

Parish Forum Online Responses

Reverence and Respect

From	Comment	Posted
Opening address from Fr Michael Cooke	<p>There was unanimous concern and disquiet about the growing trend of a lack of reverence and respect in our churches. This is not only when we have large numbers of visitors (e.g. for baptisms, first communion and weddings). Some parishioners make unnecessary noise by talking and the inappropriate use of mobile technology also detracts from a prayerful and respectful atmosphere.</p> <p>The forum discussed a number of possible remedies and, subject to the outcome of a consultation exercise, all felt that this matter ought to be addressed promptly in the short term. Have you any suggestions about how we might create a more prayerful atmosphere in our churches, especially in the time immediately before our services begin?</p>	28/07/12
Madeleine Evans	<p>- Can I suggest that some music be played five or ten minutes before Mass begins? I'm thinking of perhaps Taize? It would only work if all parishioners knew what it signified, by either announcement from the altar or details in the newsletter (or both!). Otherwise, people might just talk through it!</p> <p>- Many churches have a public notice in the porch reminding people to switch off their mobile phones as they enter. A reminder in the newsletter (or from the altar) wouldn't hurt either.</p>	29/07/12
Tony Proctor	<p>The opportunity to engage with our loving God in quiet and reverential prayer before the Blessed Sacrament on the altar is something precious. Attend any school mass and our school children are an inspiration and example to us all. Their prayer life in school and sacramental preparations are evidenced by their quiet, prayerful reverence. What as adults can we learn from them about reverence and respect?</p> <p>I think the lack of reverence and respect needs to be tackled firmly, both spiritually and practically. Spiritually, it would be good to have some homilies to reflect on the need for prayerful silence and the fruits of such. Maybe we even need to practice praying quietly together, led by Father?</p> <p>Practically, we might consider:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SB & SJ - A quarter of an hour Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament before Sunday Mass where it is explicit that the time is for silent prayer. • SB & SJ - Taize, Chant or other appropriate music to be played before Mass, again with it made clear that this is a time for silent prayer. • SB & SJ - Notices at the church entrances reminding worshippers of the need for silence and to switch off mobiles etc. 	25/08/12

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SB & SJ - Parishioners not wandering around church to 'chat' with others before Mass, no matter how well intended. • SB & SJ – Keep the doors into the narthex / Patmos Room closed, so it is clear that worshippers are 'entering church' and should be quiet. • SB & SJ – Keep administrative matters and discussions to a minimum. Can it wait until after Mass? • SB & SJ – Can we provide soft toys, prayer books etc for young children? A much better alternative than 'car keys'! • SB & SJ – To include a quiet prayer time after Holy Communion. • SB – Hand out newsletters after, not before Mass, as it is a distraction (missal page numbers could be on a board by hymn numbers). • SJ – Cease the practice of the whole congregation standing up for Holy Communion. Present practice encourages noise and conversation approaching the Eucharist. Maybe adopt a modified 'bench by bench' approach, similar to that used on Good Friday's for adoration of the Cross? 	
James Proctor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I agree that quiet music should be played before Mass begins. Taize music has been played before Masses in the past and, in my experience, has been a great success. Quiet music creates a peaceful, reflective atmosphere in the church. There may also be an opportunity for quiet organ music to be played at this time. • As Madeleine suggests, a notice in both church porches asking people to switch off their mobile phones (or put them into silent mode if absolutely necessary) would be useful. In terms of reverence and respect in wider terms, a simple poster asking people to enter into church quietly/silently is a necessity. I think we can learn from other churches in this regard. I recently visited a church which had a poster on the inner porch door with an image of Christ stating something like, 'if you need to speak in this house, speak to me.' Our community could work together to formulate some words which are both assertive yet welcoming. • I have more recently become disillusioned with the lack of reverence and respect at our churches. One particular event actually led me to become both frustrated and upset. This was the day of the overnight adoration of the Blessed Sacrament. Having been unable to attend the overnight watch, I decided to go to church earlier than usual and, praying quietly in front of the Blessed Sacrament, people began to talk, the noise levels reaching unbearable levels for a place of sanctity. Gladly, Fr Michael arrived and intervened, something which I'm sure no priest would ever have thought was part of their vocation/job description. As a theologian, I have studied the theology of the Eucharist in some depth and have garnered an appreciation that Jesus Christ in really, truly and substantially present in the Blessed Sacrament. This radical message that Christ is wholly and entirely present when we break bread together should have a major impact on our behaviour at church. I think it would be useful for Father to explore the Eucharist with greater theological rigour during one or two of his homilies but to do so in a way that 	02/09/12

