

REPORT ON THE MAINTENANCE AND FINANCIAL STATE OF THE PARISH – JUNE 2024

I am happy to be able to publish the financial situation of the parish – the first time since 2019. I suppose we can blame Covid for this. In 2020 when normally financial figures are issued our minds were all focused on the pandemic.

Money matters were the last things on our minds!

Because of the absence of figures over the last few years we are able to offer to parishioners this time the figures for the period 2019 – 2023. This will enable parishioners to make comparisons over the period. I will return to this further down.

PARISH PLANT

I want to begin by reminding parishioners of some of the recent history of the parish property.

At the beginning of Covid you may recall the parish had to make a difficult decision – whether or not to take on the convent property. Sr. Consilio of Cuan Mhuire fame had been seriously interested in converting the property into a rehabilitation centre for addicts. She herself is a Sister of Mercy and her consœurs were more than happy for her to take it on. Right through 2019 her organisation showed great interest in developing the property but in the end withdrew because of lack of funding. This decision was conveyed to the parish at the beginning of 2020 just before Covid.

The property was then offered to the parish by Cuan Mhuire for nothing and the parish finance committee spent the most of 2020 debating this offer. There were many meetings and discussion – mostly on Zoom. The diocese also was very helpful in its advice and guidance. I wish to pay tribute to the diocesan CEO Gareth Hughes and his team for their professional guidance and advice.

In the end - by early 2021 - it was decided not to take the convent. I conveyed this decision to parishioners online and also with pages that were posted in the church. I also spoke about it at Masses.

It was a difficult decision – and I know it was not universally acceptable to some parishioners but I am more than ever convinced it was the right one. The convent may have cost us nothing to acquire - it would have been nice to have a state-of-the-art parish centre - but it would have cost over 2.5 million pounds to fix and maintain. Once functioning we would have had to fund the salaries of a manager and a caretaker (£70,000 + annually) in order to make it effective.

The convent has been bought over by a private developer who has treated the decay which ensued through the fifteen years since the sisters vacated the building. Over the last year there has been no activity on the property but the future remains uncertain and we need to be vigilant in regard to its future use.

The sale also was achieved during this time of the St. Michael's parish centre. In my time in the parish from 2014 it was not being effectively used by the parish. In past generations it did serve a purpose – with its school, its drama club, with the bowls and the Irish dancing not forgetting the diocesan use by groups like ACCORD (the marriage preparation organisation) but it was costing us £18,000 a year to maintain (light, heat, insurance etc) including the wages of a caretaker.

Its sale has been a blessing in a sense in that we were able to make an annual saving of £18,000 plus. Currently the centre remains empty as the new owner (different one from the convent) has not made any development yet. The money for the sale has been lodged in the parish account.

The need for space to accommodate the various parish groups continues and I am glad to be able to say that this has been met so far by the intensive use of the crypt (Patrick's Place)

and the parish house. On some nights there are as many as three or even four groups using the house and crypt at the same time.

I wish to thank the many parish groups which operate during the week in all sorts of ways – from prayer groups to apostolic groups like the Legion and the St Vincent de Paul Society. All serve to embellish the life of the parish and to serve the community.

I am also delighted that the AA and NA groups use the parish crypt on a number of occasions during the week.

When we have needed a larger room e.g. the parish consultation in March 2023 - we appreciated the generous permission to use the hall in St. Mary's HS.

FORTHCOMING PLANT NEEDS

There are two main requirements over the next few months. The principal one is the remedial work needed on the presbytery. Surveys have been taken in recent months and there is evidence of rising damp in the presbytery. This - I am sorry to say - is having an effect on the respiratory health of both Fr. Henry and myself.

In addition, the diocesan consultants would encourage the refurbishment of the presbytery while the damp is being fixed to make it more suitable as a parish facility for meetings and gatherings. At the moment the house is not fit for purpose in terms of a parish centre – it would require modification to make it more so.

