

Parish Vision/Mission Day – St Joseph’s Centre, Ashurst  
10 September 2022

Fr Tom’s introductory talk

Our journey so far:

In my personal prayer, shortly after my arrival at St Boniface and very mindful of my responsibility as parish priest to help the parish grow, I was thinking and praying of ways to bring new life to the parish. Many things were working well, but I felt a need for a deeper renewal. I was very thankful for a core group of committed parishioners who have been carrying along the parish well for many years. At the same time, I saw a need to get others more actively involved.

I remembered a book highly recommended by a priest I knew in England. It had helped him and his parish very well: **Divine Renovation – moving from maintenance to mission**. That title intrigued me. (As a side note, DR is very well established throughout the world – parishes from 23 countries are actively participating; 140 bishops are engaged in DR events and coaching; 660 parishes are involved in UK, which is 23% of all Catholic parishes in the UK. And these parishes are growing and thriving!!).

The theme “moving from maintenance to mission” was very much the same thing emphasized by Pope Francis in **Evangelii Gaudium**, where he speaks of the Church not waiting for people to knock at the door, but rather reaching out to the peripheries like the Good Shepherd, who goes out to search for the lost sheep. Pope St John Paul II himself had often spoke of the **New Evangelization**, and he admitted that this is especially challenging here in Europe, which had once been so strongly Christian. **Vatican II** itself reminded the Church that every living member of the Church, each in his/her own unique vocation, is called to evangelize and to become an active participant, not only in the liturgy, but also in spreading the Kingdom of God on earth.

St Paul gives us an image of the Church as a living body (1 Cor 12; Rom 12:4-5; Col 2:19; Eph 4) to describe, first of all, the inseparable relationship between Christ and the Church. Christ is the Head, we are the Body. This image also describes how the living members of the Church are joined with each other and need each other to live and operate. Each member has a special place in the Body and is called to contribute to the good functioning of the Body. In this Body there is both unity (we all form one Body with Christ) and diversity (not

every member is identically the same; there are a multitude of charisms and gifts; unity does not mean uniformity; the Church/parish has many different members, who have different gifts, and who together make up the whole Church). St Paul stresses that there should be a solidarity between the different members, involving sympathy and rejoicing (1 Cor 12:26). No person in the Church/parish should feel inferior or unwanted (1 Cor 12:16), and no one should be excluded through the arrogance of others (1 Cor 12:21). Parts of the body which seem to be weak or less honourable are actually indispensable (1 Cor 12:22-24).

It is important in our understanding of the Church as a whole and of the parish more concretely to know that every single member is empowered with particular gifts through which he/she can serve the Church/parish. No two people in the Church are the same, each has his/her unique contribution to make, whether this is prominent, or more in the background. There are many different gifts, and no single gift is universal to all believers. All are important to God, so no one should feel unwanted or excluded. Those with more prominent gifts should be careful to encourage others, and not reject them, as all gifts are necessary for the healthy functioning of the Church. All gifts should be exercised out of a motivation of loving service to seek the unity of the Church, not the selfish seeking of one's own importance. Growth can only happen in the Church and in the parish when the Body is in right relationship with its head, drawing its nourishment from Christ. And the members of the Body must be in right relationship with each other, with each member making his/her unique contribution and being valued by others. This is a practical way of living out what Jesus said were the greatest commandments: to love God and neighbour.

It is within the context of this image of the Church that I see a need for parish renewal. We must all deepen our union with Christ and we must all work together harmoniously, helping and supporting each other, encouraging one another, putting our gifts and talents at the service of God and others.

It is in this same context that I began the Divine Renovation prayer process during the pandemic (20 individuals were involved) – the PPC and a few other parishioners. There were many others who I knew would have been very qualified to also take part, but due to more technical and practical reasons I had to limit the number.

With the help of the DR workbook, we were able to craft a vision and mission statement. The vision is simply identifying what we dream about being as a parish, closely discerning where God Himself is leading us. The key question is: "Where are we going?" We need to have a definite goal in mind, a destination.

And then we need to ask: "How will we get there?" This is our mission, our concrete plan of action. We are the navigators of the ship (being ever docile, of course, to God's guidance and inspiration), so we need to have clarity of purpose, a clear destination. Without a clear vision, we are like the Israelites going round in circles in the desert for 40 years, though the Promised Land was actually quite near. It's interesting to note that what kept the Israelites from making progress was their constant yearning to return to their "comfort zone", to hold on to the past, to forget the miracles and wonders God had worked and all their past sufferings while in slavery. They complained, saying: "We remember the fish we used to eat in Egypt for nothing, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions and the garlic" (Num 11:5). The people had to learn to trust in God's providence.

