



Facilitated Event Summary

Parish: St. Teresa of Avila

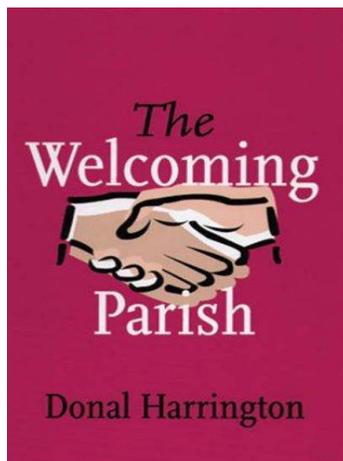
Date: 9th September 2012

Venue: Parish Centre

Introduction and Purpose:

On Sunday evening 9th September 2012, 20 people from the Parish of St. Teresa's gathered together in the Parish Centre for the 6th in a series of meetings designed to culminate in the forming of a Parish Pastoral Council.

We gathered in our sacred space before we began the work of the night. Fr Brendan led us in prayer. We reflected on the beginning of John's Gospel where, in beautiful language he tells us that, **'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God'**. We went on to reflect on Christ as the **'light of men'**. Fr Brendan prayed that we would be able to bring this light of Christ to bear in our meeting tonight and into our Parish as well.



He went on to read from, 'The Welcoming Parish', by Donal Harrington. In particular we heard of the Parish as a 'village fountain' where people could come to draw water and quench their thirst. This would make for a messy, rather than tidy, place, with membership made up of the wounded, damaged and inadequate. **'Such a [parish] would be a place of hospitality. The emphasis would be on inclusiveness rather than exclusion...Hospitality would look to the future rather than the past'**. At this point we moved to our work area to begin the session.

Before agreeing our purpose for the evening we agreed a set of guiding principles for this series of meetings:

- ✚ We are not the Parish Pastoral Council
- ✚ We are in the business of giving and receiving wisdom from all
- ✚ We collect any questions as we go
- ✚ Our work informs the way forward
- ✚ We meet in the Spirit of Christ-what does God want?
- ✚ We seek consensus- not voting
- ✚ Not 'did I get what I want or did you get what you want- more can I live with the outcome and is it what is best for our Parish.

The purpose of the evening was then agreed as:

- ✚ To gather together as a community in prayer
- ✚ To review our last session
- ✚ To consider what a Parish is
- ✚ To consider the nature of our Parish
- ✚

Review of the Previous Meetings:

We spent some time at the beginning of the evening reviewing the work done in previous sessions. This was particularly important for those who had missed one or two meetings and, more especially, those who were attending tonight for the first time. For details of previous meetings, please visit; <http://www.downandconnor.org/livingchurch/pastoral-area-teams/>.

Exercise 1- What is a Parish?

We shared the word or phrase that came to mind when we heard the word 'Parish'. The group came up with many words and it was clear that the group felt attached to the Parish. We grouped the words together as follows:

Parish Means:

Unit / Boundary / Facilities / Hub

Place / Social Function- births, deaths
etc / Isolation

Worshipping / Church / Christ Centred

Communion / People of Prayer/
Eucharist

Mission / Growing / Reflecting

Energy / Discerning

Kingdom of God / Outreach / Ministry

Social justice

Community / Togetherness / Sharing

Family / People / Home

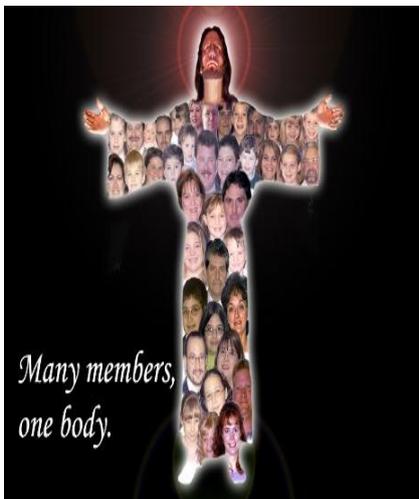
We reflected on these words and on the words of Pope John Paul II (who described the Parish as not merely territorial but a vibrant community of faith), of Canon Law (which sets out the varied roles and tasks of the Parish) and of Donal Harrington (who reminds us that Parish is about the breaking of bread- worship in Church- and the washing of feet- mission out in the world). Having done that and reflected on the nature of Parish it seems that our definition of Parish would be:

A vibrant, living and growing Catholic faith community in a particular geographical area who gather to worship Christ and (having heard His call) go out to minister to each other and, in particular, to those who are in need through illness, poverty, injustice or those having lapsed from or with no faith in Jesus Christ.

