



## **Our Lady of Lourdes Harpenden**

# Annual Report To Parishioners

March 2022



## Introduction

This is first of what we hope will be an annual report to parishioners. Its intention is to provide an overview of the activities that have, are currently, or plan, to take place within the parish. The document connects all parish activities as an aid to fulfilling the mission of Our Lady of Lourdes as we aspire to be a more open, active, and welcoming parish.

Much work has already been going on in the parish, but not always in a connected way and perhaps without realising that respective groups were already fulfilling the mission.

Understanding that we are part of a Parish Renewal Programme makes us appreciate that we are not just a few amongst many, it means that we benefit from mutual support and so with confidence go out and encourage others.

During 2019, a Mission Development Team was formed to discuss and debate the content of 'Devine Renovation' and ultimately plan the best way forward for Our Lady of Lourdes parish. The work has been significant, with many hours spent analysing, rationalising, and planning the way forward. The pandemic hindered progress, but ultimately the point came to share the results with parishioners.

This report does not offer a perfect solution or suggest that we have reached the end of the journey, in fact it is only the beginning. Plans will change and new ones will evolve as fresh impetus is injected by those who carry the baton forward. Goodwill, an open mind, a desire, and commitment by all parishioners to work with and for the mission of the Catholic Church and Our Lady of Lourdes parish, will ensure continuity and ultimately the success of the mission.

**The Mission Development Team**

### Our Parish Vision

To become a **welcoming, active, and outgoing** Parish community which **recognises** and **benefits** from our **God given gifts and talents, empowering** each one of us to individually and collectively **spread the Good News** to others, **whilst deepening our own relationship with Christ** our brother, irrespective of the point we are at on our journey.

# What Is and Why the need for a Parish Renewal Programme?

Canon Anthony Dwyer, Parish Priest

Anyone who knows this parish, will readily say what a good parish it is with many activities taking place, and many parishioners ready to participate and take on responsibility.

Given that reality, you might ask: 'Why do we need a Parish Renewal Programme?' Well, you don't need me to tell you about some of the challenges facing the Church.



To give you an example from our own parish, in 'normal' pre-pandemic years somewhere in the region of 100 babies are baptised. When the time comes for Holy Communion, there can be 70 or more children receiving the sacrament and at Confirmation between 40 and 50. When it comes to marriage there are approximately about 6 a year. These numbers demonstrate that there is a decline right from the beginning.

Before Covid struck, between 700 and 800 people were attending weekend Mass, now it is under 400. Even allowing for those people shielding, or with health issues, you can't help but wonder: 'What has happened to everyone?'

## Sacramentalising rather than Evangelising

It is said that for every one person who joins the Church, 10 will leave. 95% of young people confirmed will have left within three years. What we are doing is sacramentalising people rather than evangelising them! It's not life-giving, it's not transformational, and it's not changing people's lives! This is a concern I have been increasingly living with, and this situation is not just what is happening in our parish, it is a common story.

## Inspiration for Transformation

When I was on holiday, just before I moved to this parish, I was reading 'Divine Renovation' by Father

James Mallon. It was a book which inspired me, and which I read again. Fr Mallon is a Parish Priest in Halifax, Nova

Scotia and he was facing the same issues as us, not least families, who rarely attend Mass, wanting their children to be Baptised or to be prepared for Holy Communion, or young people who rarely attend church, wanting to be Confirmed.

So, what are to do? We cannot just continue doing what we have always done, especially if we see that it is not having the effect we might hope for.

"The Church is sent to bring Christ & His gospel to all" Fr Mallon talks about: 'making missionary disciples'. He is right because it seems that we've forgotten that we are called to make disciples - 'The Church is sent to bring Christ and his gospel to all' - and to do that we have to become missionary disciples ourselves.

A missionary disciple is someone who has had a personal encounter with Jesus Christ, who loves him, desires to grow in love for him, and joyfully shares that love for him with others.

Pope Francis says:

I dream of a "missionary option", that is, a missionary impulse capable of transforming everything, so that the Church's customs, ways of doing things, times and schedules, language and structures can be suitably channelled for the evangelisation of today's world rather than for her self-preservation. {EG27}

## Changing the Mindset

The sub-heading of Fr Mallon's book is 'From a Maintenance to a Mission Parish'. It is very easy to get swallowed up in the maintenance. Those things we do regularly: celebrating Mass, preparing for the sacraments, caring for the sick and those in need, but we need to become more a parish of mission, a parish in which everyone understands that we all have a part to play, and everyone's contribution is important, and valued.

