

Parish Partnership Meeting

Date: Wednesday 10th May

Start: 7.30pm

Chairperson: Fr Stephen Myers also present
Fr Francis Abara (S Ockendon),
Fr Anthony Cho (Tilbury & SLH)
Matuš Meleg (Seminararian)
Also present members of parishes

- 1. Opening prayer & welcome (Fr Stephen)**
- 2. Condition survey**

It was reported that the condition survey (for St T's) included a drone survey in order to inspect condition of roofs and guttering.

Conclusion was that it would take around £250,000 plus VAT to bring things up to regulation standard.

Donations from the parish building fund have around £100,000 in the bank at present.

There was a recent Fire Regulations inspection and this needs to be acted upon in order to comply with the rules.

There has been a rodent infestation in one of the areas under the church and exterminators have been called in.

There was an asbestos survey carried out around 3 years ago – but this has not yet been acted upon. This would entail a cost of approximately £5K - £10K

To retain the property in a safe condition at the current time would cost around £300K

Fr Anthony reported that the Church Hall (SLH) is currently not fit for purpose and as such is out of use. The Tilbury presbytery is in need of urgent roof repairs, and these would cost around £55K. It was noted that the parish in Tilbury needs extra help and support as it is considered to be a 'poor' parish.

Fr Francis (S. Ock) advised that there are plans to sell the Church Hall and build a smaller one with the extra monies then available for other repairs. The presbytery is in a safe state of repair at present. However, the church roof is in need of urgent repair at a cost of around £28K. So £15K is needed to address urgent repairs with a further £100K to cover other necessary works.

Fr Stephen reported that there has been a fall (post COVID) in Mass attendance of around 27%. Obviously, this affects donations made to the parish. St Thomas Church is currently £50K in the red due to rising costs (gas, electricity and general cost of living).

It was agreed that the Fabric and Maintenance Committee needs to be re-started. They would then advise the parish how the monies (restoration fund) are being spent.

Fr Francis (S Ock) advised that he will be speaking to Bishop Alan regarding selling the current Church Hall.

Fr Anthony (SLH) advised that the presbytery at Tilbury had suffered a ceiling collapse which would cost around £500K to renovate. He suggested the possibility to sell the property/land and move out into the presbytery at SLH but this building is also in need of renovation work.

3. Buildings report

It was noted that it is the churches' duty to maintain all their buildings to a safe and risk-free condition to comply with current regulations.

4. Working together

It was recognised that in the future there is the possibility that there will only be 2 priests working in partnership to cover the 3 parishes (Grays, S Ock, Tilbury/SLH). The need to consider sorting out the way Masses would be organised (possible rota basis) was discussed thinking which Masses had the highest attendance.

The bishop had suggested employing a youth worker (appointed by the diocese) to support the youth and catechists etc in the parishes which would increase the engagement of young people in the Church. This has a 3 part rationale – Supporting youth events, getting more young people involved in retreats and similar events and finally reporting these things to the Church community. This is where there is currently a gap and as a result youths leave the church and do not return.

Fr Stephen suggested a sharing of costs (between the 3 parishes) for such things as Fire Inspections. So one company would be used to carry out the work – maybe even on the same day. He also suggested that there could be a sharing of some Sacramental Preparation Classes. This could entail possible geographical issues but with car sharing/pooling or similar these could be overcome. Each parish needs to consider areas where they can work together to save as many expenses as possible to become a working parish partnership.

(There was a question from the floor at this point regarding why do we actually have Catholic Schools if not all pupils are of the faith – the reply was that the ethos and atmosphere are far better in them than many state run schools and this has been recognised by people outside of the faith. These attributes are benefiting to both Catholics and non-Catholics)

(There was then a brief discussion about the need for a local Catholic boys' school. But it seems that this is not easy to attain any more. Government approval is needed, and it was then agreed that this was not really an appropriate point to be raised at this meeting. The suggestion was made that parents write to both MP's and Local Counsellors and raise the issue with them)

5 & 6: Masses and Sacramental programmes

As we currently have 3 priests in residence there will be no changes to Masses at the moment.

In the future the Bishop needs to decide – in consultation with the local community and clergy how this would change.

As the numbers of clergy decrease (death, illness or retirement) and fewer people are training for the clergy, there will be a shortage of priests in the diocese in the future.

(A suggestion was raised from the floor regarding selling some Church properties and building/creating Parish centres as a way forward)

(It was suggested that there is a bigger push for vocations and that this is discussed more frequently and openly in the schools. Matus did point out that when he visits the local schools this is a topic he often addresses with the pupils.)

(Question from Tilbury parishioner relating to a previous meeting held there – Parishioner stated that the meeting was informed by Steve Webb that there was a time scale of just 2 years for things to improve regarding building works and the church. What would happen if these things are not resolved?)

Fr Stephen replied saying he thinks he Steve was referring to finances and not closure of the churches)

It was agreed that there is a need to discuss the sharing of resources (Baptism course, Confirmation classes etc) with the Parish Partnership at a later date.

7. Next steps

It was considered and discussed that in the future if there were only 2 priests to cover the 3 parishes, they could both live in the same house or live at either end of the Parish. There is also the option to sell the presbyteries and house the priests in local council accommodation!

You have to balance what you need against what you can afford.

If there were only 2 priests available to cover the parishes then there would need to be a Parish Assistant in each church to assist with the everyday running of things (counting monies, fielding phone calls etc)

8. Next meeting

Date for next meeting was set for Wednesday 21st June at 7.30pm