

Our Lady Help of Christians Catholic Church

Parish Pastoral Council Report: August 2016 – July 2019

| Chairperson | Peter Bruyns | Other Members | Ex Officio |
|---------------------|--------------------|----------------------|-----------------------------|
| Vice-Chair | (currently vacant) | | Fr E Farrelly (2016-18) |
| Secretary | Merlynne Volkwyn | Gloria Naidoo | Fr Bongji Nlheko (2017 -19) |
| | Catherine Andrews | Michael Noone | Fr Bart Walsh (2016 -19) |
| | Antonio Ferdinando | Zelda vd Holst | Fr C Sharp (2018 -19) |
| | Keith De Norman | Carl van Niekerk | Dcn B Davids (2019) |
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| Prepared by: | Peter Bruyns | Presented by: | Peter Bruyns |

What were the goals of the PPC for this period?

Very early in our term of office a line in the opening prayer/reading caught our attention it was *“Perhaps our challenge as parish leaders is to be open and allow something to be done beyond our wildest imagination.”* This statement set the tone for our term of office.

As this was the first time on the PPC for most of the members, we were not clear on our role and how to fulfil it. We decided to consult the community and held a visioning exercise to determine what it wanted and expected from the parish leadership. The outcome was a document titled Vision 2020. It is a Vision statement with 6 value statements and a road map of how to realise the vision. The Vision Statement is:

**Our Lady Help of Christian's Parish is
A LOVING CHRIST-CENTRED COMMUNITY SERVING ALL**

In the first two years progress on realising this vision was slow but progress has ramped up significantly in the last 12 months. One of the factors that has influenced the change was the exposure the concept of “Divine Renovation” as defined by Fr James Mellon and taking on this challenge by the newly appointed Parish Priest and a number of lay leaders in the parish.

Divine Renovation has deflected focus away from Vision 2020 but having been intimately involved with both, I am quite confident that the former will achieve the same final outcome as the Vision 2020. The current “action plan” is based on the personal vision of Fr Bongji which he describes as “picking up the baton of his predecessors” and has been largely influenced by Divine Renovation.

Fr Bongji’s vision is based on four pillars:

- Faith Formation
- Young People
- Community Finances
- Community Empowerment

Were these goals met? Briefly say how or, if not, why:

As goals are not spelt out in detail above, this section will describe what was actually achieved in the context of Fr Bonggi's 4 pillars even though some outcomes pre-dated Fr Bonggi's appointment as parish priest. As indicated Fr Bonggi's Divine Renovation influenced vision is closely aligned to Vision 2020

Faith Formation:

Depending on what one includes or not, there currently are 16-20 Ministries and Sodalities in the Parish. These cater for a diverse range of activities that allow members to deepen their faith, be Christ-centred and of loving service to each other and the broader community. The focus of the PPC has been to facilitate co-ordination among the ministries so that all are focused on the same outcomes and that they co-operate to achieve them. There has been a visible, and significant, increase in co-operation between ministries in the last three years.

During the period 2 Bible study groups were established and over 60 participants engaged in four 15week Prayer and Life Workshops. Two new ministries were established - a Bereavement/Funeral ministry and a Ladies Ministry.

Alpha started in the parish 3 weeks ago. This is the first course for many years. 45 participants are registered with a long list of participants for the next course which will be scheduled for early next year. Alpha courses – for Adults and for Youth (13-18yrs) - will become a standard on the OLHC annual programme in the future.

Catechetics, Life Teens and RCIA continued as per normal. A new Catechetics Co-ordinator and additional assistants were commissioned in 2018 and new teaching material was provided for all catechists.

There is also an increased sense of community in the parish. More and more individuals are taking part in the both spiritual and social activities of the parish. This is an important indicator of a welcoming and safe environment that our people want to be in and part of.

Young People:

The Child Safety Policy was ratified, adopted and implemented during this term. It was not without challenges but in the end all 120 individuals working with young people were verified and cleared to work with our young. Other communication, infrastructure and control measures have also been implemented.

The focus on Young People in this parish is appropriate and in line with the objective of the Salesians of Don Bosco. In his term as Assistant priest Fr Bonggi established a small youth leadership team and started the work of creating a more inviting and welcoming environment for the young. A programme of activities (for 2018) was developed and implemented. As we move forward all programmes from the start of catechism though to post confirmation (18-24yrs) will be integrated. The objective is to keep our young adults in a church which is welcoming, attractive to them and meets their needs. We are currently recruiting a Youth Co-ordinator to drive and manage this process but a lack of funding for youth activities, and for evangelisation in general, remains a major challenge.