## All Welcome - No Exceptions

We are a welcoming parish, and we want to be even more welcoming. First and foremost, we want everyone to know that they are welcome. There are no exceptions to that, and we want that to be the experience they have when they come to Mass or attend other parish activities. There are many different activities taking place, we counted over thirty when preparing the 'rolling' display for the Parish Gathering held recently. Extending our welcome, we want everyone to know about them, and that there is a place for everyone.

## Reflecting on Devine Renovation

Initially, I invited eight parishioners to read 'Divine Renovation' to see what they thought of it, and what we could learn for our parish. Since then, the Lenten groups have also read, and discussed it. Broadly speaking, most people, I think, appreciated what was described, and recognised its wisdom.

Fr Mallon is very clear, that what he writes is not a 'programme' for every parish, and I agree, but we can learn from some of it. I would say rather than a 'programme', it is something we can be inspired by, rather than transplant into our situation, something which has happened in another place and culture.

## Mission Development Team Formed

The Mission Development Team was formed almost three years ago to plan the way forwards. The original team consisted of Dennis Cooper, Sue Martin Dominique Pesez and Cathy Seaton. In 2020 Alison Fox joined the team. Dennis, Alison, and Dom have worked during the pandemic analysing the outcomes from the survey and from that, identifying areas to work on. Some areas will be realised in the short term, and others will take longer.



Dom Pesez



Alison Fox



Dennis Cooper

Dominique Pesez has now retired from the group after three years of significant service and replacements are being sought.

## Parish Member Engagement Survey

Almost two years ago, just before the pandemic, the Parish Survey was presented to parishioners, and approximately 170 responses were received. Parishioners had the opportunity to express what they appreciated in the parish, and what else they thought should be happening. The responses have been analysed and provide a long list of actions to be taken forward.

## New Groups Formed

The initial outcomes of all this effort, have been the formation of a Communications Team, the creation of the Pastoral Council and the presentation at the Annual Parish Gathering.

Our efforts also meant that we were perfectly positioned to embrace Pope Francis's formation of the Synodal Pathway initiative and form a group to guide the parish and at the same link our 'mission' project to it. We are grateful to Sally Faiz and Michelle Heyes who stepped up as volunteers to facilitate the Synodal Pathway effort in the parish and their report, which was distributed after Mass in February has been delivered to the Diocese and shared with the Parish Pastoral Council.

It is my hope that everyone in the parish will become involved one way or another and inspired by our mission. The remainder of this report illustrates how each parish group connects to the mission and outlines the next steps.

# The Parish Gathering

“Looking Back and Moving Forward”

On 23rd January 2022 we held a Parish Gathering to:

Reflect on the past year.

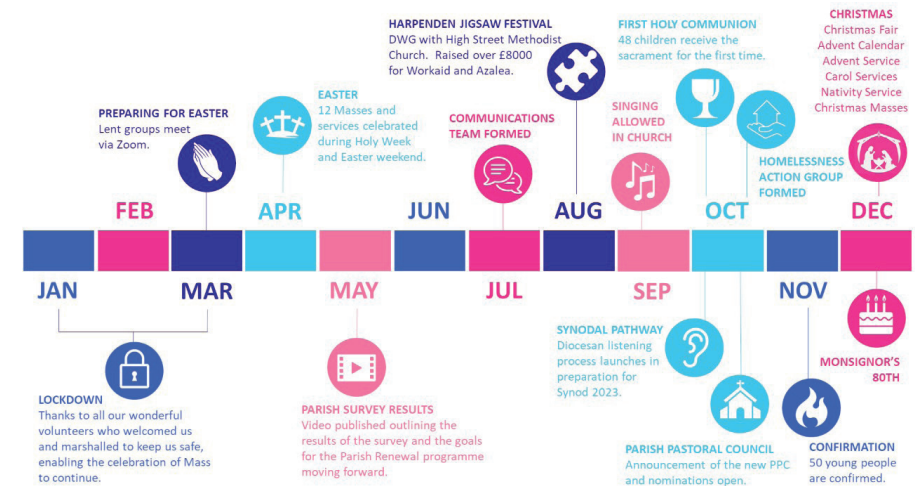
Provide an update on Parish Renewal progress.

Launch the Pastoral Parish Council.

Communicate the next steps for Parish Renewal.

