

Holy Family Parish Pastoral Council

Review of Parish Life September 2024 – August 2025

Introduction

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

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 and discern.



Membership of the Pastoral Council for the year 2024-2025:

Fr Michael Spence PP (President)
Elaine McEntee (Chairperson)
Bernadette Cunningham
Mairead Walsh
Patricia Nolan

Fr John O'Laverty CC
Lisa O'Kane (Secretary)
Stephen McCormick
Fiona McNeill

Deacon Brendan Dowd
Nicola McAllister
Martin McGranaghan
Philip Hart

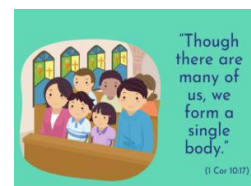
Reflections on the Year 2024 - 2025

Following a period of reflection and discernment, the Pastoral Council decided to focus this year on the key areas: Season of Creation throughout September, the Centenary of the Canonisation of St Thérèse of Lisieux, Prayer in the Jubilee Year and Youth Ministry. However, we were also mindful of the changes and opportunities that might arise from the diocesan Pathways to the Future programme and our need to respond to these, if necessary.

This report provides an overview of the life of the parish over the year and a summary of the work of the Pastoral Council. We hope that the many activities and initiatives included will give you a sense of the variety and vibrancy of parish life.

Building a praying community – Liturgy, Faith and Worship

- A variety of devotions continued 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 continued to provide prayerful support every Tuesday evening on the parish Facebook page where all were invited to share their intentions or to simply watch and pray for each other.
- The Children's Liturgy took place at the 10:30 a.m. Sunday Mass in Holy Family Church with active involvement by the children. Pupils from our primary schools regularly attended and reverently participated in morning mass and other liturgical services.
- 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. Memoriam Cards of our loved ones were also displayed in both churches.



- During the season of Advent parishioners had the opportunity to reflect on the Sunday gospels using the resources prepared by the Pathways to the Future team: “Approaching the Dawn as Pilgrims of Hope”.
- 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. To assist in this tradition the Briginis provided some little figurines and cribs which they had made. A prayer card and a small present bag in which to place the baby Jesus was provided for each family to take home.
- Parishioners joined Bishop Alan to mark the Opening of The Jubilee Year in St Peter’s Cathedral. Jubilee 2025 was launched in the parish at Mass on New Year’s Day. Prayer cards were distributed and jubilee banners displayed in both churches. Events and activities pertaining to the Jubilee were also promoted on an ongoing basis.
- The Feast of the Holy Family was marked by Mass and a prayer card featuring an icon of the Holy Family, written by Fr. Alexander. On the Feast of The Epiphany the distribution of chalk and prayer leaflets, to continue the ancient tradition for blessing our homes and families, was gratefully received by our parishioners.
- Catholic Schools Week was marked by the participation of pupils from our parish schools at each of the Sunday Masses.
- The Feast of St Brigid was celebrated by the age-old skill and tradition of making and distributing St Brigid crosses and these were warmly received, particularly by the sick and housebound.
- Prayer cards and little treats were distributed and gratefully received on both Mothering Sunday and Fathers’ Day.
- During Lent, devotions included early morning Mass, Morning Prayer, weekly Stations of the Cross in both churches and a guided Holy Hour on the eve of the first Fridays. Lenten courses included ‘Catholicism – exploring the riches of the Catholic Faith’ each Wednesday evening and ‘Walking in the Steps of Jesus’ each Wednesday morning.
- 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 the annual Youth Mass was attended by a large number of young parishioners and families, and this was followed in May by the celebration of a Youth Ministry Mass. This was a very moving and blessed occasion for all of our young people as they lit the examination candle and prayerfully and reverently participated in the different ministries.
- The annual Mass for the Sick and Carers, including the Sacrament of the Sick and a blessing for Carers, took place in May. This was a very special occasion, particularly for the sick and their families, and the beautiful refreshments served were greatly appreciated.
- In June, in line with what was happening in other parishes across the Diocese, there was a Nine Day Novena to the Sacred Heart and a Holy Hour was celebrated on the eve of the Feast. This also highlighted the 350th anniversary of the apparition of the Sacred Heart to St. Margaret Mary Alacoque.



