

## **REPORT FROM ST ANNE'S PARISH ASSEMBLY 30 MARCH 2009**

The 4<sup>th</sup> annual assembly of St Anne's Parish was facilitated by the Parish Pastoral Council. It consisted of a time of prayerful reflection on scripture, inputs from members of the Parish Pastoral Council about the work and reflections of the Council and opportunities for group discussion and feedback from all the parishioners present. Feedback from parishioners about the structure, format and content of the evening was extremely positive (detailed comments from individual comment sheets are included in Appendix A).

In response to the initial questions, "in your opinion, what aspect of our Parish most helps you feel you belong?" and "what aspect of Church going in St Anne's most develops you faith?", getting involved with parish groups or having responsibilities within the parish were felt to be very important for developing a sense of belonging to the parish. Some parishioners shared that until they "threw themselves into the life of the parish" they felt on the periphery of parish life.

Further written feedback from discussions about how to continue to develop our parish and help people feel more involved were collected from groups and have been collated in Appendix B. Individual feedback, submitted to the Parish Pastoral Council through the feedback forms available on the night have also been collated and are included in Appendix C. Both sets of feedback have been summarised below under the following headings:

### **Continuing to develop the sense of community in our parish**

The need to continue to develop the sense of community (or "family") within our parish was expressed by a number of discussion groups/individuals. The wide variety of groups and initiatives available within St Anne's was highlighted and their role in developing a sense of belonging was acknowledged. Because of this role, it was felt that groups should be encouraged to recruit new members and develop a sense of inclusiveness. More frequent and more detailed communication of the work being undertaken by the many groups within the parish was also suggested.

### **St Anne's - A welcoming parish**

The importance of the welcome to the parish was highlighted, as it was felt that if people felt welcome, they would be more inclined to return to St Anne's. The work of the Welcome Team was praised, but it was also felt that every member of the parish had a responsibility to welcome people to our parish. Personally inviting people to join groups/become involved was also considered to be very important.

### **Families and young people**

The importance of families and young people in our parish life was reflected again this year by the fruitful discussion and feedback in this area. The importance of supporting young families was emphasised. The work already being undertaken by the Baptism team, the children's liturgy team and our Catholic schools was praised. The preparation Sundays for First Holy Communion and Confirmation, and the integration of First Holy Communion into Sunday Mass were felt to be important

to the life of our parish. The significant work undertaken with the youth of the parish was also recognised, and further suggestions for activities that would appeal to young people were made.

### **Evangelisation**

A number of groups and individuals commented on reaching out to those parishioners who do not come to St Anne's. Suggestions included somehow helping people to see why they need parish, forming a Legion of Mary group, continuing to enhance our Sunday liturgies, developing activities that will be attractive to non practising Catholics and ensuring people have the best experiences possible on those very significant moments when they encounter the parish (eg funerals, weddings, the birth of children).

### **The changing face of our church**

Many groups felt that the church will probably be more laity lead as priest numbers decrease, and recognised the importance of preparing ourselves for the roles we must take. The catechesis/formation courses already presented by Fr O'Donnell were felt to be a good start and many groups/people would like them to continue. Some felt that as the numbers of people attending mass get smaller, the parish may appear more vibrant and attractive (as the people that will have remained are the most active), and that this could perhaps result in numbers growing again.

## **APPENDIX A: COLLATED COMMENTS FROM INDIVIDUAL FEEDBACK RELATING TO THE PARISH ASSEMBLY**

- Thankyou for a most interesting evening.
- Parish assembly most informative. Liked the structure, reflection on scripture very helpful.
- Very impressive presentation of PPC assembly.
- The assembly was extremely positive and heartening, with an informative and purposeful structure.
- Format of meeting much better - more positive.
- Structure of evening much better than previously. Informative, interesting and spiritual.
- A very worthwhile evening - very well structured.
- Enjoyed the evening very much and always marvel at how others can talk so openly about their faith.
- It was very impressive that people spoke from the heart about their experience of parish.
- Discussion was livelier and everyone was more involved than last year. It was very enjoyable.
- I think that the structure to this years assembly is a good improvement to the previous assemblies. Although some more time for discussion would perhaps not be a bad idea!
- Well done to all concerned. I think you all do a wonderful job. St Anne's is a great parish to live in - forward thinking and with the help of the council improving all the time.
- Get the feeling of the mood of the parish, and it is good. Had worried about the future for faith of our children but feel excited that mood of optimism and acceptance that we can all help ourselves - more optimistic.
- It strikes me that we are on the verge of much change. This then shows that we might need more meetings of the Council throughout the year.
- It would be very helpful if the parish council published an occasional newsletter (say once a month/2 months) on what it has been doing.

## **APPENDIX B: COLLATED FEEDBACK FROM GROUP DISCUSSIONS**

### **Continuing to develop the sense of community in our parish**

- Value in parish through variety of groups – therefore encourage people to join.
- The key features of groups should be to grow, and therefore groups should be open to new people.
- Each group in parish to recruit new members and develop inclusiveness.
- Baptisms could be during mass in a similar manner to the 1st Communions.
- Clearer presentation of parish - suggestion box, condense tonight at masses.
- Newsletter every 3-4 months letting the parish know how groups in the parish are progressing.

