

Résumé of Church 21 Parish Meetings so far.

Our first preliminary Parish Meeting was held on 21 June 2011, when 22 people including the Parish Team came together in our National School. The Team felt that this was a good attendance and encouraging for the future sessions.

A “PowerPoint” introduction to the evening had been scripted and prepared by the team giving some basic information about the Union of parishes. This included details of Sunday services and the average attendance at each, an age profile of parish membership from the Register of Vestry Members, a list of parish organisations and a financial profile of our Union.

The meeting then met in groups to consider four questions based on a biblical account. Group 1 “Where are you?” (Genesis 3:9); Group 2 “What is in your hand?” (Exodus 4:2); Group 3 “What are you doing here?” (1 Kings 19:9); Group 4 “What do you see?” (Ezekiel 8:15).

Group 1: The question considered by this group was, ‘Are we where God wants us to be or are we in any way a hidden Church?’

Group 2: The focus of this group was the resources available to us to allow God to transform the life of our Union.

Group 3: This group considered the vision for our Union – what do we want God to do? What is the ‘dream’ scenario in terms of where should our Union be moving towards?

Group 4: This group considered how we, the Church, might make a difference to the local communities in which we are set.

There was to have followed on from this meeting three further meetings in each of our parish units. Because of a shortage of numbers at one of these only two sessions were held, at which parishioners looked at where we *are*, and where we felt we *should be*, in respect of our ministry of Welcome, Fellowship, Worship & Nurture, Service & Caring.

On 23rd September the younger members of our Union were invited to a meeting in order to ascertain their perspective on their church. There were 2 from Clara, 2 from Rahan, 5 from Tullamore and 3 from Tyrrellspass. They were given a questionnaire and asked to answer:-

- ***What do you think are the strengths of your parish or our union as a whole?;***
- ***In what areas does it ‘fall-down’ for you?***
- ***What, if anything, do you think could be done better in your parish/union?***
- ***Any other comments?***

Needless to say, they didn’t pull any punches, and their comments were a great help to us as the Parish Team to begin to get some sense of how we, as a church family, can further support them.

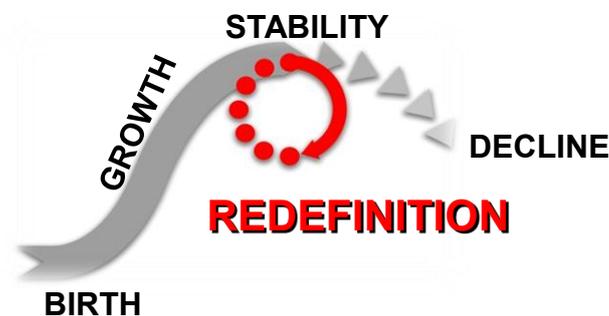
November 7th last we had our first Parish Meeting with our facilitator, Revd Paul Hoey.

Paul led us through a couple of exercises to help us identify what it is that defines our church community. The purpose being that once we can define our identity, we can consider what our values are, what our purpose is, and, from that starting point, consider our Vision for the future.

He then considered with us why such a vision is important.

The world in which we live has changed and is changing. If the Church in any community doesn't grow to meet those changes it becomes irrelevant, and as in the life cycle of any every living thing and system, will eventually die. The way to avoid that is by redefining ourselves so that we enter a new cycle of growth. Paul went on to clarify what defines a church community with vision:

- ◆ Focuses on the future
- ◆ Builds unity
- ◆ Releases resources
- ◆ Motivates commitment
- ◆ Sidelines distractions.



To help us arrive at some common mind as to our identity as the “Tullamore Union of Parishes”, we split into groups and were given 12 statements which we had to place in order of priority, as we believed they applied to our church community. Out of the discussion which followed we, the Parish Team, were given the task of composing a church mission statement based upon the top three statements selected by each group.

At the second meeting with Paul on January 25th we presented the following mission statement to parishioners:

We, in the Tullamore Union of Parishes, seek to support and encourage one another in our Christian journey through Sunday worship and private prayer.

We welcome all to worship with us, so that as a church family we are able to make friendships with God and each other in a spirit of thanksgiving, service and love.

Based upon that statement Paul asked us to consider the purpose of our Union of Parishes.....what do we exist to do?

He went on to explain about what he described as “Core Values”.

Core Values are the preferences or choices churches make in their life together. The way we behave reflects what we truly value as a congregation. Values are not an idea, nor a program, nor a goal. Core values are reflected in the consistent choices we make in our Church on a daily, monthly and yearly basis.

But the reality is that most churches never take the time to clearly define what their core values are. When Core Values are “muddy” or “inarticulate” here's what often happens to a church.

Ambiguous Core Values Results

Poor planning; Low morale; Tense relationships; Decision-making is timid and very slow; Preoccupation with trivial matters; Constant squabbling over matters of personal taste; Decisions constantly deferred; So-called “traditions” keep churches from moving forward.

However, churches that do go through a process of core value discernment discover the following results...

Clear, Articulated Core Values Results

Higher morale; Ability to plan the future; Quick resolution of disputes; Healthier relationships; Focus on “Big Picture” items; Rapid Decision-making; Easy entrance for newcomers.

In groups we then considered what values were needed to feed in to our Vision for the future. The meeting concluded by agreeing the following core values needed developing: ***generosity; sharing; caring; welcoming; being united.***

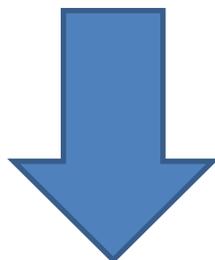
Out of all of the meetings so far the following is a list of suggestions of how our Union might develop into the future.

- ◆ Youth Club
- ◆ Youth Services (?Saturday evening?)
- ◆ All Age Worship
- ◆ Operate a Parish Office
- ◆ Review of Communication
- ◆ Monthly Healing Service
- ◆ Parish Course exploring our faith
- ◆ More social events
- ◆ A Welcome team in each parish unit
- ◆ More of a community focus for the Church
- ◆ Parent & Toddler Group
- ◆ Parish Visiting Team
- ◆ Parish Outreach Ministry
- ◆ Every church member having a ministry
- ◆ Encouraging people to sit nearer the front of church and together for worship

What Next?

The next stage of our development programme is crucial, as we look at practical ways of developing the values identified, and therefore our Vision. We need your input!

So.....





Please accept this invitation
to
Church 21 Parish Meeting No.3
on
Wednesday 9th May
at 8.00pm
in the Liss Suite
The Charleville Centre



From
Gill, Yvonne and Stuart
(Church 21 Parish Team)