	<p>does not deter people with complexity.</p> <p>Adoration before Mass begins once or twice monthly at both Sunday Masses (and the vigil) is a very good idea to aid this need for a reaffirmation and understanding of the true meaning of the Eucharist. We could even implement a theme for each time this occurs and explore a particular aspect of the church's teaching on the Eucharist.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We need to provide children with suitable toys and books that relate to the 'Mass' environment and let parents know politely that it is not suitable for their children to be playing with mobile phones, games consoles or any toys deemed 'violent'. Most importantly in all this, adults need to set the example to the young people. 	
Joan and Edwin Rankin	<p>When St Brendan's was built, we were told that the entrance was designed as a special place for very small children, who could not be expected to observe the silence necessary for an attentive and prayerful congregation. This was why the entrance was separated from the church by a glass partition and furnished with a loudspeaker to enable parents to follow the mass. There used to be a number of folding chairs kept there for the parents.</p> <p>Our suggestion is that the entrance should be reserved for what it was designed for and the folding chairs put back. A notice that this is the crèche area and a place for noisy or crying babies would be useful and a few quiet, children's toys would reinforce the message. One noisy child in church can prevent many from hearing the sermon and cause frustration. Picture books with a simple reading text would encourage parents to explain the Mass to toddlers. Wherever possible, other furniture should be cleared and activities should be moved to the Harbour room. Space should be left between the doors and to facilitate access to the toilet and for repository activity immediately in front of the display. Children should be prevented from going up into the organ loft where, even with a carpet, the floorboards act as a sounding board to give maximum noise. A notice on the door to the organ loft, NO CHILDREN IN THE CHOIR LOFT PLEASE, over the name of Fr Cooke would be helpful.</p> <p>As already suggested, the provision of low-level prayerful music (Taize, Gregorian chant etc) would encourage silence and prayerful reflection before Mass. The purpose of the music should be emphasized from the pulpit.</p>	04/09/12
Carol HolmesQF	<p>There are some brilliant suggestions here and I want to endorse the ideas people have put forward.</p> <p>I just have one note of caution: people can sometimes infer more than we intend, or misinterpret our words and gestures. The support we offer parents in terms of books and proposed soft toys, and a place to take an inconsolable crying child (haven't we all been there....!) is fantastic. Let's ensure nobody could find it intimidating and feel that they may not be welcome at all with a less than perfect child. How can we reassure families that we all understand occasional interruptions are inevitable? After all, we do want our</p>	06/09/12

	children to grow up able to participate appropriately in services, and understanding why reverence matters, because they attend as a family.	
Martin Roe	I understand some of the concerns for appropriate reference and respect inside our churches, particularly from those who feel that a quiet, shared, prayerful atmosphere is an uplifting affirmation of their faith. There seems to be much less silence then I found when I was a child. However I feel that this has a positive side as well as a negative aspect. When our own children came to mass at St John's I was surprised and gratified by the encouragement from fellow parishioners that Marie and I received when our children were less than perfect and I would like to think that others feel equally encouraged. I would like to feel that all people feel as encouraged, old and young alike. Perhaps on one day the smile one gives to a fellow human being is the best prayer of the day.	16/09/12

