

Facilitated Event Summary

Parish: Bright

Date: 10th October 2012

Venue: Killough

Introduction and Purpose:

On Wednesday 10th October, almost 40 people from the Parish gathered in Killough for the first in a series of group meetings designed to establish- in time- a Parish Pastoral Council in the Parish. This was a great turnout for a first meeting, especially given that the weather on the night was so inclement.

A Praying Discerning Community

We began the evening with a period of prayer as a way of ‘arriving’ at the session and looking to God for direction for our session this evening. Each of the sessions we undertake will begin with a period of 15-20 minutes of prayer; sometimes silent, sometimes using scripture and reflection. This allows us to model the type of Church we want to see: a Church that is a Praying, Discerning Community. We continued our prayer using a reading from the Gospel of Luke (Lk9: 10-17):



“He welcomed them and taught them about the Kingdom of God, and he healed those who were sick. Late in the afternoon the twelve disciples came to him and said, “Send the crowds away to the nearby villages and farms, so they can find food and lodging for the night. There is nothing to eat here in this lonely place.” But Jesus said, “You feed them yourselves.”

“But we have only five loaves of bread and two fish,” they answered. “Or are you expecting us to go and buy enough food for this whole crowd?” For there were about 5,000 men there.

Jesus replied, “Tell them to sit down in groups of about fifty each.” So the people all sat down. Jesus took the five loaves and two fish, looked up toward heaven, and blessed them. Then, breaking the loaves into pieces, he kept giving the bread and fish to the disciples so they could distribute it to the people. They all ate as much as they wanted, and afterward, the disciples picked up twelve baskets of leftovers.”



We ended the prayer reflecting on the apostles' words, 'we are in a lonely place here'. We acknowledged that there can be times when we feel lonely in our lives and in our Parishes. However, we reflected also that Jesus fed the hungry and lonely. We prayed that he would feed us throughout this evening and this process to come.

Introduction and Purpose

We introduced the idea that tonight we would be looking at the topic of Parish Pastoral Councils and asking if having one is right for us in our time in our Parish. Before agreeing our purpose for the evening we agreed a set of invitations, requests and promises:

Invitations:

- To come along for two hours
- To trust the process
- To speak and listen from a position of honesty

Requests:

- To keep a sense of confidentiality
- To ask what God wants
- To look at the present and the future

Promises:

- I will not judge or criticise you
- I will value you for your commitment to your parish and faith
- I will be honest

Agreeing this allowed us to reflect that in this process we must set aside our own issues or agendas and really pray and discern what God is telling us in our time in our Parish.

The purpose of the evening was then agreed as:

- ✚ To gather together as a community in prayer
- ✚ To draw from the experience of our Parishioners
- ✚ To discern the next steps in the process of revealing the Living Church in our Parish
- ✚ To explore the views of all present regarding a Parish Pastoral Council

What is a Parish Pastoral Council?

We moved on to consider what a Parish Pastoral Council (PPC) is. We heard the following:

What?

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

Priest acknowledges the wisdom of the Parishioners and expresses his desire to share with them his responsibility for the governance of the Parish

Set Pastoral Themes for the Parish- everything to do with the life of the Parish can be discussed



As such, the PPC would be a group drawn from the Parish who would be members of the PPC for a time before a new group of people would be chosen to carry on the work. The PPC is a place for co-responsibility between clergy, those in religious life, and laity. A PPC can help plan for what is needed now and, more importantly, plan for what is needed in the

future. This is especially important in a world that is changing so rapidly. We heard that there was sound Church teaching and directives about having a PPC, coming from Vatican II and subsequent Church documents. Having heard about the nature of PPC's we moved on to our small group exercise for the evening.

Exercise- A Successful Council

In small groups we asked the people to complete the following task:

Imagine we had a PPC that was working well in our Parish today.

What would it be about that PPC that made it work well?

This was not a task asking for ideas for what the PPC would do. Rather it was for us to reflect on the nature of a successful PPC. In ways this was a difficult task because we are so often used to 'doing' and generating 'doing' ideas. We are less accustomed to reflecting on values and the nature of the groups we wish to set up. However, the benefits of taking the latter approach is that the group we will set up will be better formed and informed through taking time to reflect on its nature. This in turn will help ensure that decisions about ideas and 'doing' we will better decision and actions. The groups came up with many ideas which we grouped under the following themes for a successful PPC:



Each theme had several ideas behind it. It seems that the people who gathered there wanted a PPC who were representative of all the people in the Parish. They felt that the PPC should be a prayerful group who were approachable for the people in the Parish. They felt the PPC should be trustworthy and be able to keep confidence. They should work in an honest manner, with everyone having a voice on the PPC.

Having completed the task and considered the whole idea of having a PPC, we asked ourselves the question:

Is there consensus that having a PPC would be a good idea and that we should work together monthly to consider in more depth what a PPC could do in our Parish in or time?

Happily, there was complete agreement on this question that we should move ahead together. Therefore, we set the following action:

- ✚ Our next meeting will be on 7TH November 2012 in Killough Parish Hall
- ✚ The topic will be: **What could a PPC work to do in our Parish?**
- ✚ Jim from Living Church will continue to facilitate the meetings
- ✚ Jim will provide a write up of this and subsequent sessions for the Parish bulletin as well as the Living Church website:
<http://www.downandconnor.org/livingchurch/pastoral-area-teams/>
- ✚ All Parishioners are welcome to attend these meetings
- ✚ People can attend one, some or all of the meetings

This was a very active meeting. The people who came were truly engaged in the topic for the evening. This means that when they said 'yes' to committing to an on-going process, there can be real confidence that this process will happen and be successful. This is a very exciting time in our Diocese and it is fantastic to see the Parish of Bright journeying along with so many other Parishes and asking 'what does God want in our time?'

Jim Deeds, Living Church October 2012