## Review of Parish Life September 2025 – August 2026

Compiled by Holy Family Parish Pastoral Council

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

The Pastoral Council meets monthly. An important focus at each meeting is prayer, calling on the Holy Spirit to help the members listen and discern.



### Membership of the Pastoral Council for the year 2025-2026:

Fr Michael Spence PP (President), Fr John O'Laverty CC, Deacon Brendan Dowd, Stephen McCormick(Chair), Bernadette Cunningham, Lisa O'Kane, Nicola McAllister, Mairead Walsh, Fiona McNeill, Patricia Nolan, Philip Hart

### Reflections on the Year 2025 - 2026

Following a period of reflection and discernment, the Pastoral Council decided to focus this year on three key areas: Building a Family of Parishes; Welcome and Outreach; 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 the needs in our neighbouring parishes.

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 weekday morning mass and other liturgical services.
- At the beginning of the new school year, Holy Family Church hosted an Ethos Day for staff from Holy Family and St Therese Primary Schools. Richard Moore was the guest speaker.
- At the end of September, to bring to a close the celebration of the Centenary of St Therese of Lisieux, mass was celebrated by Bishop Alan, and refreshments were warmly received afterwards in the church grounds. Prior to the Feast Day a Novena booklet was made available for families and schools.
- The Annual Mass for the Deceased and the Bereaved was celebrated on two evenings in November, with the support of the Lay Bereavement Ministry, Hospitality & Welcome Group and parish musicians. These were very moving occasions, greatly appreciated by all who attended, particularly those who were bereaved during the past year. Memoriam Cards of our loved ones were displayed in both churches. There was also opportunity to remember our deceased loved ones in January when mass was celebrated for those in whose memory poinsettia plants were donated to decorate both churches and cribs at Christmas.

- During the season of Advent parishioners had the opportunity to reflect on the Sunday gospels using the resource 'Journeying Towards Jesus in Advent', each Wednesday morning after mass.
- 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. A Christmas Blessing Prayer Card was also distributed on Christmas Day.
- In December a Youth Ministry Mass was attended by a large number of young parishioners and families and this was followed in April by another Youth Ministry Mass when the examination candle was lit, prior to the start of examinations. These were very moving and blessed occasions for all of our young people as they prayerfully and reverently participated in the different ministries.
- The Feast of the Holy Family was marked at Sunday Masses and on the Feast of The Epiphany the distribution of chalk and prayer leaflets, to continue the ancient tradition of asking God's blessing for our homes and families, was gratefully received by our parishioners.



- In early January parishioners joined Bishop Alan to mark the closing of the Jubilee Year in St Peter's Cathedral. Later in the month Bishop Alan celebrated Sunday Mass in Holy Family Church to mark the installation of the repaired and restored Church of the Resurrection doors. They depict the moment the Risen Christ invites Thomas to touch His wounds.
- To mark the start of Catholic Schools Week pupils from our parish schools led the offertory procession at the Sunday masses. Special prayers and grandparents' celebrations were also held during that week.
- In January the week of prayer for Christian Unity Week was marked at the monthly Taize Prayer around the Cross.
- 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 Father's Day, funded by the contributions made at the weekly teas and treats served after the 9.15 and 10.00 masses.
- During Lent, devotions included early morning Mass, Morning Prayer, weekly Stations of the Cross in both churches and opportunity to experience Silent Prayer each Friday evening. The booklet, Praying with the Psalms, was made available; it included prayers and reflections for each day. On the eve of Holy Week, Taizé Prayer around the Cross focused on the 'Seven Last Words' spoken by Jesus from the cross.
- The very successful Youth Alpha Programme, attended by a group of young people during the six weeks of Lent, explored life, faith and God and 'prayer partners' supported them on their journey, a reminder to the group that our parish 'walks' with them.
- On Good Friday, Stations of the Cross, led by those participating in the Youth Alpha Programme, 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.
- 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 afterwards 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, prayed during the daily masses and individually.

- During the year an icon of St Joseph was placed in Holy Family Church and one of Saints Louis and Zelie Martin in St Therese Church. Written by a parishioner, a further icon of the Road to Emmaus, was placed in the Adoration Chapel.
- In late June a new parish leaflet was launched to help us pray before the Blessed Sacrament.
- During the summer months, the special Jubilee year to mark the 800th anniversary of the death of St Francis of Assisi, was highlighted in the bulletin. And a booklet was made available that offers scripture readings, prayers and reflections in preparation for his feast day on 4th October.




## 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. This is also offered on alternate Thursday mornings, after the 10.00am mass in St Therese.
- 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. As part of the parish focus for this event, displays were erected in the sanctuaries, a collection of non-perishable foodstuffs was donated to local food banks, there was a display of artwork produced by the children who attended the Children's Liturgy, and there was also the Blessing of Pets in the grounds of both churches.



- 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, the Apostolic Society Collection and Coffee Morning and the Stella Maris Shoe Box Appeal took place during the year. Parishioners generously supported these and the Crib of Hope donations to the Order of Malta Maternity Hospital in Bethlehem.
- In January 2026, the Baptism Preparation Team and the Hospitality & Welcome Group held the annual 'Celebration for the Newly Baptised', which was a very joyful family occasion. Prior to this, the Youth Ministry Team prepared Christmas decorations for the children.
- Parish outreach to the sick and housebound, to residents in Nursing homes and to the NI Hospice continued each week.
- 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 and the Holy Family Parish in Gaza. They also organized the sale of Trócaire Christmas gifts and the Lenten Campaign and Lunch
- After the Easter Vigil and Easter Sunday Masses, small bottles of holy water and prayer cards were made available and delivered to the sick and housebound.
- The Lourdes Youth Team Appeal in May to support five of our young parishioners and the annual Lourdes Associate Pilgrims Collection were overwhelmingly supported.
- Also in May, a generous response was made following the appeal by Medical Missionaries of Mary who work in Africa and S America to bring Christ's healing love to those most in need.
- A church-door collection to support Newington Day Centre that provides isolated and lonely older members and their unpaid carers a safe, welcoming fun-haven, took place in June. It was very generously supported, reflecting the esteem that the Centre is held in by our community.

- During the year the Dominican Community at Iona House left the parish, and as a reminder of the historical bonds, the gift of a wooden statue of Our Lady to St Therese's Church by the Dominican Sisters was gratefully received.
- To further enhance the building of our caring community, a day trip to Powerscourt House and Gardens was arranged in early summer and thoroughly enjoyed by all.

## 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.
- The Parish Calendar distributed at the beginning of the year also helped to highlight important dates and times of services.
- 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 opportunities and ongoing Pastoral Formation Training.
- Our Family of Parishes consisting of Holy Family, St Patrick's, and St Gerard's, formed a Leadership Team comprising two of the laity and the parish priest from each parish. Their role is to lead and plan for the pastoral care and priorities of each faith community.
- In May the annual diocesan census of weekend Mass attendance took place.

## Pastoral Council Annual Day of Reflection

The annual day of reflection and discernment took place in Tobar Mhuire Retreat Centre in June. The members spent time in prayer and discussion to identify priorities for the year ahead.

### Thank You

Our parish is greatly enriched by many active voluntary groups and ministries, and we extend our heartfelt thanks to them all. These groups and ministries depend on volunteers, and we ask you to please consider volunteering if you are not already involved. If you would like any further information, please contact the Parish Office. We also extend God's blessings on you and your families for the forthcoming year.

Holy Family Pastoral Council

Parish website: www.holy-familyparish.com

