

St. Elizabeth's, Minsteracres Annual Parish Report 2020-2021



Contents

1. Introduction
2. Justice and Peace Group
3. Liturgy Group
4. Busy Church
5. Social Committee
6. Music Liturgy
7. Cemetery Working Group
8. Financial Statement

1. Introduction

My last annual report spoke of reduced activity and forward looking as a result of COVID-19. Sadly, this is also the theme of this year's report, as we cycled from lockdown, to brief respite, back into lockdown, and back out again in June of this year. As you know, we were able to stay 'open' during the second lockdown due to the work of the parish council, a number of volunteers who have acted as stewards, cleaners, and those who have ensured that we have been kept up to date through our virtual communications and updated website. I personally want to thank them all and in particular to Frank Balloch who has maintained rotas and encouraged (coerced) parishioners to join the volunteer band. For those who have not been able to return to Minsteracres we have continued to stream the 8:30 mass, thanks to Pavan who as well as operating the video has also 'fogged' the church between masses to keep us all safe.

Martin Deasy has decided to step down at the end of his tenure as a parish councillor. I would like to thank Martin for his contribution as a council member and his role as our communication lead which included building our new website. Martin has kindly agreed to continue to oversee the website outside of the council. Martin's forthcoming departure will leave a vacant seat on the council so if anyone would like to learn more about being a council member please reach out to any council member and we will gladly answer any questions you may have. Alternatively we allocate the first 10 minutes of each parish council meeting as an open session, in which any parishioner can join the meeting to ask a question and/or share an opinion with the council.

We have received feedback during the past year on the mass changes (masks, restricted numbers, etc.), which has led us to retain the role of the steward in a revised way. The steward will take on a role of welcome, monitor numbers in line with recommendations, advise on COVID safety measures, and take the collection which will reduce the number of people moving around during the mass. We have paused the need to book, restarted indoor coffee after mass and designated a seating area at the back of church for those parishioners who wish not to wear a face mask. We will continue to assess risk and, if necessary, and/or on advice from the Bishops Conference, we will reintroduce the booking systems and re-impose other restrictions.

The parish council has met via Zoom for the past 12 months and we have renewed the subscription for another 12 months. This facility is available for use by all of the subgroups / committees and I encourage these groups to make good use of this particularly in the winter months. There is a facility to book a slot via the parish website.

We are keen to restart social activity within the parish in a safe way, to be able to meet and rebuild our community through hospitality. Our social committee is severely under-resourced. I am therefore appealing to you social butterflies in the parish. Your support does not have to extend to joining the committee itself, if that's not your thing. But we would welcome your ideas—and ideally your hands when it comes to washing up. Margo and Camille have been actively seeking support and I thank those who have stepped forward so far, but the more the merrier.

Once again thank you all for your support.

Susan Collins
Chair of the Parish Council

2. Justice and Peace Group

Introduction

I am very pleased to say that our small parish group (Eileen, Frank, Rosaleen, Ann, and myself) have been strengthened by Fr Jenish, who has joined our meetings this year. We hope in 2022 to be able to return to our normal range of activities:

- Fundraising for asylum seekers, CAFOD, and other causes.
- Collecting biscuits for the Diocesan Refugee Project food bags.
- Arranging coffee mornings and other events to raise awareness of local, national, and international justice and peace issues/organisations.
- Supporting our new parish initiative in raising money for three Passionist projects in India.
- Working with other parish justice and peace groups within the Heavenfield Partnership.

