



## **Facilitated Event Summary**

**Pastoral Area:** Ballygalget, Ballycran, Portaferry

**Date:** 15<sup>th</sup> November 2012

**Venue:** Portaferry Community Centre

### **Introduction:**

On Thursday 15<sup>th</sup> November, around 70 people from the three Parishes came together in Portaferry to discuss the possibility of setting up a **Pastoral Area**. Each of the three Parishes was represented well in the group. The group was notable for a number of reasons; firstly, in terms of the number of people who come to these Living Church events, 70 was very impressive. Secondly, it was notable that younger people were well represented in the group. It was, indeed, heartening to see such an interested and broadly representative group.

### **A Praying Discerning Community**

We come together to model a Praying Discerning Community. We can only seek to reveal the Living Church in our Parish if we recognise first our need to pray and discern the will of God. We must be in communion with each other, resolving difference by reaching consensus.

That is why we begin all of our sessions with prayer. Not just because it's 'what Catholics do', but because it invites God into our midst, into our meeting. It says that we are not here for our own agendas, ideas or issues. We are here to hear His will, to act on His behalf. We chose Ephesians 4: 2-6 as our scripture reading:



**Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. (Ephesians 4:2-6)**

Bernie read the scripture piece twice and we then had a period of reflection and sharing. This time of prayer set the scene for our meeting, taking place as it did in front of two lit candles and a book of scripture. We began and continued as a praying, discerning community.

### **What is A Pastoral Area?**

A pastoral area is a group of neighbouring parishes that support each other and share the collaborative gifts and talents of each parish. With the help of the Holy Spirit, they do this in order to fulfil the mission of the Church to proclaim the word of God and further the mission of Christ in the world.

Parishes maintain their identities but work together in order to:

- ✚ ensure the effective sharing of the many gifts and talents of the people of God in the pastoral area
- ✚ enable the Christian mission of the Communities involved
- ✚ promote learning through reflection on experience
- ✚ identify pastoral matters that can be done better together as a pastoral area than separately as individual parishes

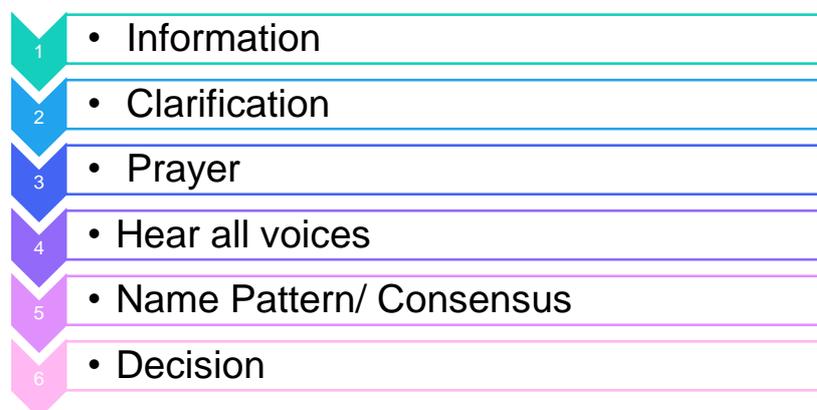
We spent some time discussing the above and reflecting on the type of church we hoped for in the future. Broadly speaking, this seemed to be a church where all ages of people would and could gather for worship. It would be a vibrant church with lots of people actively engaged in the mission of the Parish from which they came. It was suggested by the Living Church facilitator that grouping together into a Pastoral Area was one way to create the structures and momentum necessary to make that vision a reality.

### Pastoral Area Team (PAT)

One of the main structural changes there would be in a Pastoral Area would be the creation of a Pastoral Area Team (PAT). We moved on to have a short input about what a Pastoral Area Team was:

- A group of committed people of God (Priest, religious and lay people) called upon to **investigate** pastoral matters, **reflect** on them thoroughly and **recommend** practical conclusions
- Priests acknowledge the wisdom of the Parishioners and expresses their desire to share with them their responsibility for the governance of the Pastoral Area
- Set Pastoral Themes for the Pastoral Area- everything to do with the life of the Parishes can be discussed

We also heard of the basic steps a Leadership Team would take to function and what they would do in their meetings:



In this way, the PAT would be a group of people who represent each Parish and clergy. They would set Pastoral themes for the area. These themes would then be communicated to the parishioners and each Parish would work to achieve what was set out in the themes. One example of c-working in a Pastoral Area might be the centralisation of marriage preparation for example. One example of a Pastoral Theme may be 'Adult Faith Formation' for example.

At this point, we broke into small groups of approximately 8-10 people to discuss the following:

**What would the benefits be to this area of having a Pastoral Area?**

**What would be the areas of concern that we would have to attend to in order to make this a success?**

The discussions in the small groups were lively and engaging. The people really considered in depth their answers to these questions. The groups were advised to try to be positive and creative yet honest and realistic. This was exactly how the groups proceeded.

### **Benefits**

**Build young lay ministry, opportunities for pastoral initiatives, develop open lines of communication between Parishes, build community, avoid duplication, tackling common issues, free up clergy to do priestly duties, unity of purpose, joint social interaction, sharing gifts and talents, one community, minimises efforts, maximises resources, teaching, less onus on priest to do everything, pooling resources, faith development, greater networking.**

## Concerns

**Loss of parish identity, how to break down barriers, reliance on same people- we need new faces, how will leadership be chosen, patience needed to maintain enthusiasm, loss of masses, education needed for PAT members, lack of response from community would be a concern, need for open communication, need to make sure all age groups are represented, concern if there was a lack of openness of membership of PAT, all Parishes should be fairly represented.**

## Conclusions

Having considered all of the above, we agreed that there was a consensus reached in the room:

**We feel it was a good idea to move ahead with the establishment of a Pastoral Area and a Leadership Team in the Pastoral Area. The team would be representative of all three parishes in the area.**

The turnout, age range, interest and energy for this issue in this area is testament to the fact that the faith is alive and well in the Peninsula. There was a real 'can-do' attitude from the people who came. We were challenged to consider ourselves and advocates for our agreement to go forward and to talk honestly and positively about it. We were hopeful that more people would hear about the initiative and either come along to our next meeting or read the write up and keep up to date.

Further to this we also agreed the following:

-  Jim will write up a full report of the session
-  A short report should be put into the bulletin for all to see

✚ All Parishioners are welcome to join us in any of the sessions

✚ The next session will be on **Thursday 13<sup>th</sup> December at 7.30 in Ballygalget Parish Hall**

✚ The topic for the next session will be: **What do we understand by the word 'Parish'?**

The meeting was prayerful yet energetic and the consensus reached sent all away hopeful of good things to come.

Jim Deeds, Living Church, November 2012