The Future of St Brendan's Presbytery

From	Comment	Posted
Opening address by Fr Michael Cooke	<p>The presbytery has now been empty for over four years and is clearly deteriorating. The meeting was advised of a number of local and diocesan conversations about possible uses, none of which have proved viable. One of the main sticking points has been the shared access to the site.</p> <p>However, the forum believed the presbytery was still a significant asset and demolition was not the preferred option. If anyone has any further suggestions for potential use of the presbytery they are encouraged to put this forward now since the diocese will want to revisit this issue in the near future.</p>	28/07/12
Alison Howarth	Not sure what suggestions have already been made so apologies if this is not a new idea. Is there any way that the parishioners of either parish could use the presbytery? e.g. could it be used for meetings of any groups? Mums and toddlers, forum meetings, baptism/marriage courses etc. If the accommodating was upgraded could parishioners rent rooms on a short term basis if, for example, they had friends or relatives staying and needed to put them up nearby. They could use bedrooms, kitchen area, lounge area in the presbytery instead of paying more for hotel facilities.	29/07/12
Tony Proctor	It is difficult to determine the best solution for this potentially valuable asset. We need to detach sentimentality and practicality in order to determine the optimal resolution. Demolition or refurbishments both involve expense and work. However, the property's ongoing deterioration means we cannot drift on without early resolution. The facts are (1) It has stood empty for almost 5 years, which confirms there is no ready solution, (2) the estimated costs of returning the property to a viable domestic condition were in the order of approx £30,000 (2010 estimates), (3) access to the site is not straightforward, due to the shared car park & access, and (4) there are significant, associated premises issues which also need	25/08/12

	<p>to be resolved,(including site drainage, re-routing a gas main to feed the church boilers and providing storage for church items and equipment).</p> <p>The consensus view seems to be that demolition ought to be avoided. We need to be confident that that is a sensible stance, given that no clear business case has been made for any potential use. It would be a shame to demolish what could be a great asset and as a parish community we might come to regret such.</p> <p>So, maybe we should look beyond the 'here and now' towards how 'Faith in the Future' might shape events? Fewer priests, the coming together of perhaps St Columba's with SB & SJ? No longer a resident priest at SB. Will the laity take on more of the day to day running of the parish?</p> <p>Given a vision of operating as "one parish with two churches" might a good use of the presbytery be as a 'Parish Centre'? – to serve SB & SJ and beyond? If we look to other dioceses it is not uncommon for 1 priest to serve several churches. Could we see a vision of the presbytery modernised, as a truly joint Parish Centre seamlessly serving SB & SJ? Maybe we could have the accommodation upgraded to provide a parish office, managing the day to day, but important tasks of managing the diary, taking the weight of routine administration off Father? Dedicated rooms for our Young People's Group? A larger social meeting space and kitchen? I am sure many other ideas exist.</p> <p>If this proposal had support and commitment from both SB & SJ's parishes, might this provide a focus for fund raising and truly working together as "one parish with two churches" to the benefit of SB & SJ and beyond? It really is 'make our minds up time'!!</p>	
Joan and Edwin Rankin	<p>We believe that the problem of empty presbyteries was solved in the Hexham and Newcastle diocese by appointing a pastoral co-ordinator and caretaker. In return for free accommodation for himself and his family, this person would be a central reference point for parish activities and the care of the Church. When the normal priest was unavailable he would arrange for a supply priest for mass, funerals etc. He would ensure that there was always someone to man the phone for emergencies. He would look after the Church.</p> <p>The diocese looked forward to a time in the future when there would be a more plentiful supply of priests and the presbytery would be needed for its original purpose.</p> <p>It might be short-sighted to get rid of the presbytery. If it is redesigned for a different purpose, that design should be capable of reversion to its original use in the future.</p> <p>Our suggestion:</p> <p>Explore the possibility of opening up the ground floor to provide a large space – possible uses: youth club, large meetings, hired out. (The car park would make it very attractive to organizations. Any contracts should be for short term runs to be renewed if agreeable to both parties.)</p> <p>Explore the possibility of providing a self-catering flat on the second floor – possible uses: caretaker or visiting priests or available for short term rental. No agreements should be made that would tie up</p>	04/09/12

