

South West Edinburgh Cluster
Final Cluster Report

14 April 2017

Your Grace,

CLUSTER PARISHES TOGETHER

You asked for the reports from clusters to be sent direct to you. I have pleasure in submitting the report on behalf of the parishes of Our Lady Mother of the Church, St Cuthbert's, St John Ogilvie's and St Joseph's.

The report follows a series of three meetings which were structured and conducted, as far as possible, in accordance with the guidelines set out in the Cluster Parishes Together Handbook. We found the Handbook very helpful in guiding us through our deliberations, but since we have had very little experience of working as a cluster we had to examine many of the issues on a prospective basis, that is, we looked at what would or could work well as a cluster rather than what does work well.

As suggested in the Handbook, the report summarises separately the substance of each of the 3 meetings, and it makes a number of proposals which we believe are positive, pastorally feasible, and canonically possible. I should add that the report is a concise version and its content does not include much of the detail presented at the meetings. This arises from your expressed hope that reports will be brief.

(Signed)

A. Quinlan, OMI

Parish Priest,

St John Ogilvie's, Wester Hailes

The Report

WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE TOGETHER IN PASTORAL PROVISION?

Clergy

Sharing of priests and staggered Mass provision could facilitate the success of future cluster arrangements.

Sacramental Preparation

Marriage preparation could take place on a cluster basis to avoid duplication of resources.

RCIA provision could also be provided within the cluster rather than in individual parishes.

Sacramental preparation for children could, in some cases, be delivered on a cluster basis, where children do not attend Catholic schools, e.g. if Confirmation was to take place in one church only within the cluster. This would enable all parish catechists and clergy to work together to ensure each participant felt equally included.

Combined Faith Events

Retreats, pilgrimages and prayer services/groups could be organised within the cluster rather than duplicated across all parishes. This could prove more viable, in terms of cost, where applicable, and numbers attending

Certain parish ministries could be carried out on a cluster basis, e.g. Bereavement Group, Music Ministry for cluster events, Justice and Peace and Ecumenical Groups.

Sharing of priests and staggered Mass provision could facilitate the success of future cluster arrangements.

Joint Parish Events.

Social events are a means of enabling parishioners from each cluster parish to come together and build community, dispelling any feelings of "them and us."

Ongoing participation in projects such as Mary's Meals, St Catharine's Homelessness Project, SVP and Justice and Peace could continue across the cluster.

Cluster parishes currently have very vibrant community life, essential to evangelisation and outreach.

WHAT SHOULD CONTINUE WITHIN INDIVIDUAL PARISHES?

The consensus of opinion from Parishioners from each of the four cluster parishes was that each parish community must be retained as each has a strong, individual identity and a rich, vibrant community and pastoral life. This was emphasised at each cluster meeting.

Each parish should have at least one Sunday/Vigil Mass, to continue to enrich their faith and enhance the spiritual life of each community. This is essential to allow continued access to Mass for those parishioners faced with travel restrictions, often due to issues of age, infirmity or financial demands.

Individual parish provision should continue for Children's Liturgy within Sunday Mass

Funerals, weddings, baptisms, special feast days and celebrations such as Easter and Christmas are an essential part of the spiritual life of each parish community.

Each parish should have its own Parish Pastoral Council. A new forum could be established to enable these PPCs to meet, together, on a quarterly basis.

Eucharistic Ministers, visiting sick and housebound, should also operate on an individual parish basis.

Eucharistic Services could be promoted and developed within each parish, to be held in the absence of a priest.

Where possible, Deacons and Pastoral Assistants should support parish life.

Parishioners should be encouraged and trained to undertake duties which do not need to be carried out by a priest, e.g, conducting Eucharistic Services, funerals, finance, maintenance etc.

Continue to encourage and support positive links with local schools, St Augustine's, St Cuthbert's and St Joseph's.

