

Parish Pastoral Council Meeting Minutes

Thursday 19th February 2026

6.30pm, St Palladius Church House

Present: Fr Stephen Latham, Janet Barr, Joan Cairns, Paula Calderwood, Brigid McGuire, Annette McGurran, Ann Sweeney

Apologies: Tony Leslie, Paul Marshall

Fr Stephen welcomed everyone and started the meeting with the Prayer for the Diocese of Galloway.

What's good?

SVDP have started Mini Vinnies at St Palladius. This has been well received and the group have enjoyed building stronger ties with the school such as receiving an invitation to attend the school's Burns Supper. A Valentine's Tea was organised to raise money for SVDP.

Primary 7 children from the Deanery (about 250 children) took part in a retreat at St Matthew's as part of their transition. Some of the children's artwork is on display at the back of St Palladius'.

What can we improve?

Discussion re chatting before Mass

A request for a quieter and more reflective time before Mass was received. Opinion was divided on whether it is important to foster a thriving and welcoming community in the parish in which communication between parishioners is welcomed or whether priority should be given to creating a quiet and reverential atmosphere before Mass. Is it possible or desirable to ask people to talk outside or at the back of church before or after Mass? Both points of view were supported and Fr Stephen agreed to put an item in the bulletin asking parishioners to be considerate, and tolerant, of each other's needs.

Volunteers

Volunteers are needed in all three parishes. Suggestion that a more structured approach should be taken – for example, providing a clear 'job description' of each role so that people are clear on what they are committing to. It was agreed that some people are hesitant to volunteer and like to be asked. One idea is to have a parish 'jobs fair' in the spring. An open meeting could be held to discuss how we sustain the running of the parishes.

Finance

Finance statements for the year ending 31st December 2025 have been made available for all three Garnock Valley parishes. A paper copy will be available for people to take away and will be displayed on notice boards.

All three parishes are operating at a loss and have been for some time. In the long term it is not sustainable to continue running three parishes given the current level of finances.

Note: St Brigid's has £100,000 invested in a Parochial Investment Fund.

General note: Many bills are paid from the Dalry account, which should be reimbursed from the other parishes.

Banking arrangements

The bank now imposes bank charges which is an additional cost. However, there is very little flexibility regarding banking arrangements as Canon Law requires each parish to have an independent account and we are tied to banking arrangements made by the Diocese.

Benefit of standing orders

Contributions made by Standing Order do not incur charges but fees are imposed when cash donations are banked.

Gift Aid

It will be necessary to start from scratch and ask parishioners to sign Gift Aid forms.

Availability of information on weekly donations

It is not always easy to organise counters in each parish (ideally three volunteers are required for each count). This means that figures are not available every week for donations. In addition, information on standing orders have to be collated from bank statements. In parishes where this information is printed weekly in bulletins, there tend to be administrative assistance for the Parish Priest which is not the case in the Garnock Valley.

Fr Stephen is planning to give a presentation about finances after mass in all three parishes.

Deanery and Diocesan Pastoral Councils and Synodality

The next Deanery Pastoral Council will take place on Monday 23rd February 2026 at St John's in Stevenston. All are welcome to attend.

The meeting will be based on the bishop's seven-year plan for the Diocese and will ask "How does the Holy Spirit want the Diocese of Galloway to proclaim the Passion, Death and Resurrection of the Lord Jesus in 2033?"

Unsustainable

Attention was drawn to the bishop's pastoral letter for February 2026 in which he takes an unflinching assessment of the task facing our priests who are "being asked to do increasingly

more while being fewer in number.” Other factors, such as declining congregations and the poor condition of many buildings lead to the unavoidable conclusion is that this situation is unsustainable.

The bishop continues: “We must also be asking if the present structuring and number of parishes is suitable.”

Spirit of Openness

Before change happens, the bishop asks us to pray - to open ourselves to the Holy Spirit – to think about what we can do to develop an atmosphere or industry of prayer – to pray often to the Holy Spirit so that we are led by God. We do not know where the future will lead us but we need to move together as part of a Church which is greater than us.

Buildings and Maintenance

General

Electrical inspections are due for all three churches, and parish buildings (a legal requirement every five years). The work required to meet standards is very costly.

St Brigid's

Sale of house in Kilbirnie – there is an interested buyer. Proceeds from the sale will belong to St Brigid's.

Work on disabled access and toilet at St Brigid's will start in March.

Suggestion – a hand rail for readers.

St Palladius

Enquiry re work at the hall in Dalry – there is currently no money available for work to be carried out (building funds collected are absorbed by maintenance costs). Plans were previously drawn up by an architect – Fr Stephen will enquire as to their whereabouts.

Our Lady's

The church hall in Beith will be marketed when the house in Kilbirnie is sold.

Radiators in the church are in very poor condition.

Upcoming Events

Reconciliation Service for Lent will be at St Brigid's this year. Date tbc

Children's Reconciliation will be held in the schools.

General note: Fr Stephen plans to start saying the Prayer for the Diocese of Galloway after Communion.

Diary Dates

First Communion: St Palladius – Sunday 17th May, St Brigid's – Sunday 24th May

No Confirmations this year – decision to be made regarding the best age for this to be done.

AOCB

Discussion re use of fresh flowers instead of artificial – seen as particularly important at Easter.

Fr Stephen will produce a Welcome Poster to put at the back of the churches. It will include a QR code.

Discussion re marking of anniversaries of deaths – Fr Stephen welcomes requests from families – he particularly welcomes written information to ensure that no one is overlooked.

Discussion on possibility of printing adverts on bulletin to bring in income. Experience has shown that this is often counter-productive as the size of the bulletin often has to be increased and the extra cost cancels out the financial benefit.

Ideas for events – “Don't ask ‘What can I do?’ ask ‘Who will stop me?’”

Given the level of existing commitments, Fr Stephen is not able to make all ideas and requests for events happen but he emphasised that it's good to try ideas that will build the parish. Even if he cannot be 'hands on' he offers his full support.

Ideas discussed:

Possibility of a Faith Group during Lent. This could take the form of a 'retreat' on a Sunday afternoon which could take place in people's houses. Fr Stephen has videos which could be used as the basis for discussion. Fr Stephen could ask for numbers of those interested.

Stations of the Cross – could be led by a parishioner. Fr Stephen has materials which could be helpful.

Discussion regarding encouraging parishioners to put up photos at the back of the churches of good things happening – such as Mini Vinnies, Parish dance, upcoming celebrations such as wedding anniversaries etc.

Date of next meeting: tbc