Asylum Seekers

The Diocesan Refugee Project has both a new project manager, Sara Harris, and a new base in St Vincent's Support Centre, New Bridge St, Newcastle (adjoining St Dominic's). Eileen has visited the new centre to deliver biscuits and has invited Sara to visit us in the New Year to update us on changes within the project which she has agreed to do. The project currently has around 320 clients of which two thirds are seeking asylum and one third have been refused asylum and now receive no support in terms of accommodation or money. The project provides food bags and clothing to both groups plus a monthly food voucher of £30 to those who are destitute. They are currently distributing 660 food bags a month and are desperate for parish food donations to resume. Thankfully they have a team of 35 volunteers but would welcome more, including drivers to deliver to clients where necessary. A new project worker to assist Sara, Azad Hasan, was recently appointed. Thanks to your continuing generosity we were able, following collections in January, to send £600 to support the project. Please continue to donate biscuits for the food bags which we will deliver. As we approach Christmas the project will also start collecting winter clothing and new or nearly new toys and gifts.

Traidcraft

Due to a significant decline in sales in recent years, and the amount of work involved in managing the Traidcraft account, we have decided not to restart our monthly sales of goods, apart from Christmas cards.

CAFOD

With your support, and with money remaining in the Traidcraft account, we were able to send £550 to support CAFOD projects during the year.

Passionist Projects in India

Following the parish Zoom meeting with Fr Jenish's colleagues in India, and our launch event in July, we have begun to collect money for three Passionist projects in India: the Cow Programme, the Brick Making Project, and Support for Educating Children from Poor Families. Already largely based on donations and 'coffee money', we have been able to send £1500 to India to support these projects. We also have a number of fundraising ideas for 2022 and beyond.

Events

Although we have been unable to organise our usual parish coffee morning talks and other events this year, we intend to restart the programme in the New Year.

Heavenfield Partnership

We have taken the initiative to reactivate the Heavenfield Partnership Justice and Peace Group, which had such a promising start before the pandemic. We hope this will lead to new joint initiatives in the New Year.

Thank you for your continuing support

Jim Darlington

3. Liturgy Group

This group, which has met rather infrequently during the last 20 months or so, comes together in more normal times to help plan and develop the celebration of the liturgy within the parish. This manifests itself in various ways from exploring ways to support faith development to organising specific liturgies.

Whilst our liturgical life has undoubtedly been impacted significantly as a result of the various restrictions we have had placed on our worship since the start of the pandemic, there are undoubtedly—as a result of the hard work and effort of a number of parishioners—things we should perhaps take the time to celebrate:

- Despite the impact of the December restrictions of 2020, which had a significant impact on attendance, our Christmas services, including the children's nativity service which preceded the early Mass seemed to be well received.
- Whilst we didn't meet in person to explore Faith development during Lent, the Zoom talks led by the clergy of the partnership proved thought provoking and were generally well attended.
- Our Holy Week and Easter services were of course restricted in terms of what we could and couldn't do (no feet washing or communal singing), but given the

circumstances we were able to celebrate all of the normal liturgies in this most important period in the Church's calendar

- Eventually we were able to celebrate the first Holy Communion masses for the children of the parish who had been preparing for this for quite some time. We also celebrated the confirmation of two parishioners, and five couples were married here this year.
- Just a couple of weeks ago we welcomed Bishop Robert who celebrated a special Mass for us to commemorate the tricentenary of the founding of the Congregation of the Passion and the 250th anniversary of the founding of the Passionist Nuns.

Many thanks to everyone who was involved in the preparation and celebration of all of these activities and liturgies. Without the help and support of so many parishioners we simply wouldn't be able to do all the things we are able to.

Looking ahead, whilst we are still living with the virus and are consequently constrained in some of our activities, some things are perhaps returning more to what we might consider normal. Over recent months the involvement of the congregation in the Mass is getting back to how things were (readers, bidding prayers etc.), and we are now gradually reintroducing congregational singing. We will also soon be starting to plan our Advent and Christmas programme, and will be giving some thought as to whether it is practical to re-introduce our Advent Posada. We are also hoping to re-establish our programme of home masses sometime in early 2022.

Our liturgical life is at the heart of our faith and our thanks once again go to all those who enrich this in whatever way, small or great. The more people engaging in nurturing and developing the parish's liturgical life, the more vibrant and grace filled the parish will be. When they resume, our Liturgy meetings are open for all to attend on a regular or ad-hoc basis, so please give it a try.