SIGNS AND DEVELOPMENT OF VIBRANCY WITHIN CLUSTER PARISHES

Clergy

Our Cluster is in a unique position as two of our parishes are served by Religious Orders, Oblates of Mary Immaculate and Augustinians, who relieve the Archdiocese in servicing these parishes. The other two are served by one Diocesan priest, while the resident Redemptorist priest in Our Lady's, Currie, is chaplain to two hospitals, the Western General and Royal Victoria, and assists in saying Mass in the parish. Heriot Watt University Chaplaincy is also served from within the cluster.

People

Parishioners are seen to be the most valuable resource in the cluster. Numbers in all parishes are healthy with a trend towards growing attendance at Sunday Mass. A considerable number are active within their own parish communities, in a wide range of groups and areas of service.

Evangelisation and Outreach

Active groups within the cluster parishes are major forms of evangelisation. Currently, a range of groups operate, including Mary's Meals, SVP, Justice and Peace, Eucharistic Ministers, Liturgists, Catechists and Music Ministries. Parishioners also volunteer with projects such as St Catharine's Homeless Project, support liturgical services and work with refugees.

Within the cluster, there is an enthusiastic Justice and Peace team which, in addition to other activities, encourages all parishioners to become involved in projects such as Fairtrade, Fresh Start, SCIAF, Foodbanks and environmental issues. The lives of many local people benefit from the group's work, which is seen by the local community to be "the Church in action".

In 2016, within our cluster, one parish hosted the world - renowned Notre Dame Folk Choir, which enabled all cluster parishes and other denominations to support and share in an overwhelming, week long evangelisation experience through music, faith and, above all, joy. The choir enabled people throughout Edinburgh to participate in a unique experience of evangelisation while inspiring renewed interest in liturgy among young people and, indeed, all ages.

Leadership

Parish groups are perceived as a continuing strength and the foundation for future leadership within each parish in the absence of a resident priest.

Catechesis

Sacramental Preparation, both for adults and children, is paramount. Engaging children, together with supporting parents, should be consistently emphasised. Children's Liturgy is a prime example of ongoing engagement.

Stewardship

Encouraging people to use their skills and talents is an effective way of developing the cluster community. Acting as responsible stewards of God's creation is a clear indicator of parish vibrancy.

PASTORAL GOALS FOR CLUSTER TO WORK IN SPIRIT OF MISSION AND EVANGELISATION

Youth Development

Set up a Cluster Youth Ministry Team to encourage and enable young people to re-engage with church communities.

By empowering young people in a practical way, provide the opportunity for individuals to continue their journey of faith.

Encourage and support young people to assume leadership roles within parish communities.

Lay Development

Develop strategy and training for lay leadership. This is essential to ensure future survival of parishes and to promote and support evangelisation.

Development and expansion of role of laity in partnership with clergy to support pastoral life and growth. As numbers of ordained clergy dwindle, it is essential that the laity be prepared to assume a more prominent role in ongoing pastoral work.

Set up a Cluster Prayer Group to support ongoing spiritual development.

Establish Cluster Parish Pastoral Council to bring together strengths of individual PPC's, providing a forum to share ideas and resources, where appropriate.

Programme of joint services, to share and grow together.

Cluster involvement in ecumenism, connecting with and reaching out to other churches in fellowship.

Engage with other clusters to learn from one another.

Continue to develop existing resources and parish groups in order to reach out and serve more people.

First Cluster Group Meeting (St Cuthbert's, 22 September 2016)

REPORT

Discussion Groups Feedback

Question 1: What works/could work well in parish cluster?

1. Sacramental preparation.

There was considerable agreement that this could be delivered on a cluster basis, with a number of advantages:

a. Children

While the role of the primary schools was acknowledged, it was felt that a cluster approach would allow children to meet, become familiar with clergy and the "host" church on an ongoing basis.

Those children who do not attend Catholic schools would share equally with other children in Sacramental Preparation.

