

**DIOCESE OF DUNKELD: COUNCIL OF THE LAITY:APPROVED 16.09.17**

**Minute** of the **third** meeting of the **Council of the Laity** held in the Conference Room of the St Ninian's Pastoral Institute, Lawside, Dundee, on Saturday **27 May 2017** at 11.00 am.

Present: Fr J High (Chair), Fr J McCrudden (Vice-Chair), Sr M Aladi, M Caswell, J Dagen, J Galligan, J Joyce, P Kearns, A Kenny, D Meiklejohn, M Mitchell, C Mulford, F Murphy, L McIver, C McCrosson, P Porter, N Sloan, D Smith, M Veal, P Veal, R Wyle  
D McDowall (Secretary)

In attendance: Bishop S Robson

[Secretary's Note: The list of attendees and the Societies/Groups they represent is provided at the end of this minute]

Apologies were received from: A Herron, S Love, M Parke and A Toshney

Father High opened the meeting with a prayer and an invocation to the Patron Saint of the Council, St Vincent Pallotti.

**1. Minutes of the Meeting of 11 February 2017**

The minutes of the meeting of 11 February 2017 were approved subject to it being noted that:

the Pastoral Institute DOES NOT have its own minibus (Para 2.1 refers); and the Holy See (not the Bishops' Conference) would consider and decide upon the matter under discussion (Para 5 refers).

**2. Matters Arising from the Minutes of 11 February 2017**

**2.1. Repository in St Ninian's Pastoral Institute (Para 2.2 refers)**

Members were disappointed to hear that the application for a grant to fund the proposed refurbishment of the repository had been unsuccessful. Mr Meiklejohn reported that it was possible to resubmit the application and informed members that he would shortly be meeting with Bishop Robson to discuss the way forward.

**2.2. Use of the Diocesan Website to Publicise Events/Parish Activities (Para 2.4 refers)**

Father High welcomed Mr Andrew Mitchell to the meeting. Mr Mitchell gave a presentation and during his introduction he reminded members that Sunday 28 May had been designated "Communications Sunday" by the Holy Father. Mr Mitchell had used Council's minuted discussion of the 11 February meeting as the basis for his presentation which provided a range of information including:

Data from the Office for National Statistics indicating that 52% of the population in age range 65 - 74 years had made use of information technology in 2011 compared to 78% in 2017 - though it was important to note that older users needed constant refresher courses to keep them abreast of the developing technology.

Data showing the number of “hits” on the diocesan website from May 2016 to May 2017 with “spikes” in the number of visits in the days leading to Christmas and Easter - most likely due to visitors to the site checking Mass/Service times in the different parishes.

Reference to the twitter feed on the diocesan website which had been intended to serve as a means of disseminating the good work being done throughout the diocese, but which had attracted negative comment when “tweeters” had perceived that particular events had been “singled out” at the cost of others and where silence about an event could be perceived as tantamount to criticism.

A summary of the study undertaken by Mr Mitchell and Sr Delphine to try to gauge the impact on attendance numbers of widespread publicity for a particular event: The Margaret Sinclair Story. The event had been advertised in the Courier, publicised on the website and information about it distributed as widely as possible but even WITH all of this, numbers attending had been disappointing due to a number of factors not connected with the publicity itself. Mr Mitchell explained that event timings, transport to the venue, conflicting demands on individuals’ time etc. all had a bearing on attendance.

A video of the children at St Dominic’s Primary School in Crieff showcasing the children undertaking a range of activities, concluded the formal presentation.

During the plenary discussion, a number of observations were made with reference to the establishment of a network of individual parish “communicators” and members noted that:

- (i) some parishes already had communicators in place, some of whom used electronic databases - a few of which had, unfortunately, been subject to hacking - to contact fellow parishioners, distribute newsletters etc.
- (ii) establishing a diocesan-wide network whereby the individual parish communicators would be sending information into a central point where it had then to be collated and re-distributed would introduce time delays resulting in congregations having even less time to decide on attendance/action etc.
- (iii) “word of mouth” appeared to be very effective in publicising events and encouraging participation as evidenced by the recent “40 Days for Life” vigil at Ninewells which had had a continuous, albeit small, presence throughout the 40 days with some 50 people present on the last day.
- (iv) where transport or other reasons militated against individuals’ attending, it might be feasible to explore the possibility of broadcasting events “live”, where strong internet connections existed at both the transmitting and the receiving location.
- (v) individual parish communicators could assist the parish priest by assuming a “gate-keeping” role in relation to the huge amounts of information flowing into the parish much of which needed to be passed on to congregations via the parish newsletter, letters to be read out at Mass etc.

- (vi) inconsistencies across the diocese in the processing of information in individual parishes meant that some parish priest assumed responsibility for the parish newsletter, while others passed this role to a lay member of the congregation.
- (vii) it would be most helpful if all parish priests could be persuaded that it would be a positive development to identify individual parish communicators who could support the priests in their work and help to ensure that parishioners were kept abreast of relevant developments.