Rev. David Collins
Chairman and Parish Council Link

4. Busy Church

A Call to Mission

On 21 September 2014 the Bishops of England and Wales invited parishes to celebrate Home Mission Sunday to encourage every mass-going Catholic to respond urgently to the call to evangelise. With most mass-going Catholics feeling the pain and sorrow caused by a large number of family members and friends not practising their faith, there is an urgency for us all to consider afresh how we might respectfully and joyfully reach out to our absent brothers and sisters in Christ. Thank you for all that you are already doing in this regard.

Background

In May 2014 we started a children's liturgy group during 8.30am Mass to reach out to our very young parishioners and their families. The rationale behind Busy Church is a belief that we need to welcome and foster a sense of belonging and community within our Parish which will encourage attendance at Mass as part of the rhythm and structure of a family's week by making the children feel 'at home'. Parents with young children may feel reluctant to attend mass due to their anxiety about the incompatibility of prayer and contemplation with the desire of small children to explore and interact. Busy Church provides activities in the library appropriate to a range of

age groups and linked into the Gospel and life of our Parish during this service. This allows parents to worship whilst their children hear God's message in a less formal setting. By having fun at Busy Church, we hope to make coming to Minsteracres something that the children and their families look forward to.

Busy Church is supported by some of our older children and teenagers who have been part of the group since 2014 and their ideas and enthusiasms are reflected in the things that we do. We use Busy Church as a catalyst to join all our young people together, creating an extended Catholic family where our teenagers know that their experience and talents are used and valued. Now in its sixth year our founding children are growing up into teenagers and we have new members who have become actively involved in the Parish as a result of the group.

Format

We start each session with a song or prayer but the group is very informal allowing children to join in as it fits with their worship needs. This is followed by creative play – frequently colouring in pictures that illustrate the gospel or using crafts to make cards, crowns, boxes, sheep etc. During the initial stages of these activities the gospel is read and explained in very child-focused, simple language. This is followed by a prayer. Depending on the age range attending each session, the remainder of the session may use activity books with stickers or read stories out loud for the very young children or use quizzes, word searches and cross words for older children. Our teenagers or older children also help with the younger children, reading and playing in smaller groups. We join the congregation for communion and then return to the library for a song and often cake and to tidy up.

Our older children elect to join us just for the Liturgy of the Word and to rejoin the congregation at offertory whilst some of the younger children come in after the readings. The attendance and style is very flexible and develops to respond to the needs of the children attending.

We mark each other's birthdays with presents, cake and cards and celebrate our achievements and laugh at our failures together.

Busy Church through the Pandemic

Busy Church was badly affected by the pandemic, although the members of the group on Facebook were able to keep in touch and support one another remotely. We did experiment with the use of Zoom but it was not entirely successful as a format with young children.

Advent/Christmas 2020

Advent is a time of huge excitement – and busyness – in the group. We usually build a Jesse Tree and explore the Old Testament stories as well as the ideas in the O Antiphons. This is coupled with celebrations for the Feast of St Nicholas (chocolate and socks!) and the Feast of St Lucy (cinnamon buns and candles) and preparations for Christmas in singing carols.

Last year we had a Zoom Posada service with all of the families setting up their Nativity figures and sharing stories and prayers. For Christmas, we held a children's crib service with their own Christmas mass. Here the children dressed up in nativity costumes and read the Crib story from their socially distanced benches. Despite the limited number of eleven families, this was a lovely service and there is interest in repeating this again, if with rather greater numbers, this year.

Lent/ Easter 2021

We explore Lent through the idea of being kind. During Lent, resources were distributed to the Busy Church families, and we held a Holy Week Service where again the story of Holy Week was explored with the children in a child-focused service. We also held a children's Easter Sunday mass in the chapel which we followed by an Easter Egg Hunt outside and socially distanced teas.