### **St Anne's - A welcoming parish**

- Deepen quality of welcome.
- If people feel involved and welcomed they will want to come back.

### **Families and young people**

- Importance of developing faith by example for young children. Therefore structures like Baptism team to support parents/Catholic schools, childrens liturgy important.
- Importance of early intervention - Baptism courses, children's liturgy, Catholic schools to attract younger people.
- Encourage young people to come to Mass. It is very important to try to hold their attention. Fr O'Donnell does a good job on this.
- Continue the involvement of youth in the parish.
- Subsidise the hall for young people to use for youth events to reach out to them to try and make them part of the parish even if they do not attend mass.

### **Evangelisation**

- Importance of making those who are not already involved feel that they are important – organise things they can dip into whatever their age.
- We need to reach out to those who don't go to mass.
- We need to let people know why they need parish.
- Significant moments can draw people back (eg funeral, wedding, birth of children).

### **The changing face of our church**

- If the parish gets smaller - but with active people then church will appear vibrant and attractive and perhaps numbers will grow again.
- Church will probably be more laity lead as priest numbers are less.
- The role of lay people will be more important as we have fewer priests.
- Envisage laity driven parish which may be smaller but more vibrant/joyful and will attract others in. Parish clustering/less priests.
- How can more parish laity play a more constructive role in parish life?

- The importance of training/formation of lay people to ensure that in the future, when lay people are more needed in the running of the parish, they are well equipped to do so.
- Catechesis. Lay people require training /courses to equip them for this - need to be "evangelised" themselves first.
- Development of laity led church and faith development. This needs preparation. Individuals can't do this without support or training.
- More structure of groups to teach people how to lead for the future re prayer etc in Church.
- Parish should continue with teaching courses (eg Lord's prayer).

## **APPENDIX C: COLLATED COMMENTS FROM INDIVIDUAL FEEDBACK**

### **Continuing to develop the sense of community in our parish**

- Feel truly involved for about 4 years despite having lived in the parish for 39 years - terrific well thought out homily will encourage thought and Conor and co's efforts with youth give my children added reason to attend and participate happily - Love welcoming committee at mass.
- It struck me that for people to be interested they are the most involved. With this their faith develops and subsequently can be more missionary. A need for more opportunity for involvement and more to be involved in (cells groups).
- For 25 years we participated in St Anne's parish as extra-terrestrial parishioners, belonging to various groups. We see parish as people and a family rather than geography. It is important to make our "family" gatherings attractive (ie attracting those who may wish to belong) rather than exclusive.
- Grow/develop togetherness.

### **St Anne's - A welcoming parish**

- Personal invitation to become involved adds weight to involve new people.
- Encourage outsiders to make step forward/reach out.
- No parishioners from our immigrant community here tonight.
- St Anne's has been a very welcoming place for me as I have come from outside Belfast.

### **Families**

- Reaching out to all families - home/school/parish (eg parental involvement following 1st communion and 1st confession) those who are like minded currently and those who have been baptised and may not be practising prayer in their lives.

### **Young people**

- Young people age 8-11, activities - parent supervised if they want their children to attend (eg Duke of Edinburgh etc) - focus on healthy bodies.
- I think is particularly important to develop youth activities that again are not necessarily religious - this will help develop their sense of belonging and perhaps ensure their continued involvement with parish into adulthood.
- Parish "not cool" image to children.
- Used to run "disco" on a Sat night that made young people feel part of the parish.
- Child protection regulations may deter volunteers.

### **Evangelisation**

- The vision statement and mission statement does not mention evangelisation. Certainly the parish needs to "mend the baskets" (ie look after the existing parish) but unless the parish "casts the nets into the deep" will not be here in 20 years!! Need to attract people who are far away... Parish Council a useful start.

- As a parishioner, I and we should be encouraging parishioners to attend Mass in the Parish of St Anne if they are baptised and not practising/not going to mass in St Anne's parish. I recommend and would be willing to assist/join Legion of Mary group if it were set up in the parish.
- I would welcome steps to introduce groups that would appeal to current members of the parish who do not have a strong faith and who would not necessarily be interested in forming groups with a "religious" slant. This would perhaps be an opportunity for people to feel and become involved with parish and perhaps will result in developing their faith.

### **The changing face of our church**

- It is obvious that in the coming years the parish will need committed members to help run the parish. Dedicated Catholic teachers will be very necessary. The parish will need to be a living entity to attract others. Children of 8 years of age now don't want to come to mass. What will it be like in 10 years time!!
- In the future the laity will have to play a much bigger role in the management and other religious life of the parish.
- Parishes as they are now will have to merge at some level.
- To lose the regularity of mass would be a pity.
- I recognise that input from parishioners is vital, but am not always aware of how/where the help is needed. Some sort of St Anne's job finder with vacancies would be good.