

Visits to other Churches

16 parishioners and parish architect Peter Ferguson, led by Fr. Dermot and William McAuliffe, went to see four other Dublin parishes on Saturday, January 23rd 2010. The purpose of the tour was to see how other parishes had adapted their church building to the current realities and needs of their community.

In Edenmore, Raheny, the front portion of their church building has been converted into parish office space, meeting rooms and public facilities. A wide corridor still provides access to the church within. The interior of the church itself, along with the furniture, was also refurbished to present a modern, attractive environment for the congregation.

In Artane, a large church building has been partitioned to create a more intimate worship space for a smaller congregation and a series of meeting rooms, including a large conference room, has been created in the other half of the church behind the full-height partition wall. The church has become an even greater focal point for community life and pastoral services following the building change.

In Whitehall, the altar has been brought forward into church and the seating has been re-arranged to facilitate improved liturgy and participation. The large sanctuary area behind the altar has been converted into an improved sacristy, parish offices and pastoral centre. The pastoral centre includes a large industrial kitchen for a meals-on-wheels service and a large cafeteria/function room. Again, the church is the centre for a broad range of pastoral and community services resulting from the changes in building layout and design.

In Skerries, the portion and back of the church has been tastefully re-designed in the style of a glass conservatory to provide meeting rooms and shops that can be accessed by the public without encroaching on the church itself. The choir gallery has been retained above with an additional meeting room added for greater space efficiency. The church furniture was also refurbished.

In all these parishes, we were greeted warmly and given encouragement to proceed with our renewal plans. We were also struck by a great sense of community and optimism for the future in each of these parishes.

Introduction by Fr Dermot Nestor

Here in the Good Shepherd parish we have a great community, with many people involved in the parish. We have over 300 people in active ministry and 700 people who contribute to the financial support of the parish. People are very faithful to supporting this parish.

They are also very generous to many charities who come here looking to this Christian community for support for various projects.

We have a beautiful church building. However times have changed in the 55 years since the doors were first opened. Many will remember a packed church in the 1960's and 1970's. People recall having to come early to get a seat.

Things are very different today

- A Mass Survey each year over the last four years has shown an average attendance of 1050 over 4 masses each Sat night /Sunday. This is an average of 250 per mass, with just over 300 at the 11.00am

Our understanding of Liturgy has also changed in the 50 years since VatII

Years ago the priest was described as “reading” the mass, and this then became the priest “Saying the mass”. I was never ordained to “say” mass, I was ordained to “preside at the celebration of the Eucharist, to preside at the celebration of the gathered assembly”.

The early church was called ecclesia, the gathered community. The community that gathered to worship the Lord.

I find it soul destroying, to look out at so many empty seats, with people scattered along the edges of the seats. This drains me, and there is no nourishment from my faith

I would love to see people gathered together around the Table of the Lord and the Table of the Eucharist. A favourite quote of mine is “Good Liturgy deepens faith, poor liturgy weakens faith.” We have worked well here to build the liturgy, but now we have to take the next step.

Church documents tell us “The church is most fully and visibly itself when it gathers together for Eucharist, ... it expresses what it is, a community of faith and love” (one Bread one Body #19)

This year 2011, the Irish Bishops presented us with a document call “O Sacred Banquet” and I recommend it to all to read. This document describes many way in which we can re vitalise the Sunday Eucharist. Two quotes from this document encourage me in our plans for refurbishment

“Church buildings should enable the faithful to gather around the Lords table.”

“It would be a tragedy if church buildings in Ireland were to continue to lag behind shopping centres when it comes to refurbishment”

I hope that we can move forward together to prepare our building for the next 50 years