The Sacramental Life of Busy Church 2020/21

During the Easter period, and up to the celebration of the First Holy Communion of five of our children, we held monthly children's mass in the chapel – these were hugely popular and very well attended by the families and extended families.

Two of the Busy Church mums were confirmed in May 2021 by Father Jenish. Jan Loughran acted as their catechist with sessions on Zoom and in person as the restrictions allowed. A Penitential Service with Confession was facilitated by Father Jenish and Jan in the week before the confirmation and the confirmation service was held the Friday before Pentecost, with the choir providing musical support.

The First Holy Communion preparation was completed by the Heavenfield Partnership just before the pandemic struck in 2020 but the children were unable to make their communions as planned. The celebration was rearranged for July 2021 and Jan acted as our catechist with three preparation sessions and leading a Penitential Service around the idea of how we should show God's Love in the world. The children were then able to make a second confession. The ideas that we explored were summarised by the children in preparing a newspaper front page called The Good News. Sadly the Holy Communion celebrations were still affected by the social restrictions, but a lovely service with the Parish was followed by a family celebration with the children in the Ballroom.

The Future of Busy Church

Busy Church marks the rhythms of the Church year and the seasons, and aims to welcome all children in the Parish and to create a feeling of belonging. Reinstating what we had before the Pandemic is a little difficult as the children have grown up by two years, and life has moved on for many of the families.

I intend to resume Busy Church after half term with the November celebrations of All Saints and All Souls by exploring lives of the Saints and how we could be like them – what our special USP might be! We will commemorate the Armistice with Poppy pictures and Peace Prayers. We will celebrate the Feast of St Elizabeth with a rose wreath, cake and prayers and will celebrate Christ the King as birthdays of the church, making crowns and doves and eating. We will then move into the usual preparations for Advent with the Jesse Tree and celebrating the Feasts of St Nicolas and St Lucy.

I am planning an advent service on the afternoon of Sunday 28th November from which we will launch the Posada around the Parish. This advent service will also include a Christmas film show and celebration tea.

For Christmas, I am writing another Crib Service for the children to read with me, supported by some carol singing and bringing the nativity figures to the Crib. I am hoping that this will be at 3.30pm on Christmas Eve and be followed by a child-focused mass. This time seems to suit most of the Busy Church families

There is some indication that attendance from the families whose children have now made their communions may cease but we have four children who will be due to make their Communion in the 2023 and we have some new arrivals into the Parish so, once the pandemic lifts, we may once again have nine children in routine attendance.

There has been some discussion with the Busy Church mums around the possibility of moving the time of Busy Church to Saturday evening with a children's mass afterwards as that would enable some of them to attend much more easily. I am also happy to develop a monthly more formal catholic education session which could focus on pre- and post-first holy communion level discussions with some activities for the very young children at these. However, this would require a commitment for attendance before I would be prepared to devote the time to developing and delivering the sessions. I will continue with the plans up until Christmas and review the provision to best support the families

Support for Busy Church

Busy Church is not funded by the Parish. The financing has been through Jan Loughran supplemented by donations from parents and greatly boosted by the collection from the Christmas Carol Service. As the significant costs are gifts, cakes, cards and craft items purchased in the course of the normal weekly shop they have been absorbed into the normal Loughran household expenses – these have been much lower during the pandemic and were limited to Christmas gifts and the costs of the Holy Communion celebrations.

The Busy Church sessions are all led by Jan Loughran. I hope that Busy Church will evolve to reach more families in our area and that other members of the Parish might be minded to become involved in sessions.

Jan Loughran

5. Social Committee

The Social Committee has had its work cut out during a whole year of pandemic restrictions. Members worked hard to keep in touch with each other in the first place, and also to maintain telephone contact with parishioners whenever possible.

Once a Zoom link was available it became possible for parishioners to meet virtually over a glass of wine during a series of quizzes, starting in November 2020 and continuing through 2021, including St Valentine's and St Patrick's Day themed quizzes. Many thanks to Jim Darlington who shaped and hosted so many of these and to Alan Hodgson who stepped in when we thought Jim had had enough.