Exploration of the Nature of our Parish: 3 Churches but One Body One Spirit in Christ



We began this section with a reflection on 1 Corinthians 12:



“For even as the body is one and yet has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. For the body is not one member, but many. If the foot says, "Because I am not a hand, I am not a part of the body," it is not for this reason any the less a part of the body. And if the ear says, "Because I am not an

eye, I am not a part of the body," it is not for this reason any the less a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? But now God has placed the members, each one of them, in the body, just as He desired.”

This set the scene for our discussions about our own Parish as we strive to be One Body One Spirit in Christ.

Exercise2:

In small groups of three or four, we encouraged the people to answer the following question. It is worth noting that we had people from right across the Parish for this exercise.

How does the fact that we have three Churches in our Parish help or hinder us being One Body One Spirit in Christ- a unified Parish family?

In answering the question, the groups came up with issues that both helped and hindered our aim of unity. It was an adult, realistic conversation that acknowledged that, while we had some difficulties to address, we also had something special and advantageous in how we are built as a Parish. In feedback, we gathered the information below:

Factors that Help:

-  Beautiful Churches
-  Resource rich in terms of buildings
-  Good will of people to change mind set
-  Choice
-  Church close to home
-  Each Church has its own identity
-  Old and infirm can attend a Church close to home
-  Well equipped to deal with revival when our work succeeds!
-  More scope for different activities (Children's Liturgy, Choir, Folk Group etc)
-  Diversity

Factors that Hinder:

-  Distance and transport
-  Mass time changes
-  Financing three Churches
-  Problems in relationships
-  Difficulty of providing masses in three Churches
-  Natural/ Historical division
-  Entrenched mind sets of some Parishioners
-  Distinct groupings

The conversation felt useful and is, perhaps, one that could be developed in the time to come. Further to this conversation, we asked the following question:

How do we need to approach Parish life in order to keep us as One Body One Spirit in Christ- a unified Parish family?

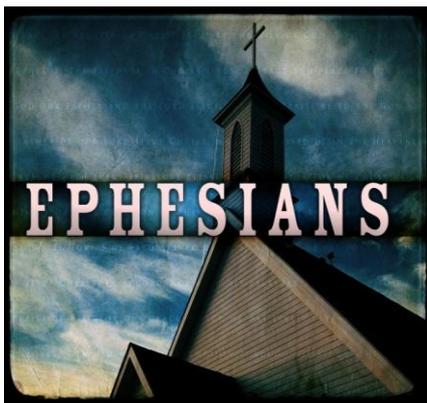
Rather than break into small groups, we stayed in a large group and took feedback as people felt they wanted to speak. The group came up with the following:

- 🌍 Share resources- community functions
- 🌍 More priests
- 🌍 Strengthen mindset of unity
- 🌍 Overcome negativity- with positivity
- 🌍 Embrace and celebrate our differences
- 🌍 Procession, banners and celebrations for the whole Parish
- 🌍 Have Parish based and not Church based ministries (readers to read across the Churches; choir to sing across the Churches for example)

These ideas could form the basis of work to be taken on by the PPC in terms of ensuring that we are united as one Parish. However, they also offer a personal challenge to each of us as Parishioners to truly act as One Body One Spirit in Christ.

Conclusion:

We concluded the evening by, once again, gathering in prayer. We prayed with Ephesians 4:1-6:



As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. 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.

Our next session is on 30th September at 7 p.m. and will be a consolidation session. We will review the work we have done and have a liturgy of thanksgiving and preparation for gathering our PPC.

Jim Deeds

Living Church September 2012