



# Holy Family Parish

'A praying, caring community, centred in Christ'

## Holy Family Parish Pastoral Council

### Review of Parish Life September 2023 – August 2024

#### Introduction

Holy Family Parish Pastoral Council was formed in 1991. Its purpose is, as a representative of the parish community, to work co-responsibly with the clergy of the parish to build and promote a vibrant Christian community.

The aims of the Pastoral Council are to:

- Build a community of faith and worship
- Support the Domestic Church
- Pass on the faith to children and young people
- Help maintain and develop a welcoming parish
- Plan and support parish mission
- Empower and support parish laity

(For more detailed information, please refer to the parish website: [www.holy-familyparish.com](http://www.holy-familyparish.com) )

#### Membership of the Pastoral Council for the year 2023-2024:

Fr Michael Spence PP (President)	Fr John O'Lavery CC	Deacon Brendan Dowd
Elaine McEntee (Chairperson)	Lisa O'Kane (Secretary)	
John Byrne	Bernadette Cunningham	Conor Mackey
Stephen McCormick	Martin McGranaghan	Mairead Walsh

The Pastoral Council meets monthly between September and June. An important focus at each meeting is prayer, calling on the Holy Spirit to help the members to listen, discern and be guided in bringing 'faith, hope and love in abundance to meet the challenges before them and to fulfil the Church's mission of proclaiming to the world God's love and salvation in Jesus Christ'. (A Prayer for the Synodal Pathway)

#### Reflections on the Year 2023 - 2024

In August 2023, we bid farewell to Fr Robert Sloan CC who was appointed as the Administrator of Ardkeen Parish and we sincerely thank him for his generous service to Holy Family Parish over the previous year. We were delighted to welcome Fr John O'Lavery to the parish as our new Curate.



Following a period of reflection and discernment, the Pastoral Council decided to focus this year on the key areas of Baptism Preparation, Faith Formation and Youth Ministry and consider how these might be further developed. However, we were also mindful of the changes and opportunities that might arise from the diocesan Pathways to the Future programme during the year and our need to be prepared to respond to these. This report is a summary of the work of the Pastoral Council but importantly, it is also an overview of the life of the parish over the past year. We hope that the many activities and initiatives included here will give you a sense of the variety and vibrancy of parish life and that you will find it uplifting.

## Building a praying community – Liturgy, Faith and Worship

- A variety of devotions continue to take place regularly in the parish, such as daily Eucharistic Adoration, the weekly Novena Mass, monthly First Saturday Devotions and Taizé Prayer Around the Cross. Pilgrim Prayer continues to provide prayerful support every Tuesday evening on the parish Facebook page. Deacon Brendan Dowd invites all to share their intentions or to simply watch and pray for each other.
- The Children's Liturgy takes place at the 10.30 a.m. Sunday Mass in Holy Family Church with active involvement by the children and it continues to grow in numbers.
- The Beloved Disciples Programme which explores and celebrates the gifts that older people bring to our church community took place over four weeks in September in Holy Family Church and was facilitated by Fr Paul Byrne from the Living Church Office. This was a great opportunity for talking, listening and sharing with each other about what our faith means to us.
- On 30<sup>th</sup> September, a Blessing of Pets took place in St Thérèse Church grounds to mark the Feast of St. Francis of Assisi and the closing of the Season of Creation.
- The Annual Mass for the Deceased and the Bereaved was celebrated on two evenings in November, with the support of the Bethany Bereavement Ministry, Hospitality & Welcome Group and parish musicians. This was a very moving occasion, greatly appreciated by all who attended, particularly those who were bereaved during the past year.
- On the Third Sunday of Advent – Bambinelli Sunday – the parish continued the tradition of the blessing of Baby Jesus figurines brought to Mass by families. A prayer card and a small present bag in which to place the baby Jesus were provided for each family to take home.
- In January 2023, the Hospitality & Welcome Group held the annual Celebration for the Newly Baptised in Holy Family Church, which was a very joyful family occasion.
- Also in January, the newly formed Baptism Preparation Team, an initiative of the Pastoral Council, began their ministry, having completed training provided by the Living Church. Parents are invited to an information evening in advance of the baptism ceremony. Baptism certificates and prayer cards were produced and are given to parents on the day of Baptism.
- The Feast of St. Brigid was marked by the distribution of St Brigid's crosses made by parish volunteers and a time of reflection and prayer held in Holy Family Church, led by Breige O'Hare.
- As a faith formation initiative, the Pastoral Council organised a short course on Pope Francis' teaching on climate change and care of the environment. The course was called 'Conversations about climate change from a faith perspective' and took place over three Wednesday mornings in February 2024. It introduced the Pope's two major documents on the subject of climate change: the encyclical letter, *Laudato Si'*, and the Apostolic Exhortation document, *Laudate Deum*, with the opportunity for group discussion.