A Christmas Raffle was organised in December 2020 and raised £425 for the parish. All tickets were bought over the phone where Tina kept a running total and added named tickets to the mixer. No mean feat and we can't thank her enough for enduring this miserable task! Many thanks to Pavan too for beautiful decoration of the hamper for display throughout December.

The Zoom link also made it possible for us to facilitate a superb Flower arranging demonstration just before Easter of 2021.

Several committee members have had to withdraw from the group because of substantial personal health and family care needs and it is clear that a new group will have to be formed as soon as possible. Margo and Camille (the only standing members) are grateful that we have three volunteers so far, but we will need to give them time to decide whether they can commit to serve. All will be helping in SOCO events in the near future, so we have been able to plan these:

1. SOCO has initiated a Christmas Draw fund raiser as a first step as this needed urgent action.
2. Parish Christmas lunch on Wednesday 15th December 2021
3. Burns Night on Friday 21st January 2022

4. Music event in Spring 2022
5. Book and Bag Clearing event in April 2022.
6. Summer Fair on Saturday 9th July 2022

Offers of help and material supplies for the Christmas Draw would be happily received.

N.B. The Minsteracres Film Club has been launched with SOCO support but is primarily run by Pavan Martin. It's been fun—and, importantly, very safely organised with hand cleansing, masks and distancing. However, given the alarming escalation in COVID infections across the country and rising death tolls, we have decided to suspend operations for a month. We plan to resume (depending on infection data) on November 28th with a children's Christmas film.

6. Music Liturgy

As can be imagined. It has proved extremely challenging to keep music alive at Minsteracres over the last 18 months. An early decision was taken to assemble those singers with the least vulnerability, and we managed to recruit four singers at first, and subsequently two more in the latter half of 2021.

We have had to invest in, and learn, an entirely new repertoire for treble three-part chorus. A significant challenge was the need for distancing in the choir loft, where we continue to have to compete with the paraphernalia and manning of equipment for live streaming. We have used the ballroom to allow rehearsing with substantial distancing. It has been complex and clearly not ideal as no singer can be supported by a neighbour which is the norm in any choral group. We have also had to sing behind visors until all doubly vaccinated.

This group has now provided choral music at Christmas, Easter, Confirmations, First Communion, Memorial and Funeral events, as well as Masses celebrating the Passionist Tricentennial and the Church of St Elizabeth re-dedication.

Until the streaming equipment is sufficiently updated (or moved entirely) to free up appropriate space we remain seriously constrained in numbers.

At the 10.30 Mass, Louise Griffin, a new parishioner, has provided harp music from time to time, and music relevant to each Sunday's readings has been played on the organ to keep the parish in touch with familiar and less familiar hymns.

Given the current escalating infection rate the return of congregational singing in the near future seems unlikely. We hope we can restore hymns and Mass parts very quickly when it is deemed safe. Feedback from parishioners suggests this can't come too soon.

Camille Mazarelo (Music Director) & Jan Loughran (Conductor)

7. Cemetery Working Group

The working group under the guidance of Fr Jenish has resumed meeting this year and still consists of Monica Rutherford, James Harris and Maureen Parker.

The general upkeep and maintenance of the cemetery is now managed within the general management of the estate. It has been recognised that there is no longer the capacity to rely on parish volunteers to consistently manage the work required. In the past some groups involved in the Outreach Programme have undertaken heavy manual work generally on the estate and in the cemetery. This may be possible again next year.

Finance

This group has recently met to discuss the current concerns regarding the cemetery. From January 2022 the fees will be increased as agreed last year: Burials will now be increased from £550 to £600 Interment of ashes will be increased from £100 to £150. These fees remain at the discretion of Fr Jenish/the Passionists, as does the decision whether to consent to burial/interment within the cemetery.