In conclusion, it was agreed that Council of Laity members should speak to their parish priest regarding the foregoing discussion, offering to work with their priest to ensure that parishioners were kept informed of parish, diocesan, and national events as appropriate, while bearing in mind that there might be some instances where parish priests had legitimate reasons for not publicising particular information.

In addition, it was suggested that the next Priests' Council could be invited to discuss the identification and role of parish communicators and that the Diocesan Pastoral Council - once established - could also be invited to do so.

The importance of publicising "good" news and positive items was stressed and it was agreed that any Council member wishing to share such news or general information about their society should pass details to Mr Mitchell who was available in the diocesan office each Wednesday morning and whose contact details were available on the diocesan website.

Father High thanked Mr Mitchell both for his most informative presentation and for his active participation in the discussion.

### **2.3 Wellburn Update**

Mr Veal reported that the documentation for approval of the loan from the Clydesdale Bank was in the process of being completed. In the meantime, the Wellburn Walled Garden had been approached by a charity funded partly by Dundee City Council resulting in 2 Syrian refugee families working in the garden on a regular basis. Dementia Scotland had also expressed an interest in funding work in the garden in partnership with Kent University. The Wellburn Project was attracting significant interest in the the city of Dundee with volunteers keen to be involved.

### **3. CHRISTIFIDELES LAECI**

Father High invited Ms Laura McIver to introduce the Christifideles Laeci document which she had suggested, at the last meeting, that members should read as a starting point for discussion on the way forward for the work of the Council. Ms McIver explained that she had been struck by the New Testament Parable about the labourers in the vineyard, when Jesus asks some labourers "Why are you standing idle?" and she had hoped that consideration of Christifideles Laeci might begin to crystallise members' thoughts on ways in which Council could be pro-active in spreading and supporting the faith. Ms Cecilia Mulford tabled papers she had collated which were prefaced by a proposal for "Christian Conventions to Encourage Christian Unity in Working together for the benefit of all peoples".

During the ensuing discussion about the role of the laity, members shared their concerns about the apathy prevalent amongst many churchgoers who were reluctant, for a number of reasons, to become actively engaged in activities other than attending Mass. Attempts by many of the Societies represented on Council to attract new members had met with little success, despite a programme of visits to the different parishes in the diocese carried out in the past 2 years. Sterling work being carried out by individual Societies and by the Sisters in the Institute was going unheeded and various ways of combatting the perceived apathy prevalent amongst the lay faithful were mooted. The average age of existing society members was mentioned as was the need to attract "new YOUNG blood".

Members agreed that it was crucial first to specify the role of the laity, in order to discuss ways in which to best fulfil that role. Members were reminded that the role of the priest was to administer the sacraments, to preach the Word, to make decisions and to exercise appropriate authority - all other matters were within the scope of the laity. The difficulty, it was acknowledged, was in identifying ways in which lay members could be encouraged to come forward and assume the role - once specified. Some members described how they felt there were blockages, hurdles, historical obstacles etc hindering the church's progress, stultifying lay members and, in some cases, feeding their apathy. Others expressed the view that obstacles existed AMONGST the laity with some lay members being very protective of their "patch", while others would not volunteer to become involved but would wait to be asked. It was agreed that there existed a wealth of untapped skills across the laity in the diocese which could be put to great use if only a means could be identified of tapping into it.

Members agreed that there was a need for change within the church. They were reminded of St Paul's 1st letter to the Corinthians which described a range of concerns similar to those previously discussed. The importance of speaking simultaneously to clergy and laity was highlighted and it was agreed that if, at some point in the future, new technology could be used to stream relevant messages into churches, mobile wifi and "booster" technology could be made available.

In the meantime the importance of discerning the role of the laity was stressed and it was agreed that discernment (with regard to the role of the laity) be included in the agenda for both the next Priests' Council and for the next meeting of the Council of the Laity.

#### **4. DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

Members were reminded that the next meeting would take place on Saturday 16 September 2017 at 11 am.

Attendees:

Fr J High (Chair)

Fr J McCrudden (Vice Chair)

Sr M Aladi

Ms M Caswell, Legion of Mary

Mr J Dagen, The Catenians

Mr J Galligan, Friends of St Jugan

Mr J Joyce, SSVP

Mr P Kearns, Diocesan Choir/OLGC

Ms A Kenny, Friends of Wellburn

Mr D Meiklejohn, St Ninian's Pastoral Institute

Ms M Mitchell, Diocesan Lourdes Group

Ms C Mulford, Independent Action Group

Mr F Murphy, KSC

Ms L McIver, Liturgy

Mr C McCrosson, JPPM

Ms P Porter, UCM

Ms N Sloan, SERRA

Mr D Smith, SSVP

Mr M Veal, Diocesan Administration

Ms P Veal, Cecilian Choir

Deacon R Wyle, CGA

Ms D McDowall (Secretary)

Bishop Stephen Robson