

Response to Parish Consultation

Part H – Step A – The Parish Return Form

Section 1: Introduction

St Matthew's Parish, Ponteland, Newcastle and North Tyneside Deanery

Consultation process

Contributions were invited at several Sunday Masses and via the parish newsletter. Three written responses were received which, together with informal verbal feedback, have been summarised in this response.

Beacons of Mission

St Matthew's is a welcoming parish community with well attended Masses on Sundays and Holy Days, as well as most weekdays. People, especially newcomers, are welcomed to Sunday Mass and to the post Mass coffee/tea. The parish is a member of the Local Ecumenical Partnership with the Anglican and Methodist Churches. There is an active SVP group who meet monthly for prayer and organise visits to individuals in their own homes and in local care homes. There is an enthusiastic group of Catenians who support the parish community by involvement in social, charitable and spiritual activity.

Section 2: Mission Discernment

Worship (Celebrating the Sacraments as Places of Encounter):-

We have a much-improved experience at Masses and the Sacraments since Father Anthony resumed his active ministry. In future we hope to attract more young adults and families with children leading to more Baptisms, First Holy Communions, Confirmations and Marriages. This could lead to Masses led by children or young adults and a Children's Liturgy on Sundays in the Hall.

There is a need to start pre-sacrament training for all the above sacraments and post sacrament support, like the renewal of baptism and marriage vows. We already have opportunities for prayer at daily Rosary and Adoration and Stations of the Cross as well as monthly Churches Together prayers and meditation. We could have special prayer services for peace or in times of crisis or disasters.

There is a need to recruit and train several lay Ministers of the Word capable of leading weekday prayer and communion services when no priest is available. Fr Anthony has invited five parishioners to be trained and commissioned as Ministers of the Eucharist who will then be able to take Holy Communion to the sick and housebound. Along with existing Ministers we are training Ministers to lead the services of the Word and Holy

Communion in the absence of the Priest. Fr Anthony has already made use of our trained Ministers to lead such services on weekdays when he is on Holiday. This was well received by the Ministers and the Parishioners and the attendance was the same as would normally attend Mass.

There is a small choir who lead the music of the Sunday liturgy. There is a need to recruit more members, both singers and instrumentalists, particularly younger people.

The average age of the congregation is quite high, so the long-term future of the parish will depend very much on attracting younger people into active participation in the worshipping community.

The lack of women in positions of authority in the church and continued resistance to ordination of women and married men was raised by some people as factors that both limit our ability to respond to the declining numbers of priests and discourage many younger people from active involvement in the Church. This remains a disputed issue which calls for continued patient listening and discernment.

Teach (Handing on the Faith):-

We work with other Churches on World Day of Prayer, Christian Unity Week services and the annual "Party in the Park". Also several parishioners attend Ecumenical services at St Mary's and the Methodists at Christmas, Easter and Bible Sunday.

In the longer term we should consider setting up an "RCIA" group. This could be done jointly with one or more local parishes. We could also consider working with the Anglican and Methodist communities on a shared introduction to the Christian faith for enquirers who do not have a strong link to any particular denomination.

St Matthew's has previously been involved in local Ponteland events such as the Remembrance service and the Raising of the Cross on Good Friday, but this involvement has not been so evident in recent years. It would be a good demonstration of our commitment to the Local Ecumenical Partnership if this sort of visible ecumenical involvement was resumed. It would also be a positive witness if Christians of all denominations, both lay and clerical, were seen to be working together on a fraternal basis as much as possible.

Serve (Sharing Christ's Love in Action):-

We try to cater for some needs in the community through SVP visits to the sick and elderly at home and in Care Homes. There is a need to recruit more SVP members as the number of housebound people increases. Fr Anthony is now actively visiting the sick and housebound hearing confessions and offering the sick and housebound the Sacrament of the sick. It would be good to arrange a Mass of anointing for the sick in

the Parish and utilise the hall for refreshments after Mass. This could be carried out with the assistance of the parish SVP and the Catenians.

Overseas aid is supported through CAFOD collections and campaigns, the annual Fairtrade “Big Brew” which is a significant ecumenical event, as well as “Missio” collections. The Parish has recently appointed a Cafod Representative to promote the word of Cafod in the Parish.

Activities that seek to share Christ’s love in action could be shared with one or more local parishes. We could also consider working more closely with the Anglican and Methodist communities wherever there is no strong reason to work separately.

The lack of a Catholic Primary School makes recruiting young people for service in the community difficult, but Ponteland schools provide the opportunity for children to take part in social action. Fr Anthony is to have a First Holy Communion Mass shortly for one child who has been prepared in the Parish. There were no takers for the confirmation programme offered in the parish this year but we will still do what we can to take the invites to our secondary schools in the coming years.