Community Finances:

The finances of the community are precarious. There is only a small surplus each year. Most of the income goes to maintenance of the infrastructure, the living expenses and salaries of clergy and employees and levies to the Archdiocese. Very little is left for funding Jesus's last instruction to us ie "...go make disciples of all nations....".

Research by the church hierarchy in South America (including the Pope when he was a bishop in Argentina) showed an important factor causing the migration of many Catholics to other Christian churches, or to stop going to church completely, was the fact that more was spent on maintenance of infrastructure and status quo than on spreading the Word.

As we move forward we need to be more proactive about budgeting, increasing our income and managing our expenditures. In particular we need to co-ordinate and integrate all our efforts both at generating income and at allocation of funds to the various projects. Without doubt greater allocations must be given to Faith Formation and programmes for our Young People but exactly how the money is spent in all areas is also of great importance. We must get the greatest bang for every buck spent.

At the same time, we need to recognise that our buildings are old and need much maintenance. The repairs to the roofs of the Church and the Hall and the re-tiling of the church floor and varnishing the pews have depleted our reserves. The water crisis of the last 2 years has also had a negative impact on our finances. 12 very large JoJo tanks were installed to collect rainwater and the plumbing to all toilets was reconfigured to use this water.

Community Empowerment:

Community empowerment is about helping members of the community to reach their full potential to live full and productive lives in which the day to day challenges do not distract them from a close relationship with God.

Examples of this is the existing OLHC Sunday Market and the Maths tutoring which will be offered soon. Other ideas are being explored.

While not actually empowerment, there is a very large and important outreach programme in the parish.

- The "Bags of Love" project collects food and other consumables to the value of over R100 000 pa and approximately 300 bags are distributed to the needy in the parish, the broader community and to neighbouring parishes and informal settlements.
- At least three ministries assisted Mater Domini with fundraising and/or made donations of goods and services to the organisation.
- The SVP and other ministries have their own beneficiaries and serve the needy in a Christ-centred way.

Other matters:

The health and wellbeing of our aging clergy was of great concern to the PPC from the start. Our first and most contentious decision was to suggest that the Monday morning mass be cancelled to give the priests at least one late – and restful - morning. (A mass is available in the chapel).

Two of our priests have passed since then and Fr Bart has lost a lot of mobility since his fall and injury on the altar last year.

Now that there are two younger priests in the parish we should not lose focus and should continue to care for and be considerate and supportive to our priests.

What unforeseen circumstances aided or hindered achieving these goals?

Not completely unforeseen but resistance to change was a factor that resulted in the slow start to the Vision 2020 implementations.

Divine Renovation had the completely opposite effect in that it clarified WHY change was necessary. It also provided a road map to implement change and describe what would happen if change was not implemented.

Very many families have young adult children who have left the church and so have first-hand experience of how the church has failed our children. Over and over again we find clear evidence that children - and adults - are seeking a better and closer relationship with God. Support for changes and programmes that have been introduced recently support this contention.

How did the activity of the PPC and the achievement of goal build the faith community?

This question has been answered in the answers above but to summarise:

- The PPC determined a community-generated vision and values for the Parish
- The activities and implementation plan of the PPC was directed by this vision.
- The activities and new initiative addressed specific needs and were embraced by the community.
- More and more individuals are becoming involved and active in the community which is embracing the "... loving Christ-centred community serving all." philosophy.

Suggestions for future PPC

To be successful as a PPC:

- Trust in God and the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Remembering always that God's time may differ widely from your time. Do not despair – He comes through every time.
- Ensure that all your activities are Christ-centred and are directed to bringing others to a personal encounter with Him.
- Remember that your role is to serve the pastoral needs of parish community. To do so you must determine what those needs actually are – not what you think is needed.
- Understand that each member of the PPC is a different person and brings a different experience and skills to the table. Seek to harness each of these experiences and skills – there is tremendous strength in teamwork where those with a particular skill are allowed to lead in that area.
- You will have differences – and arguments – among members. That is natural. What is important is that you realise you are all doing God's work. Accept the differences, point out – with love – when someone is out of line and most importantly accept the correction and apologise when you are wrong.

It has been an honour and privilege to serve God and the community of Our Lady Help of Christians for the last 3 years.

Thank you,
Peter Bruyns