	the flat too far into the future.	
Brendan Leach (St Brendan's)	<p>For me, demolition is surely the worst possible option.</p> <p>And if we are NOT to demolish the property, then we need to face up to the fact that we are going to have to spend a substantial sum on bringing the property up to useable condition again. As a previous correspondent says "Make your mind up time"</p> <p>Use as a parish centre may be viable, but do we have enough activities to justify this right now? An option for the future, maybe, but not now.</p> <p>The idea of having a parish administrator or similar ("Caretaker, plus") who would take pay in the form of accommodation. Finding such a person would be a challenge, for sure, but it MIGHT be possible.</p> <p>For me, the answer must be to rent the property out on a commercial basis. - That would bring the parish around £600 per month, - Surely we can find a way of securing the boundary between the church and the presbytery? And if access to the site is an issue, then why not move the gate and re-route the driveway to the presbytery? By spending money now, we can change the presbytery from a liability to a useful property, and do our little bit towards the housing shortage. If we have a need for the presbytery for true parish purposes in 3 or 4 years time we can exercise a break in any lease (with due notice, of course!) and re-take full possession (having got back much of the investment in rent in the meantime).</p> <p>Much of the money spent in bringing the property up to spec probably relates to the fabric of the building, and as such will not be "lost" should the house resort back to another use. We may even find a local company with visiting executives from other sites who want an alternative to hotel accommodation who will take a fixed term lease - £150 a week is just 2 nights in a hotel, so there is a case for this idea if we find the right company.</p> <p>In the light of the wider topic of "Sharing the Burden" I am happy to provide further input (not just words, but actions! on this topic should we decide on a working group with a reasonably specific brief in future. (I stress that I am NOT a property expert, just practical businessman with a hard commercial eye.)</p>	09/09/12

Sharing the Load

From	Comment	Posted
Opening address by Fr Michael Cooke	<p>Discussion of this topic acknowledged the heavy workload I carry as parish priest of two parishes together with deanery and diocesan responsibilities. However, I was at pains to point out that the starting point for this should not be "because Father is too busy" but recognition of the call in Vatican II for laypeople to exercise their rights and responsibilities to play a more active part in the life and mission of the Church.</p> <p>There are a considerable number of roles that parishioners could and should take on in order to "share the load" both with the priest</p>	28/07/12

	and with one another. Have you any ideas about what those roles might be and how people (perhaps including yourself) might be encouraged to take them on?	
Alison Howarth	Is it possible to produce a list of jobs that parishioners may be able to help with? If people see a definite area they feel they could offer help with they would be more inclined to offer their services rather than wonder what they might be asked to do. At a forum meeting perhaps the discussion could start with writing down as many ideas to put on the list with Father outlining what his day to day tasks are and discussion to see how parishioners could help with any of these areas. There will be parishioners with all sorts of skills who could help in a variety of ways.	29/07/12
Madeleine Evans	I agree parishioners don't always know how many jobs have to be done. Can I suggest a "special" newsletter one week with everything listed?	29/07/12
Janet Hill	The friends of St John's (PTA) used to have a large gathering at the start of the school year and various tables were set out with chairs. Each table would have a different fundraising endeavour i.e. Summer Fair, Christmas Fair, Easter Disco etc. and people would go to the table they were interested in (i.e. the event they wanted to help with) Perhaps a similar evening could be held for church duties with tables assigned to different duties. For example 'a welcoming group' for new parishioners, a group to help with bereavement, a befriending group to perhaps chat with lapsed parishioners, a reflection group for parishioners who want to discuss and understand their faith on a deeper level and obviously Father would know more specific groups that are required. This is quite a relaxed way to get the groups together quickly and they can be evened out a bit if one has too many or too few. Perhaps this type of evening could be arranged after the duties have been listed on the newsletter?	19/08/12
Joan and Edwin Rankin	As a first step we suggest an audit of the needs of the parish (what people want) and the resources of the parish (personnel and material). It would be useful to list the aims and aspirations of the parish both spiritual and social. Consideration of best practice in other parishes might be useful here. Maybe this list of aims could be incorporated into a questionnaire leaving space for suggestions for further aims and how these aims could be realized. A space at the bottom could be left for people to list their special competencies.	04/09/12

Development of the Patmos Room

No responses. Father Michael's opening address reads as follows: 'This matter was discussed several times at meetings of the St John's Parish Forum and plans had been drawn up by diocesan-approved building surveyors. These were not considered to be entirely what was wanted and the last forum discussion raised a number of issues about ensuring that any adaptation provided for both worship and social use of the space, so another architect was asked to do some work.

The most recent suggestion is to build a separate room but linked to the existing building by some form of corridor. Any ideas would be gratefully accepted for consideration.'