This will require the closure of the presbytery for a number of months probably later in the year. The priests will have to find alternative accommodation and parish groups will have to either use the crypt or some other location. When the time comes for this transition the parish would hope to hold a meeting with all interested groups to discuss the options.

For the Crypt to accommodate any increased use it will require some flexibility by the various parish groups. This may mean changing the day or time of your regular meeting so that the crypt can accommodate as many of the groups as possible.

The second area of concern is the church itself. As you know the original building is 152 years old. Bishop Treanor celebrated Mass and duly commemorated the occasion on Marcy 13th 2022 – the beautiful Japanese acer tree at the front recalls that occasion.

However decades of wear and tear – and rain coming from the South West - have had a detrimental effect on the facade of the church. Parishioners may have noticed small pieces of debris at the base of the front of the church. The facade is slowly disintegrating and so the survey needs strengthening against the elements. This type of repair work was last carried out on the church almost 60 years ago.

The Parish Finance Committee have agreed to employ the professional services of a company called CONSARC to do a survey on the church and to see what is needed by way of repair. This will take place in the next couple of months.

FINANCIAL FIGURES

Parishioners will be able to view the figures of the last five years online or in the church. We will leave a copy on the porch noticeboard at the sacristy entrance to the church. These will be here for a number of weeks. Parishioners can also request a hard copy of the figures for consultation through the parish office.

You will appreciate that I won't be giving a 'blow by blow' account of the figures and the reasons for differentiation here and there. If anyone wants to ask about a particular payment or expenditure I would invite them to contact the parish office

either by phone or by email and leave their query via this method. I will certainly endeavour to answer all questions.

By and large our figures have held up well through what has been a very difficult period for all of us. I want to commend many parishioners for making their contribution via the direct debit method. This is currently responsible for bringing in almost two thirds of the weekly donations. I wish to encourage this method of contributing to the parish.

Can I again encourage wage earners who do not have a box of envelopes to try to take such a box? The box is helpful in that it leads us to make a more focused contribution rather than putting on the passing plate whatever we might have in our pocket. We come to Mass having made a conscious decision to give a certain amount rather than some loose change.

If we can make a further decision to try and be consistent with this amount - however big or small – then make we could go to the next stage and agree to covenant our money. This means that the parish could get back 20% from the government on the amount we have given. It does not cost us any more than what we have already given. Just ask in the parish office for details of this process.

VOLUNTARY and PAID HELP

I wish to thank a number of people in the parish who make a significant contribution to the smooth running of the parish plant. It is important for everyone to know and appreciate the work that is carried out.

These include our parish sacristans – in all four churches. I thank particularly our altar society in St. Patrick's who look after the cleanliness of the church and provide the most wonderful floral displays at Christmas, Easter and the various sacramental occasions in late April and through May.

I wish to thank also the team which look after the grass cutting and general external maintenance of the churches. It is important that when we come to Mass we are edified by the cleanliness and the general beauty of the surroundings. Gary O'Connor and his team look after the grounds in all four churches as well as the cemetery on the Killough Road.

My particular thanks go to my secretarial team – Mary and James - in the parish office. Each week there are hundreds of phonecalls and emails all of which have to be dealt with. Also, there are many individual calls to the parish office. The team do this in an extraordinary way and I am indebted to them.

I particularly want to thank James for the work he does each week on the laptop hymns and graphics which enhance our liturgy in St. Patrick's. Thanks go also to the laptop team (Patrice, Anne and Martin) who operate it during Masses during the week.

Once again thank you to everyone for your generosity. Thank you also for your generosity to the extra collections which occur through the year and the response to the various visitors who come to us e.g. Mary's Meals, Trocaire, missionary priests and sisters etc.

The cup of water given in His name will not go unnoticed. 'So long as you did it to the least of my brethren you did it to me.'

*FR. JOHN MURRAY PP
JUNE 18th 2024*