## 2021 in Review

The past couple of years, living through the coronavirus pandemic, have been unprecedented, and whilst Mass has continued, little else was able to happen for a long time. So it was with joy that that we embraced the gradual easing of restrictions through 2021 and were able to enjoy more of the events that make our parish special to us.



2021 started as a quiet year for the parish as we were in lockdown for the first 8 weeks. However, thanks to our volunteer stewards, Mass was able to continue and as we headed into Lent the Lent group meetings were able to take place over Zoom.

As restrictions were eased, highlights of the year included:

- The Jigsaw Festival organised by the Developing World Group and High Street Methodist Church, raising over £8000 for Azalea and Workaid.
- 48 children making their First Holy Communion in October.
- 50 young people being confirmed in November.

- A group of parishioners setting up the Homelessness Action Group and, supported by a group of Year 10 Duke of Edinburgh Bronze Award students, raising awareness, and collecting donations for two local charities: NOAH and Keystage Housing.

By December we were able to come together to celebrate Monsignor's 80th Birthday as well as enjoy the Christmas Fair, three Carol Services, the Nativity Service live-streamed and of course Mass at Christmas.

## The Parish Renewal Programme



The initial phase of the Parish Renewal Programme, which took place pre-pandemic, was one of discovery and reflection about what Parish Renewal meant, and what a programme of renewal might look like:

- Canon Anthony and a group of parishioners read and reflected on 'Divine Renovation' by Fr James Mallon.
- Initial ideas were formed on how to implement a Parish Renewal Programme inspired by 'Divine Renovation'.
- The Parish Vision was defined.
- A Mission Development Team was formed.
- A Parish Member Engagement Survey carried out.

The second phase happened to mainly coincide with the outbreak of the pandemic. During that time, the Mission Development Team have worked to lay the foundations that we hope will support a successful parish renewal and enable us to achieve the parish vision

- Analysis of the survey results was carried out and a set of parish goals was defined covering seven themes that described the type of parish that people said wanted to be a part of.
- The results and outcomes of the Parish Engagement Survey were shared and some priorities to begin moving the Parish Renewal process forward were identified:
  - Set up a Communications Team
  - Build on the Welcoming Team
  - Launch a new website – work in progress
  - Set up a Parish Pastoral Council

### The Parish Goals

There were over 160 responses received from the survey and the Mission Development Team spent quite some time collating and analysing the responses to be sure we understood exactly what parishioners were telling us. Every comment was considered. From the results of the survey, we defined a number of goals themed around the type of parish that people want to be part of, and which fed into the parish vision:



The full set of goals along with the survey outcomes delivered in the May 2021 video report is still available to view on the parish website.

## The Parish Renewal 2021

During 2021 the Mission Development Team worked on the four priority actions that we set as outcomes from the survey.

### Set up a Communications Team

Communication is core to the Parish Renewal Programme. The Communications Team was set up to help inform people, within the parish and externally, about the fantastic work the church is already doing, and plans to do. Amongst other things, it means promoting events and updates on the social media channels (Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram) as well as thinking about what the group can do to communicate better with parishioners through the newsletter and noticeboards. It also has aspirations for the local newspaper.

To date they have been focussed on increasing our presence on social media and assisting the Mission Development Team with communication around the Parish Council Elections and the Parish Gathering.

The current team is small, consisting of Rachel Lee, Victoria Jonson, and Paul Durden, so they are looking for enthusiastic volunteers to join and help grow the team and help them to achieve more.

To this end, the team spoke to the parish at weekend Masses in February. They ended their talk, expressing why we need to communicate.

**We are a Catholic community..... A community thrives on interaction.**



Rachel Lee



Victoria Jonson



Paul Durden

#### **Build on the Welcoming Team**

During the pandemic we were grateful to our volunteers who tried to make telephone contact with every parishioner known to the parish, to check on their welfare and offer help where needed. The group then took on stewarding responsibility to enable Mass to recommence in a controlled and safe way. There were many positive comments about how the need for engagement through taking names and handing out hand gel created a very welcoming environment and we wanted to build on what we have learned and combine our previous Ministers of Welcome and Coronavirus volunteers into one Welcoming team to continue that.

The Welcoming team is being relaunched as part of the parish vision to be a welcoming parish and this will cover welcoming at Mass as well as volunteers involved in new parishioner welcoming, hospitality at other events, and neighbourhood contact and outreach teams.

Marianne Mudd who has organised the volunteers during the pandemic has agreed to carry on in her role and she will be supported by Carlo Antonioli. We are currently appointing a co-ordinator to rebuild and oversee the neighbourhood contacts.



