

Parish of Saul and Ballee

"One Family"



(Picture courtesy of P4 pupils St Patrick's PS Saul for Catholic Schools Week 2018)

Pastoral Council Review (March 2017-March 2018)

Dear Parishioner,

It is that time of year again when as the Chairperson of the Parish Pastoral Council, (PPC) I take this opportunity to update you all on the Pastoral work, which has been done and is indeed on going in our Parish of Saul and Ballee.

Our Parish physically continues to grow with new housing developments in the area and spiritually, I am pleased to say that the numbers attending weekend Masses are consistent, despite the overall Diocesan downward trend. This is very encouraging for us in our Parish. We believe this is due partly to the Spiritual leadership of Fr. Alexander but also our work in the Pastoral Council is making our Parish a fully inclusive, caring Living Church for one and all.

Our PPC continues its work in the Parish and has been very busy over the past year, which I hope you have seen, if not experienced for yourselves with various social and spiritual events/initiatives that are and have been taking place in the Parish.

This last year in line with our Constitution, saw a change in our Council membership. Three of our original members stepped down after three years service. Currently we have six members. We continue to meet in the Pastoral Centre each month with the exception of July and August.

As always in the past, our agenda is governed by the Diocesan Pastoral Themes of:

- Open and Welcoming Church
- Communication
- Lay Participation
- Faith and Worship
- Clergy

Open and Welcoming Church

We continue to encourage our young people from P4 upwards, to serve on the altar at our weekend Masses in the Parish.

With our Pastoral Centre now up and running, we hold *weekly coffee mornings* for those attending 10.00 am Mass on a Wednesday. We have also extended this to the first Sunday of the month after the 9.30am Mass. This gives those attending a chance to meet other fellow Parishioners and to catch up with what's happening within the Parish and beyond. It helps us build Community Spirit and I have to say there is a great "buzz" in the Centre on these mornings. Refreshments were also provided at various events throughout the year e.g. Cemetery Sunday in Saul, The WMOF Mass and after the Parish Carol Service.



Wednesday morning coffees



Christmas Carol Service

On 27th January 2018 we had a *Thanksgiving Mass* in St Patrick's Church, Saul for Volunteers from our three churches, followed by a supper in the Pastoral Centre. 29 of our volunteers attended and they enjoyed the food and the craic! It was good to be able to have this opportunity to meet up with one another on an occasion like that.

One of our aims this year is to have the *names of the newly Baptised printed in the weekly bulletin* and included on our Facebook Page as a way of welcoming these new additions to our Parish community. Following a review of our Baptism application forms and to conform to Data Protection and Safeguarding legislation, we have included an option on this form, for parents to give their permission for us to print their child's name accordingly. We hope to be able to proceed with this over the coming few months.

Communication

Being able to get our message across in an ever changing and sometimes challenging world is a very important part of our work as a PPC. While we continue with our quarterly Newsletter "*The Spirit of Saul and Ballee*", which updates our Parishioners on important issues and events within the Parish, we are aware of the increasing popularity of Social Media outlets like the Worldwide Web and Facebook.

We are currently reviewing our *website* and we hope to include more information and keep it up to date. All our Masses from St Patrick's Church are streamed live via the webcam. We have expanded the usage of our Parish *Facebook Page* to share our information more quickly to a wider audience. We continually use this channel to advertise any events coming up in the Parish and any other relevant information we wish to share.

We are mindful that not all of our Parishioners have computer access, so we regularly update our *noticeboards* in the Church and if necessary print *separate A4 information sheets*, if there is not sufficient space in our weekly bulletin.

Our main communication channel for the Parish is through the Parish secretary who along with Fr. Alexander is the administrator of our website and Facebook Page.

We continue to forge ahead with our *links to our two Parish schools*. We run competitions at Easter and Christmas times that always prove popular. Our Christmas 2017 competition involved a drawing for Key Stage 1 pupils of "My Family at Christmas". For Key Stage 2 we requested a poem under the above-mentioned heading. We had over 200 entries. I continue to be amazed at the depth of talent we have in our young people in the Parish and it bodes well for our future.

Lay Participation

Our Parish initiatives of *Morning Prayer, Eucharistic Adoration, Ministry of Praise and Padre Pio Group, along with Saul Sunday and Cemetery Sunday with its River of Roses Display* continue to be an important part of our Parish life. It is rewarding to witness the dedication and commitment of our Parishioners to each of these initiatives.

Our *Family Prayer Ministry* remains active in our schools. At special Liturgical Seasons in the Church, like Lent, Easter and Advent, we provide prayer sheets for these 60+ families. These include various short prayers which we encourage the families to say on a daily basis.

The big event this year is obviously the *World Meeting of Families* in Dublin on 21-26 August. Here in our Parish we are partaking in several initiatives linked to this celebration. In early December, we held our *Family Mass* that brought together our Parish, our schools and our local sporting groups.