Sacraments of Reconciliation, First Communion and Confirmation could be celebrated in one church for all cluster children.

b. Marriage

Marriage preparation could easily be delivered within small groups on a cluster basis, saving repetition of provision.

c. RCIA

2. Joint Social Events.

There was considerable support for the idea of joint social events such as Senior Citizens' Parties, St Patrick's and Burn's celebrations, Ceilidhs, etc. These would enable parishioners of all cluster parishes to come together and build community, dispelling any feelings "them and us".

3. Joint Faith Events.

Events such as retreats, pilgrimages and prayer services/groups could be organised as cluster events, rather than being duplicated within individual parishes. These could become more viable, both financially and in terms of participating numbers.

Joint Penitential Services were agreed to be desirable and successful.

4. Parish Ministries

Some groups felt that parish ministries could be carried out on a cluster basis. These included

Bereavement Group

Music Ministry

Liturgy Group

Fabric and Finance Committee

Parish Pastoral Council

Justice and Peace

Mary's Meals and other charities

Ecumenical Group

5. Other Points

Sharing of priests

Staggered Mass times

Question 2: What should continue within individual parishes.

1 The following points were asserted by one or more groups, with the first three receiving considerable support and emphasis:

Each parish should have at least one Sunday Mass.

Eucharistic Services should be promoted and developed within each parish.

Parishioners should be encouraged and trained to undertake duties which do not need to be carried out by a priest e.g conducting Eucharistic Services, finance, maintenance etc.

Positive links with local schools.

Children's Liturgy within Sunday Mass.

Funerals, weddings, baptisms and parish celebrations.

Special Occasion celebrations e.g Easter, Christmas, Funerals.

All parish groups should be retained within their parishes e.g SVP, Music and Liturgy Groups, social events etc.

2. Other points seen to be important were

Visiting sick and housebound.

Separate Parish Councils with forum for joint meetings.

3. Suggestions.

If a decision were taken to close parishes, land should be sold to pay for the building of a new church to provide a “level playing field” – each parishioner beginning afresh as a member of a new parish with a new identity.

Note

The final paragraph above - “Suggestions” - was drawn from the “jotters” each group at meeting No. 1 was asked to complete. The suggestion does not fall within the agenda for meeting No. 1, but it may be relevant for meeting No. 2.

Second Cluster Group Meeting (St Joseph's, 3 November 2016)

Report Discussion Groups Feedback

Current Resources

There was a consensus across the groups that we have considerable resources in terms of people and plant. Finances are also relatively stable although two groups raised queries regarding the quoted overall figure, asking if each parish had a deficit or if some were in credit. It was suggested by one that it would have been preferable to have each parish's finance listed separately. There was some concern, again from two groups, regarding the deficit as it was not clear if this was an annual pattern or referring only to the last financial year.

All groups highlighted the numbers attending Mass on a regular basis although two disputed the overall figure, also stating that numbers rose at "peak" times in the year e.g. Christmas, Easter and children's sacraments. One group stated that these numbers were too low to sustain the number of parishes within the cluster while another stressed that numbers across the parishes were too high to be accommodated within one church. Four groups raised some concerns regarding the numbers receiving sacraments of Marriage and Baptism, feeling that these should have been higher.

Concern was voiced in all groups regarding the low numbers of young adults and older children attending Mass or becoming involved in parish life. Much emphasis was laid on the need to attract young people to church together with providing opportunities to take part in and have authority/responsibility within the parishes.

All groups clearly emphasised that our greatest resource is our parishioners, a number of whom are active within their own communities. Much discussion had taken place regarding the need to encourage and empower more people to become involved. This, together with the need for evangelisation appeared to take up a considerable amount of group time and was felt to be extremely important, both currently and for future development of the cluster.

The general consensus appeared to be that, at present, we are well resourced in terms of plant, finances and people with the most imminent challenge being the diminishing number of clergy.