Marianne Mudd



Carlo Antonioli

#### **Launch a new Parish Website**

The new parish website will provide our new virtual front door and aims to reflect the values and vision of the parish, being welcoming to everyone as well as communicating and supporting

the parish mission and all that goes on in the parish. The development of the new website is well underway with most of the technical build complete and we are now in the process of populating the content. We are hopeful of launching in the first half of 2022

## **The Newly Formed Parish Pastoral Council**

A major outcome of the work of the Mission Development Team to date is the creation of the Parish Pastoral Council (PPC). We consulted with another local parish to find out how they setup and run their Pastoral Council, and based on their experience, devised a process for elections and appointments and defined the Terms of Reference modelled on theirs.

Nominations for four PPC members, were sought from and elected by parishioners in October/ November 2021. Canon Anthony then co-opted four other parishioners to complete the group of an eight-member Council. Names were announced at the parish gathering and in the parish newsletter.

The purpose of the PPC is to advise and make recommendations to the Parish Priest on the spiritual, pastoral, and social life of the parish. This is a huge responsibility, which will be achieved by developing the goals that have been set, refine, and introduce new ones as they become apparent and decide on the priorities to lead to the realisation of the Parish vision. They will also be responsible for developing and publishing an on-going five-year strategic plan for the implementation of parish renewal.



Canon Anthony



Tony Fields



Eddie Gaynor



Jon Newham



Fernanda  
Paukstys Batista



Liz Bradley



Sarah Shipley



Mark Quigley



Lucy Rochford

The PPC team will hold their first meeting on 28th and will meet six times each year. A final four members will be appointed by Canon Anthony in early 2023 bringing the Council to its full membership of 12 people.

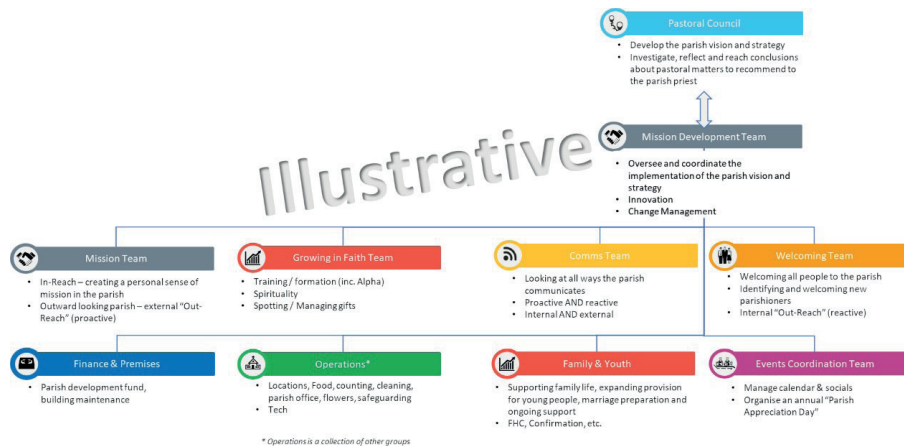
## Moving forward

With the Pastoral Parish Council in place, we are now excited to move into the next phase of our parish renewal – turning the ideas into action!

The Pastoral Parish Council will shape the strategy, set the direction, and decide priorities, and the Mission Development Team will support the PPC in setting up new teams or working groups as required, acting as facilitators with other groups and taking practical steps to implement the vision and achieve the parish goals.

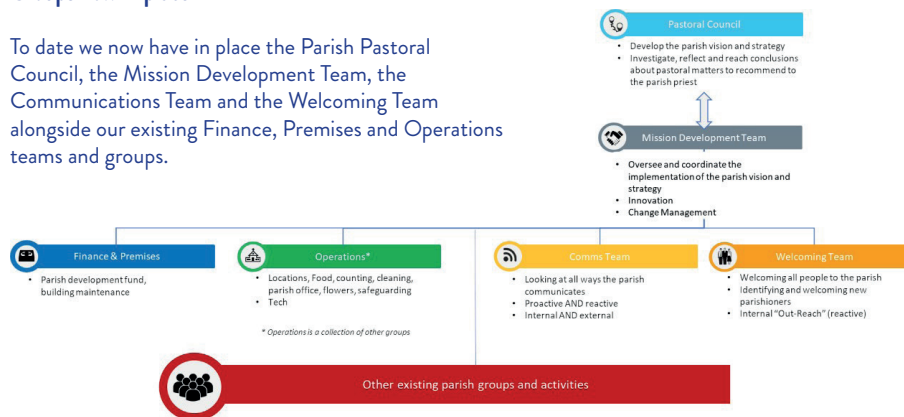
### An Organisation for the Future

The eventual aim is to have teams, or collections of related groups working together to achieve the goals set out for each key area of parish life. This suggested structure, shown below, may change over time based on actual needs and the guidance of the Parish Pastoral Council.