As our small group of 20 considered our vision and mission, we clearly understood from the start that this vision must be compatible with the diocesan vision, which is to bring people closer to Jesus Christ through His Church. This includes going out on mission to everyone, being totally dependent on the Holy Spirit, "converting" Catholics, and becoming outward-looking servants.

From the start we wanted to build on what is already very healthy and positive at St Boniface.

After many weeks of prayer and group discussion, we came up with the following Vision statement:

**St. Boniface is an active, welcoming, diverse community where everyone feels accepted, listened to and brought closer to Christ and one another.**

**As a Parish Family, we love, serve and worship God Our Father in Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit.**

**We will continually deepen our love and knowledge of God in order to bring Christ to the people and people to Christ**

This vision statement is very good, but it still needs to be simplified. We should be able to remember it easily. That is one thing we will work on today. But this vision statement is already immensely helpful. It clearly puts the Holy Trinity in the centre. Our goal is, first of all, to deepen our love and knowledge of God. We all need to grow in our discipleship, listening to and learning from the Master, Christ. Our faith formation is an ongoing process. It never ends. We are blessed to have so many resources at hand to grow in our knowledge of the faith and to seek to live out our faith. So faith formation is one of our main goals. But our goal does not stop here. We also want to become more active in bringing Christ to the people and the people to Christ. This is in essence the mission of the Church, but only we can do it in the most effective way within the boundaries of the parish and even beyond. The city of Southampton should be a better place because of St Boniface parish.

But we need a lot of helpers! A ship always has a large crew. One person cannot man the ship. And each person has a specific task. The same is true in the Church and in a parish. The priests should be able to focus on what is essential to their priestly ministry (preaching, teaching, administering the Sacraments, leading). They should not get caught up in too much administration and property maintenance. The laity have many gifts and talents to offer to help us cover all the vital areas of parish life.

These vital areas we have identified as:

1. PPC and CLT: Fr Stephen from DR helped us to understand how these two work together. The CLT deals with the day-to-day operational issues; the PPC is more strategic, asking questions like: Where do we want to be 5 years down the line?
2. Liturgy – (readers, Euch. Ministers, altar servers, stewards and welcomers, music group and choir, children’s liturgy, cleaners, flower arrangers, sacristy, etc.)
3. Catechesis – sacramental preparation (baptism, FHC, confirmation, marriage, bereavement); faith formation of children and adults.
4. Spirituality – Bible study, prayer groups, retreats, pilgrimages
5. Finances – administration, property management
6. Social outreach – care of sick and elderly, calling ministry, home visits, communication (website, newsletters, live-streaming), missions and charities, social events to foster communion (picnics, parties, Sunday coffee, youth groups)
7. Safeguarding

Our „teams“ grew out of these vital areas.

The DR workbook identifies the following key areas in parish life:

1. **Worship – liturgical, sacramental life of the parish**
2. **Evangelisation - To announce the good news of Jesus Christ. Helping people encounter Jesus, then help them build up their relationship with Jesus so they want to follow Him.**
3. **Discipleship – Deepening our relationship with Jesus.**
4. **Fellowship - To welcome, love, know and support parishioners in their Christian Faith**
5. **Ministry – concrete way we serve the parish as priests and laity**

One key exercise of DR: Where do we want to be in five years? What is our dream of a thriving parish?

Here are some things we answered in the above five areas:

- 1) **Worship**
  - a. Mass
  - b. Eucharistic Adoration
  - c. Beautiful celebration of all the sacraments
  - d. Prayer groups
  - e. Praise and healing
- 2) **Evangelisation**
  - a. Evangelisation first from within, leading people who already practice to develop their relationship with Jesus. Ongoing adult formation to address any ignorance of the fundamentals of our faith.
  - b. Begins with way we welcome people, make them feel welcome, loved, respected, feel that we have an authentic interest in them (team of welcomers). Get all parishioners formed in this. (Use porch more...make inviting, welcoming – spill out into front of church).
  - c. Actively seek to get to know people who come to us. (Many just come and go and we really don't connect with them). Approach people, invite them to events, to Sunday coffee. Ask various ethnic groups to prepare Sunday coffee or other events.
  - d. Reach out to the community – calling ministry, regular home visits, know people's situations so as to help them more effectively.

- e. Reach out to the 82% who do not really practice. Using social media, sparking their interest and desire to participate and live their faith. Tap into Church resources – Word on Fire, Alpha, Youth Alpha, pre-Confirmation group etc).
- f. Reach out to non-Catholics – street ministry; team of people linking church to Shirley, bring new people in (RCIA team); people should notice that “something positive has happened at St Boniface”.
- g. Evangelisation through example (works of charity, service, outreach, corporal works of mercy) and word (faith formation, spiritual works of mercy).