Building a caring community – welcome, hospitality and outreach

- The Hospitality & Welcome Group continued to provide refreshments in the Holy Family Gathering Space each Wednesday morning and once monthly after Sunday Mass.
- In September the Hospitality & Welcome Group and Newington Day Centre organized a very successful and enjoyable 'Sunday Brunch' after the Sunday Masses in St. Thérèse's Church.
- Each year the Season of Creation (SoC), a worldwide ecumenical event, began on 1st September, the World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation, and concluded on 4th October, the Feast of St Francis of Assisi. Throughout September the bulletin content and web site had a significant focus on SoC. The parish took inspiration from Pope Francis' 2015 encyclical 'Laudato Si' and screened the film "The Letter", produced by the Laudato Si' Movement.
- Also as part of the parish focus on SoC, there was a collection of non-perishable foodstuffs which were donated to local food banks, a litter pick in the vicinity of HF Church by Guides, Scouts and the HF Youth Club, artwork produced by the Briginis and a Blessing of Pets in the grounds of both churches to mark the closing of SoC.
- The Parish Christmas Fair took place in the Somerton Road site of Blessed Trinity College. As always, there were huge donations of gifts, and treats to enjoy with a vital cup of tea. It was a hugely successful event, enjoyed by young and old alike with many great prizes on offer.
- The SVP Annual Appeal and the Stella Maris Shoe Box Appeal took place during December and our parishioners very generously supported both appeals.
- Poinsettia plants, donated by families in memory of loved ones, were used to decorate both churches for Christmas and a Mass was offered for these deceased family members.
- In January 2025, the Baptism Preparation Team and the Hospitality & Welcome Group held the annual 'Celebration for the Newly Baptised', which was a very joyful family occasion. The Baptism Tree was also enhanced by the donation of a plaque and sycamore surround.
- To mark the 'World Day of the Sick', a special greeting card was produced for the residents in the Nursing Homes within our parish and also to the sick and housebound parishioners.
- The Feast of St Patrick was once again marked by the distribution of shamrock and celebrations provided by Irish dancers, musicians and the Welcome and Hospitality Team. This was very well attended and created a lovely sense of community.
- The Developing World Group hosted several hospitality events in Holy Family Gathering Space after Masses in support of the Twezimbe Centre, Uganda. They also organized the sale of Trócaire Christmas gifts and the Lenten Campaign.
- 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.
- In support of the wider mission of the church, the Apostolic Society held several coffee mornings and their annual collection, raising funds to support Irish missionaries in their work overseas.
- To mark the Centenary of St. Thérèse's Canonization in May, a special talk on her life, wisdom and the relevance of her message today, was given by Rome based, Fr Paul Murray



OP, in Holy Family Church. Fr Murray, originally from Newcastle, Co. Down, is considered a world-renowned professor, author and poet. It was an honour to have Fr. Paul speak to a packed church about St Therese. The veneration of St Thérèse's relics and the distribution of roses on that evening added to the wonderful occasion.

- Also to mark the Centenary prayer cards and bookmarks were distributed, banners and photographs were displayed in both churches, a parish pilgrimage was arranged to Lisieux and Paris and our schools prepared beautiful Masses for both the Centenary and her Feast Day.
- In June a Fun Day for our local community was organised in Holy Family Church grounds by Newington Day Centre and the Hospitality & Welcome Group. This was a very enjoyable event.

Communication

- The parish website played a vital role in providing information and the livestreaming of Masses and services for the sick and housebound. The Communication Team promoted parish groups and highlighted events on the parish Facebook page, helping to keep our community connected.
- Faith formation initiatives, events in other parishes, and activities at the Belfast Jesuit Centre were regularly highlighted in the weekly bulletin and website throughout the year.

Diocesan Initiatives & Events

- Pastoral Council representatives attended meetings to discuss Youth Ministry programmes, leadership training opportunities and Pastoral Formation Training.
- The allocation of parishes to the new Families of Parishes in our Diocese was confirmed. Our Family of Parishes consists of Holy Family, St Patrick's, Donegall Street and St Gerard's, Antrim Road. What this means in practice is still unfolding.
- The Diocesan Conference 'Hearts on Fire – A Call to Prayer and Renewal' was held in June and attended by a number of PC members. It explored ways to inspire and equip the Families of Parishes to re-ignite the churches' missionary spirit.
- In April the annual diocesan census of weekend Mass attendance took place, capturing valuable information primarily for the ongoing planning work of the Diocese but also helpful to the parish in regard to identifying pastoral priorities.



Pastoral Council Annual Day of Reflection

The annual day of reflection and discernment took place in Tobar Mhuire Retreat Centre in June. It was facilitated by Fr. Tom Layden SJ. who led the discussions reflecting on both the past year and the year to come, to identify priorities for the Pastoral Council to focus on.

Thank You

Our parish is greatly enriched by so many active voluntary groups and ministries and we extend our heartfelt thanks to them all. If you would like any further information, please contact the Parish Office. Finally, we wish God's blessings on you and your families for the forthcoming year.

Holy Family Pastoral Council Parish website:
www.holy-familyparish.com