### Groups now in place

To date we now have in place the Parish Pastoral Council, the Mission Development Team, the Communications Team and the Welcoming Team alongside our existing Finance, Premises and Operations teams and groups.



## The Next Priorities

As we move into 2022 a new set of priorities has emerged and will be the focus of the work of the Pastoral Council and the Mission Development Team going forward.

We must ensure that teams always remain fresh, inclusive, and active, and therefore succession planning will be a critical element going forward so that the parish continues to benefit from new talent and ideas. To support this, there is an ongoing need to identify and promote opportunities for more people to get involved in Parish Renewal and parish life in general.

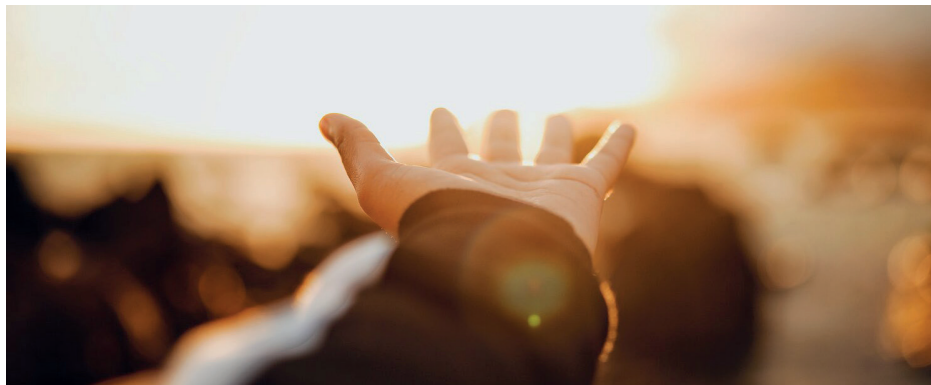
It is critical that every parishioner encourages people back to Mass post-pandemic and makes them even feel more welcome than ever.

The challenges facing families will be ever present, so the need to investigate, implement and consistently improve Catholic education provision in all its forms, for young people across the age groups remains paramount.

Every single member of our parish is called to engage with the parish mission & discipleship as defined by the obligations bestowed at baptism, helping each other fulfil this responsibility by providing the tools to carry out the job by providing individual and collective learning opportunities. There are many ways of achieving this.

At the start of this project and after reading 'Divine Renovation', the parish commenced a pilot Alpha course. Alpha is a **practical tool inspiring Catholic renewal by answering the call to the New Evangelization**, the call of Christ and His Church to "go and make disciples of all nations". It gives faithful Catholics a path and a language to fulfil their baptismal call to evangelise. We hope to restart the Alpha programme again soon.





## You are Called

There are so many opportunities to get involved in aspects of parish life, your involvement will add value and enrichment to your chosen group. Everyone including current volunteers are busy people. They find the time to get involved often only in small ways, but the culmination of a lot of people doing a little, is good for progress and positive change. The call to mission is not aimed at someone else, it is for each person to play a part.



The Parish Gathering January 2022

A woman of Samaria came to draw water. Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink."

The Samaritan woman said to him, "How can you, a Jew, ask me, a Samaritan woman, for a drink?" (For Jews use nothing in common with Samaritans.)

"Sir, you do not even have a bucket and the well is deep; where then can you get this living water?"

Jesus answered and said to her, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again; but whoever drinks the water I shall give will never thirst; the water I shall give will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life."

(John 4:4-42).

- Help to open up our parish by doing something
- Help our call to Mission
- Help us to become an outward looking and welcoming parish
- Help bring Christ to others
- Be Ready and Willing to Play Your Part
- Don't Wait to be Asked





# Annual Report To Parishioners

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## Social Media:

 Facebook: [/OLoLHarpenden](https://www.facebook.com/OLoLHarpenden)

 Twitter: [@RC\\_OLoL](https://twitter.com/RC_OLoL)

 Instagram: [@ololharpenden](https://www.instagram.com/ololharpenden)