The WMOF Prayer is now said at our daily Masses in the Parish after Holy Communion. Over 1000 Family Prayer Cards were distributed to our Church congregations and to our sick and housebound Parishioners. Our Parish schools are encouraged to say this prayer in their classrooms and their assemblies.

As a Parish we are participating in the *Popular Moments of: - The Commerative Gifts for Children's Baptism and The Commerative Gifts For Marriage.*

For the children of P4 we will present them with the "*Amoris Cube*" on the day of their First Holy Communion and encourage them and their families to partake of its challenges.



Our Parish WMOF representative will liaise with the schools in the Confirmation initiative of: "*Cead Mile Failte, One Hundred Thousand Acts of Kindness.*"

Copies of the *WMOF Icon* were distributed at all our Christmas Masses in the Parish and our Church Icon is displayed on the

Sanctuary of our Churches.

We have promoted the *Family New Years Resolutions in January* and will partake in the *Easter Blessing of Homes* with plans for further initiatives as we progress closer to the main event in Dublin in August.

Faith and Worship

This theme is very much central to our PPC work. We are continually looking at ways to enrich our Parishioners and indeed our own personal faith. With having our Pastoral Centre now, we ran *Advent talks* for the 4-week season. These talks were facilitated by our local Knights of St Columbanus and proved very popular.

Remembering our deceased family and friends is a special focus of our Christian Faith. With the emphasis being on the launch of the World Meeting of Families, this year, we were unable to organise our Special November Mass for the Parish deceased due to concentrating our efforts into launching the WMOF events in our Parish and in particular our Family Mass in early December. The Special November Mass will remain one of our tasks for the incoming year.



However as a further means of remembering our dead, we produced the *Parish Memorial Book* that contains the names of deceased friends and families buried in our Parish cemeteries. It was introduced from 1st December and the names included on it, are prayed for during the Mass of the day. If you wish to have your family members included in this book and they are buried within our cemeteries, then please contact the Parish Secretary and give her the details. You can then rest assured that your loved ones will be remembered at the Mass of the Day on their anniversary date. The Book is displayed on the Sanctuary of St Patrick's Church, Saul.

On 10th February 2018, a small group of our Commissioned Readers and Extra Ordinary Ministers of Holy Communion attended a *full day retreat* in Tobar Mhuire, Crossgar. This was a lovely day and our thanks go to Fr. Mel and the staff of Tobar Mhuire who looked after us so well.

Due to circumstances beyond our control with the Facilitators being unavailable, for the dates we required, we were unable to run the *Called and Gifted Course* but we hope to do so during 2018.

Through Fr. Alexander's visits to the Parish schools and their attendances at Mass, along with my links to St Patrick's Primary, we encourage the children, in particular those preparing for the Sacraments to call in on a Tuesday to Eucharistic Adoration. He also encourages the children to bring their parents/grandparents/child minders in for a few moments when they are passing the Church on their way home after school.

Clergy

As Pastoral Council we continue to help and support Fr. Alexander in his Pastoral care of the Parish.

The Year Ahead

Over the next few months, we will be looking at some new initiatives, in our 2018-2019 Pastoral Plan, that we can introduce into the Parish as well as the *Called and Gifted Course* and the Special November Mass previously mentioned. We will print off copies of this new Pastoral Plan in due course.

Also in June 2017 I attended along with Fr. Alexander, the first meeting of the *Downpatrick Pastoral Community Forum, (PCF)*. This is a forum of the ten Parishes in our area and includes Downpatrick, Killyleagh, Strangford, Saul and Ballee, Bright and Killough, Dunsford and Ardglass, Saintfield, Crossgar, Drumaroad and Clonvaraghan and Loughinisland.

There are 23 churches in this area with 13 priests and it is estimated that with the current rate of ordinations and deaths of priests in the Diocese, our whole area would have four priests by the end of 2026 or even earlier. The Forum consists of the Parish Priest of each Parish and a lay representative, who will remain on the PCF for three years.

Some areas the PCF will be looking at are: -

- Baptism, RCIA and Marriage preparation
- Common courses for young people and adults
- Training for Ministries
- Bereavement Ministry
- Safeguarding issues
- Review of Mass provision in the area.

It is clear there are big changes around the corner, as the present situation of a Parish Priest in each Parish cannot be sustained forever. We will keep you all advised of what is happening in the Pastoral Community and more importantly

what, we as a PPC will be working on, over the next 12 months here in Saul and Ballee.

So I take this opportunity to thank all those who currently serve in our various Parish Ministries, our altar servers and all our volunteers for their help and support and should you feel that you could help us in any way, no matter how small, please leave your details with the Parish secretary.

Finally I would ask you as we continue our journey, for your prayers and support during this coming year.

Yours faithfully

Vivienne McCormick
Chairperson

