

PARISH COUNCIL REPORT 2022- 2023

Current members of the parish council of Our Lady Immaculate and St. Cuthbert parish are Father Nick Jennings; Sister Paschaline; Ann Callan (Treasurer); Eugene Brady; Brian Rinaldi; Frank O'Neill; Duncan Reed; Anne Smith; Anne Timothy; Anne Berry (Secretary); and Peter Fleming (Chair).

It has been a busy year since the last annual general meeting report in May 2022 what with the complete breakdown of the church central heating system, the redecoration of parts of the church, the sale of the convent and the massive rises the parish and indeed ourselves have all faced with the cost of utilities. In addition we have had the sad and untimely death of Susan Hall the previous chairperson of the parish council.

Parish finances have continued to be managed by Ann Callan and our thanks go to her for coping through difficult and personal times for herself and the parish. Her accounts have been meticulous as usual and she reports regularly to the parish council as well as to the diocese. This is on top of her work with the finances of the parish centre. Just to give a ball park figure at this moment about parish finances the current state of affairs is that there is about £8683 in the current account and £31703 held by the diocese in a deposit account. There are some copies of the annual accounts available for anyone interested.

Looking at parish expenditure, the last year has been difficult particularly with the cost of repairs to the church central heating system which turned out to be far more involved than what was first envisaged. The repairs turned out to be long and expensive with new pipework having to be fitted under the floors in parts of the sacristy and presbytery. In addition, asbestos had to be removed. The church, as you are aware, had to be closed while these repairs were being carried out and masses were switched to the parish centre which the majority of parishioners seemed to be happy with. We have only in the last month or so began to feel the benefit of the repairs to the system. Let's hope everything is OK for next winter.

Part re-decoration of the church has also taken place during the year and that was long overdue. Thanks are due to St. Cuthberts Centre and to private donations for help in covering the cost of this. In addition, the parish has received income from various fund raising events carried out by the parish centre in particular the Christmas Fayre and Race Night.

We have received £3253 from the gift aid scheme during the year and this is greatly appreciated. This is in spite of the drop off in Sunday attendance at mass which on my estimation averages out at under 50 parishioners per week and they are generally the same people. If you had said that, even ten years ago, I doubt if anyone would have believed it. I'm sure this parish is not alone in witnessing the attendance drop off which I doubt can be laid totally at the door of the recent pandemic, which I am glad to say is now no longer classed as a global health issue.

The diocese have agreed to let the parish keep part of the proceeds received from the sale of the convent to offset the essential costs of the repairs to the church central heating.

As well as the expenditures mentioned earlier, other building and property costs continue to mount up, for example the re-decoration of parts of the presbytery and the purchase of new flooring for parts of it. An ornamental pinnacle has had to be replaced and stonework repaired around the outside of the church though some costs have been met out of insurance.

The Building and Properties group meet at regular intervals to evaluate any outstanding building issues and report back to the parish council with their recommendations.

We have a new tenant in the Lodge again who hopefully will be in situ for a longer time.

There is a new updated plan for the graveyard which cannot yet be accessed as more work is required with the computer system. In addition a dedicated area has been set aside for the burial of ashes. A protocol for this area is being drawn up and will be published when completed and approved.

There is nothing to report with respect to the partnership arrangement with other parishes.

The lunch club is now up and running again at St. Andrew's in Dawson Street under the auspices of Churches together in Crook and anyone willing to help will be more than welcome. Also, under the umbrella of Churches together in Crook, the Good Friday witness service was well attended and some of our parishioners were involved in this. In addition joint services between the churches, including some of our parishioners, have occurred during the year such as the World day of Prayer and the week of prayer for Christian Unity.

Problems have occurred with church cleaning and the cleaning of Father's house and solutions are still being sought.

This year we proudly see the 50th anniversary of the parish garden fete. It is possible that this may be the final time it is run by the parish but like everything it depends on the level of support. The sad but inescapable fact is that many of the current volunteers are unable, because of age, to continue with the same amount of support they have given over the years. Indeed, sadly a considerable number of parishioners who helped and supported the fete have died in the last year and are sorely missed. It may be that others with a new enthusiasm and ideas can take over the fete.

The Justice and Peace group continue to support monthly prayer vigils at the Hassockfield centre on the first Sunday of the month. Their family fast day appeal raised over £300 and monies were also raised at the Bunraiser event and the Christian Aid Quiz night. A prayer service was also held around the Peace Tree. Unfortunately, Tradecraft went into administration during the year.

Turning back to the church itself, Father has continued with the streaming of mass which has been well received. He has also spent time developing further our links with the parish primary school having school masses and getting the communion children along regularly at Sunday mass.

As you are aware the convent has now been sold and the nuns have moved into part of the presbytery with Father moving to his house on Church Hill.

Finally, the parish council constitution has been in place for a number of years and it was felt necessary to have a look at it to see if any changes were needed. A small group has been set up to look expedite this.

Thank You