discussions. She then asked Father Alex to conclude the meeting with prayers.

It has subsequently been agreed that the next meeting will be on Tuesday the 24th of January at 7:00 when the results of the Diocesan Fabric Committee meeting will be known.