At this time if there are any surplus funds after expenses at the funerals, those go into the general fund for the upkeep of the estate, which has undertaken the ongoing responsibility of the care of the cemetery.

Record Keeping

Monica continues to gather and collate information to provide a record relating to interments within the cemetery. Work is still in progress to map and number the plots where ashes are interred. The records at this time only show numbered plots for burials. The best use of available space has to be considered.

The paper records are kept securely in the parish resource room, and a digital record is also kept.

Concern has been expressed that the stations of the Cross within the cemetery are now beginning to deteriorate. A quote has been obtained for replacement obelisks, but at this time their replacement is not feasible due to more urgent demands on resources.

The group will continue to meet in the new year when hopefully it will be possible to continue to ensure the cemetery continues to be the special place of dignity for those at rest and their loved ones.

8. Financial Statement

St Elizabeth, Minsteracres, Financial Statement, Year to 31st MARCH 2021

Income

Gift Aid showed a small increase to £22,259 from £20,965. However, the COVID virus had a devastating impact on all other income which was radically down, most importantly Sunday cash and fund raising through the Social Committee. The donation of £2286 is cash collected for Villa el Salvador which could not be transferred to them following their demise; £1200 was transferred to the Retreat Centre. The Diocese received £6066 Gift Aid relief from HMRC which is retained by the Diocese on behalf of St Elizabeth's.

Costs

The major cost in the year was the replacement of the balustrade in the choir at a cost of £7942. Clock repairs cost £1674.

The Parish contributed £3500 towards the cost of the new cattle grids and associated resurfacing. The Parish received £3500 from the Diocesan deposit to cover this donation.

Other costs included the £1200 donated to the Retreat Centre (from Villa el Salvador receipt) and £820 passed on for Fr Jeroen's parting gift (see other income in Income analysis).

The £792 paid to the Heavenfield Partnership is St Elizabeth's share of the general administration of the Partnership which is mainly employment cost shared based on individual parish mass attendance data.

Outcome

The reduction in income and the increase in repair costs are the major causes of the deficit of £11063. However, the current account balance at £6772 is not in the danger zone.

Richard Bridges
19 May 2021

St ELIZABETH MINSTERACRES

INCOME / EXPENDITURE ANALYSIS

	2019/2020		2020/2021	
	TOTAL		TOTAL	
INCOME				
Gift Aid	20965		22259	
Other	8274		2140	
	<hr/>		<hr/>	
	29239		24399	
Special Collections	2676		343	
Newspapers	0		0	
Candles	622		0	
Fund Raising / Donations			2286	
Fund Raising - Social Committee	2868		0	
Other	137		820	
Interest	0		0	
	<hr/>		<hr/>	
	35542		27848	
Tax Refund - Gift Aid	3915		4246	
Tax Refund - GASDS	1820		1820	
	<hr/>		<hr/>	
	5735		6066	
TOTAL INCOME	<hr/>		<hr/>	
	41277		33914	
COSTS				
	Paid to		Paid to	
	Retreat Centre		Retreat Centre	
Church Requisites	269		642	
Repairs & Renewals	1890	792	14243	792
Housekeeping	6264	6264	6264	6264
Heat & Light	2304	2304	2304	2304
Clergy Allowance	8304	8304	8304	8304
Clergy Car Allowance	2076	2076	2076	2076
Insurance	1380	1380	1380	1380
General Administration	1380	1380	1540	1380
Special Collections	3116		218	
Newspapers	0			
Diocesan Levy	4739		5134	
Heavenfield Partnership	884		792	
Other	383		2080	
	<hr/>		<hr/>	
	32989	22500	44977	22500
SURPLUS	8288		-11063	
Opening Balances	63780		72068	
Closing Balances	72068		61005	
Represented by :-				
Current Account	20402		6772	
Tracker Account	0		0	
Deposit with Diocese	51666		54233	
	<hr/>		<hr/>	
	72068		61005	