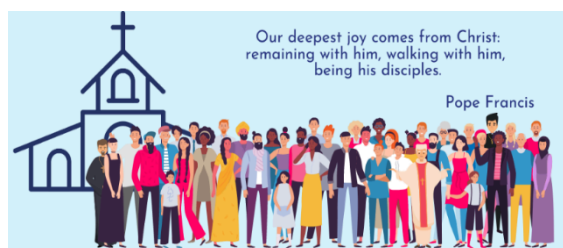
- During Lent, devotions included Morning Prayer before the weekday Masses, weekly Stations of the Cross in both churches, and a weekly time of Silent Prayer in Holy Family Church. The course 'A Journey through the Passion According to Mark' was delivered by Deacon Brendan.
- On Good Friday, Stations of the Cross, led by members of the parish Scout and Guide Units, was a very prayerful experience, enhanced by music from the parish Folk Groups and our young people read the reflections with great reverence and sincerity.
- In April, we were delighted and privileged to have Bishop Alan McGuckian, recently installed as Bishop of Down and Connor, celebrate our annual Youth Mass in Holy Family Church. Members of the parish Guide and Scout Units were actively involved. Prayers were offered for those preparing for exams and an Exam Candle was blessed and lit. Many of the youth of the parish and their families attended and enjoyed wonderful hospitality provided by the Hospitality &

Welcome Group. It was a very joyful occasion and Bishop Alan was presented with a scout scarf, as the Holy Family Scout Unit is fondly known as 'the Bishop's own'.

- Pastoral Council representatives attended meetings hosted by the Living Church to discuss Youth Ministry programmes and leadership training opportunities and also to learn from the experience of others. It is hoped that some diocesan initiatives might be launched in due course.
- Holy Family Parish was invited to host the St. Gerard's Annual Solemn Novena to our Mother of Perpetual Help for seven of the nine days in May. The theme of the novena was 'Creating a Culture of Care', reflecting on the love of our compassionate God – a love that knows no bounds. This was a great opportunity for our two parishes to begin working together in the proposed Family of Parishes grouping as part of the Pathways to the Future initiative.