### 3) Discipleship

- a. Great team of catechists who engage children, youth and adults (need to be formed)
- b. Discipleship means really following Christ, knowing His teaching and applying it to daily life as living members of His Body the Church.
- c. Make disciples of all who come seeking Baptism, FHC, Confirmation, Marriage. Sacraments are our greatest pastoral opportunity. Many families requesting them are not active members of the parish, or they fall away quickly afterwards. Adults must be drawn into a process of authentic conversion towards sustained belief.
- d. Group study of the Bible, Church teaching, the saints.
- e. Small church support groups; house prayer groups (could be on Zoom); engage the 82% to get involved. Different focuses throughout the year like Advent, Christmas, Lent, Easter...Appeal to different age groups; also have mixed age groups. May – Our Lady. October...
- f. Foster teams or families that adopt people beginning their faith journey.
- g. Gospel-centric activities that spread the Word through actions – reach out to the poor, the sick...Gospel not just an idea, but lived in action!
- h. Retreat ministry – key to deeper discipleship. St Ignatius – grace to know Jesus more intimately so as to love Him more and follow Him more closely.
- i. Pilgrimages.

### 4) Community

- a. Great family spirit where people know each other, are loved and accepted as they are in their uniqueness, with their gifts and talents, and also with their limitations, weaknesses and idiosyncrasies. Strong sense of belonging. Socialising is well done and is inclusive.
- b. Offer gift of unconditional love to imitate God's love.
- c. St Boniface – a place where people trust each other and can be transparent and discuss problems and difficulties without offending or being offended. A community that fosters communion through prayer support, healing ministry, authentic listening, resolution of difficulties through mutual understanding and effort, a spirit of forgiveness and reconciliation. "Nothing is swept under the rug." People are accountable for each other.
- d. Our inspiration – St Teresa of Calcutta – See Jesus in everyone.
- e. Get together for trips, celebrations, pilgrimages, different events; open to the outside community.
- f. Build up community, create ways to foster community. Have thriving groups in place that people can join. Have signs that clearly indicate which groups exist and how to contact them and join. Should be normal for everyone to be part of at least one parish group.
- g. Links are made across age groups and across cultural backgrounds.

## 5) Ministry

- a. Priests are fully dedicated to their specific priestly ministry (esp. preaching, celebration of the Sacraments; Mass, Adoration, confession, spiritual direction). Requires that priests never fall into a rut, but always try to improve their preaching, proclamation of God's Word, their skills in being good spiritual directors, counsellors, confessors, listeners. Priests need feedback of the laity.
- b. Laity are involved in various ministries (services – any way in which we give our time and energy to the parish and to those who do not belong).
  - i. Mass – readers, Eucharistic ministers, altar servers, welcomers.
  - ii. Prayer groups
  - iii. Support groups – calling ministry, home visits, bereavement team.
  - iv. Catechesis – great team of catechists at all levels.

- v. Healing ministry
- vi. Powerful youth group
- vii. Great children's apostolate
- viii. Activities for the elderly, reach out to the sick; all people's needs are being met.
- ix. Vocational work

On Tuesday the Core Leadership Team met with Fr Stephen Langridge, the parish priest of St Elizabeth in the Diocese of Southwark, for many years the national vocations coordinator for the Bishops Conference of England and Wales. Fr Stephen himself looked for ways to help the parishes he has served in. He found the greatest help in DR. He is now one of the main coaches of DR in the UK and abroad, helping other parishes grow and flourish.

When Fr Stephen arrived at a new parish that was very divided and had been in a kind of rut for many years, he was determined to see if the DR principles would make a difference, and they did. Within a few years the parish turned around; the participants at Mass doubled in size; the parish became a joyful, outward looking community.

One key lesson that Fr Stephen learned is that we have to move from maintenance to mission, from being consumers to being disciples of Jesus, from being guests to becoming hosts who invite people. Fr Stephen experienced that consumers have wants and are essentially self-centred, whereas disciples are Christ-centred and have stories to tell and seek to be transformed and to make a difference.

Fr Stephen emphasized that our main focus today should be to look more closely at our vision statement. It needs to be simplified (for example, St Boniface – a parish family committed to know and love God and neighbour). And we need to keep coming back to our vision statement. We have to make it our own. It should animate our various teams, all that we do.

We are now going to give you the vision statement and some key questions and ask you to bring these to prayer. Let the Lord speak to you, so that through each one of you He may speak to all of us as a group gathered here.

Fr Tom Kleinschmidt OMV  
Parish priest