Lay leadership is present in the parish, but it needs lay, as well as priest led coordination. For this we need a Parish Advisory Council to make it more focused, organised and open to the congregation. Fr Anthony has held the first meeting of the newly formed Parish Advisory Council along with a newly formed Finance Committee to review the Parish Accounts which will be publicised in the Parish on the parish website along with this consultation document.

Community (Building a Family of Faith):-

We have welcomers, but we need a greater congregation-wide effort to make everyone welcome, so they feel they belong. The vulnerable and isolated are supported by parishioners and the SVP. Resilience is aided by support and social events like the Christmas Carol evening, SVP tea, Fairtrade Big Brew and after Mass coffee, which all bring joy and companionship. Our future vitality would be enhanced by a Lay Pastoral Council both in the short term to help Fr Anthony, but also for a time when we might just have a visiting priest, who lives elsewhere. The Diocese needs to train our lay leaders.

Whilst we have ecumenical links with local churches, we have few interfaith links with Jews, Muslims, Sikhs and Hindus. This is an area for further consideration.

Section 3: Stewardship and our Common Home (Property)

Church:

Estimated occupancy capacity	200
Estimated hours use per week	6
Estimated number of car parking spaces	12*
Level access into and within building	Yes
Accessible WC within building	No (see Hall below)
% of people travelling by car	60% (estimate)
Local public transport links	Regular bus service nearby

Hall

Estimated occupancy capacity	80
Estimated hours use per week	2
Estimated number of car parking spaces	12*
Level access into and within building	Yes
Accessible WC within building	Yes (Female, Male and disabled)
% of people travelling by car	60% (estimate)
Local public transport links	Regular bus service nearby

* There is a large, free public car park a short walk from the site.

Presbytery

The presbytery is attached to the church and has been refurbished recently.

Section 4: Stewardship Review Discernment

Finance:-

Parish finances are managed by Fr Anthony with assistance from Andrew, a lay volunteer and Fr Anthony has recently appointed a new Finance Committee made up of the Lay Signatories on the Parish Account and other representatives i.e the newly appointed safeguarding Representative a Builder, a representative from the Hall group and the Parish Health and safety Representative. Greater lay involvement and more information is strongly recommended concerning how weekly donations are spent and what major costs are impending. We believe that St Matthew's is a financially sustainable parish. This matter is to be addressed shortly by the Parish Finance / Pastoral Advisory Council.

Buildings:-

Our Church, Presbytery and Hall seem in good condition, are well kept and are accessible for wheelchairs (the Presbytery has ramp access to the ground floor). The Hall could be used more both by the Parish and the wider community. We also need a carbon footprint survey of our buildings and their heating and cooking systems.

People:-

We need more volunteers to help run the parish, including involvement in the liturgy, with tasks and responsibilities made clear. Fr Anthony has recently appointed a new Parish Sacristan with a wealth of experience from the Cathedral Parish who will be a great asset to the Parish. We have some great people who keep the parish on the road, but for example if Ted Armstrong, who looks after much of the routine maintenance of the church and the hall (and is our Health and safety Representative), was unavailable, we would need someone to stand in very quickly. Leadership and organisation must be widened, and this will again be helped by our newly formed Parish Advisory Council.

Sustainability:-

We are in a comparatively well-off area with a committed but ageing congregation and so are financially secure for the next few years. We seem to spend our money wisely to support our Mission. It would be worth getting paid secretarial support for the priest, as is the case with the other two churches in Ponteland.

Conclusion:-

We have a great Parish, Priest and Congregation, but it is not sustainable simply to maintain the status quo. We must develop together, be more outward looking, attract young people and families, and with the help of the Spirit, great things will be achieved.

Section 5: Snapshot Summary and Parish Conclusions

What is thriving and must be strengthened?

- Sunday and weekday Masses and prayer services.
- SVP group and Catenians.
- Ecumenical links.
- CAFOD and Fair Trade.
- Finances and buildings in good order.

What should be adjusted?

- Work closely with our new Parish Advisory Council and Finance Committee.
- More visible involvement in Local Ecumenical Partnership.
- Attract more young people and families. This might include setting up an RCIA group and collaboration with Anglican and Methodist Churches.
- Recruit new people to various ministries including Lay Ministers of the Word, choir, SVP, welcoming & maintenance.

What drains Mission, is unsuitable, and needs to be released?

- An ageing congregation and forecast declining number of priests.
- No Catholic Primary or Secondary Schools in the parish.

Where is the Holy Spirit prompting bold steps?

- Reaching out to younger people and families.
- Pray for and encourage more lay involvement across all parish ministries and activities.
- Deeper cooperation with local Anglican and Methodist Churches which could include a shared “introduction to the Christian faith” programme.

What are our next steps as a parish?

- Welcome our new Parish Advisory Council and Finance Committee.