## Building a caring community – welcome, hospitality and outreach

- The Hospitality & Welcome Group, Pastoral Council and Newington Day Centre organised a very successful and enjoyable 'Sunday Brunch' event after the two Sunday Masses in St. Thérèse Church on 10<sup>th</sup> September.
- To mark the Season of Creation and celebrate the time of harvest, the annual collection of non-perishable foodstuffs took place and was donated to local foodbanks.
- The Pastoral Council organised a 'Volunteer Fair' on the last weekend of September to celebrate and highlight the work of our volunteers. Many of our parish groups were represented and it was a great opportunity for parishioners to meet some of our volunteers and find out more about the support and services provided as well as the many volunteering opportunities available.
- The Parish Christmas Fair took place at the end of November and as always, was a hugely successful event, enjoyed by young and old alike with many great prizes on offer.
- The SVP Annual Appeal took place at Christmas and was generously supported by parishioners.
- Poinsettia plants donated by families in memory of loved ones were used to decorate both churches for Christmas and a Mass offered for those in whose memory the plants were donated.
- To mark the 'World Day of the Sick', the Pastoral Council produced a special greeting card which was delivered to the residents in the Nursing Homes within our parish and to sick and housebound parishioners.
- The St Patrick's Day celebration included refreshments and traditional music in Holy Family Church organised by the Hospitality & Welcome Group. This was very well attended and created a lovely sense of community.
- The Developing World Group hosted several hospitality events and organised the sale of Trócaire Gifts of Change in Holy Family Gathering Space after Masses during the year in support of the Twezimbe Centre, Uganda and the Trócaire Christmas and Lenten Campaigns.
- After the Easter Vigil and Easter Sunday Masses, small bottles of holy water and prayer cards were distributed to the congregation and also delivered to the sick and housebound.
- The Apostolic Society held several coffee mornings during the year, raising funds to help support Irish missionaries and others in their work overseas.
- On Sunday 23<sup>rd</sup> June, a Fun Day for all our local community was organised in Holy Family Church grounds by Newington Day Centre, the Hospitality & Welcome Group and the Pastoral Council. This was a hugely enjoyable event which was made even more special by the guest appearances of the Irish Football Cup and two of the Cliftonville Football Team players. Sincere thanks to all who helped in any way to make this fantastic event possible.
- The Hospitality & Welcome Group continue to provide Wednesday morning tea and monthly refreshments after Sunday Mass, which is a wonderful contribution to the life of the parish.



- The *Faith Friends* initiative between P7 pupils in St Thérèse Primary School and students from Blessed Trinity College was a blessed experience for all involved and for the whole parish.
- Fr Chris Gault OP, a Holy Family parishioner, was ordained to the Dominican Order in July and celebrated his first Mass in our parish in St Thérèse Church. Hospitality was provided afterwards in Blessed Trinity College and it was a most joyful occasion.

### Communication:

- The parish website plays a vital role in providing key information and livestreaming of Masses and services for the sick and housebound. The Communication Team regularly share information and highlight events on the parish Facebook page, helping to keep our community connected.

### Diocesan Events: Pathways to the Future Initiative

- ‘Pathways to the Future’ is a Diocesan initiative that explores how we can best respond to the practical challenges and opportunities that lie ahead in this time of transformation and change. A preparatory awareness programme using bulletin inserts and Prayers of the Faithful was communicated to parishioners in the lead up to the official launch of the programme on 5<sup>th</sup> November 2023. The Steering Committee hosted conversation evenings across the diocese in November. Parishioners were invited to attend a meeting in St. James’ Parish, Whiteabbey to hear more about the programme and contribute to the discussion. In April, parish leaders, including members of the Pastoral Council, met with representatives from the parishes in our proposed Family of Parishes. The meeting was facilitated by members of the Pathways Steering Committee and there was an opportunity to comment on the proposed Family of Parishes groupings and consider ways to move forward.
- Four Holy Family parishioners were commissioned as Lay Funeral Ministers on 8th October 2023. This new Ministry is being piloted in North and West Belfast and reflects that all of us, as baptised children of God, are called to minister and to lead.
- The annual diocesan census of weekend Mass attendance took place in April, capturing valuable information for the ongoing planning work of the Pathways Team and helping parishes to identify pastoral priorities, make plans to address them and provide support to our faith community.



### Pastoral Council Annual Day of Reflection

The annual day of reflection and discernment in Drumalis Retreat Centre took place in June and was facilitated by Fr. Tom Layden SJ. The main focus was on the Synodal model of working in the context of both the ongoing Universal Synod and the Diocesan Pathways to the Future initiative. We used this method to reflect on the past year and identify priorities for the Pastoral Council to focus on over the coming year.

### Thank You

Our parish is greatly enriched by and ministries. We extend our dedicated volunteers whose puts our parish mission day: ‘a praying, caring



so many active voluntary groups heartfelt thanks to all our generous faith-inspired service statement into practice every community centred in Christ.’

Thank you for taking the time to read this report – if you wish to make any comments or would like any further information, please do not hesitate to speak to one of our members or contact the Parish Office. Finally, we wish God’s blessings for you and your families for the forthcoming year.

Holy Family Pastoral Council