Implications for the Future

The majority of groups emphasised the need to involve and attract more people to the church. It was clearly seen to be a priority to encourage and attract young people back to church, together with enabling them to take on roles of responsibility within parish communities, as, without them, we will have no church in years to come! Here, again, evangelisation was highlighted, together with the need to provide training for lay ministers and apostles, both young and older adults. Youth Ministries were also advocated. One group

stated that the church must review its views regarding women and, indeed, married clergy. This was underpinned by a second group which believed that, in order for the church to be sustainable, there must be a fundamental shift in its position regarding the role and position of laity within the church. Many groups stated that it is more essential than ever that parishioners take on responsibility for efficient parish management, given low numbers of clergy.

A range of opinions were held regarding plant and finance issues. While some groups believed that all parish buildings are currently sustainable, others felt that, in order to make a judgement, more information regarding income and expenditure was required. Some groups stated that parishes could be merged, either into a smaller number of parishes or, indeed, one larger parish while others voiced considerable concern over the effects this may have on more vulnerable groups such as elderly or less mobile parishioners. Here, too, concern was voiced over the possible effects this may have regarding the sustainability of current relationships with primary and secondary schools, especially those currently linked to a parish. This debate extended to provision of Mass and sacraments with some advocating joint sacramental celebration while others saw this to be a disadvantage. Suggestions included rotation of Sunday Mass around cluster parishes with Eucharistic Celebrations on the remaining Sundays. The possibility of joint ministries within the cluster was also mooted as a viable approach.

Finally, the need to be proactive in setting up new cluster initiatives was a common theme. These could incorporate existing groups and also enable new volunteers to advocate fresh and even innovative approaches to both support and revitalise individual parishes and/or the cluster as a whole. These could also encompass forms of evangelisation.

Third Cluster Group Meeting (St John Ogilvie's, 8 December 2016)

REPORT

Discussion Groups Feedback

Question 1. What Makes Parishes Vibrant? Currently?

There were a variety of suggestions under this heading:

The Eucharist was the prime factor for three groups, while another two suggested that welcoming families was of great importance.

Involvement in the parishes, in many guises, was seen to be crucial by a number of groups. This ranged from SVP to social activities.

One group stated that vibrant liturgical music was very important, in celebration of liturgy and in attracting and retaining parishioners, especially young people.

One group felt that having a priest for celebration of Mass was of vital importance.

EVANGELISATION

The recurring factor in evangelisation was the importance of outreach. Celebration of all sacraments, together with the wider liturgy, was seen as crucial. A number of groups stressed the value of active groups, for example Justice and Peace, SVP, Mary's Meals etc as important forms of evangelisation, both for participants and the wider community. Ministering to refugees and homeless people also contributed here.

Work with and within schools was cited within this category. This referred both to school and church based activity.

LEADERSHIP

Parish groups were seen to be a strength. Focus here tended to be on difficulties rather than strengths, with issues such as lack of young people, lack of confidence/self - worth seen as barriers to leadership. CATECHESIS In this category, Sacramental Preparation, both adult and child, was seen to be paramount. The importance of engaging and involving children and young people was consistently emphasised together with the need to support parents. Children's Liturgy was felt to be a good way to engage children. The value in the use and training of the laity to lead and participate in liturgical events such as funerals was recorded by one group.

OUTREACH

Community activities were seen by most groups to be of paramount importance as means of outreach, both locally and within the wider community. These, again, ranged from Justice and Peace to social events. Work with schools, Sacramental Preparation and the need to empower young people were highlighted here.

STEWARDSHIP

The need to develop community by allowing people to use their skills and talents was felt to be important by one group. The idea of being eco-friendly parishes featured twice while setting realistic goals was mooted by one group.

Question 2. Further Goals for Action?

Youth development – form a Cluster Youth Ministry Team.

Develop strategy and training for Lay Leadership.

Joint Parish Council meetings.

Cluster Prayer Group for spiritual development.

Visit and learn from other denominations.

Visit and share resources with other parishes.