



THE ARCHDIOCESE *of* BIRMINGHAM

PARISH VISITATION DEANERY OF BANBURY & WARWICK

Parish of St. Peter the Apostle, Leamington Spa [128]

Parish of Our Lady, Lillington, Leamington Spa [131]

Visitor: Canon Paul Fitzpatrick

Parish Priest Fr. Stephen Day

Date of Visitation: 27/28 January 2024

Summary of Visitation Activities:

Saturday 27 January 2024

Conversation with Fr Stephen Day.

5pm Mass at St Peter's Leamington Spa.

Conversation with Niall Herbert, co-leader off the Young Adults Group.

Conversation with Paul Milton, deacon in training.

Dinner with Fr Stephen and Mrs Kate Day.

Sunday 28 January 2024

9.15pm Mass, Our Lady, Lillington.

Meet with parishioners and Catechists group afterwards.

11.15am Mass, St Peter's Leamington Spa.

Meet with parishioners afterwards in Parish Hall.

Meeting with Royce McParland, Office Manager.

Meeting with Social Outreach of the parish.

[SPAN St. Peter's Aid to the Needy, Kindaid Our Lady's Social Outreach, CAFOD representatives, LiveSimply Representatives, Justice and Peace Group, SVP]

Meeting with Catechists of the Parish: First Holy Communion, Confirmation, RCIA.

Meeting with representatives of the 'Walking Together Group' the parish Synodal Pathway Group.

Meeting with Parish Musicians.

Parish Meeting in the Parish Hall (45+ parishioners attended).

Closing conversation with Fr Stephen Day.

A brief profile of the Parish.

St. Peter the Apostle is a fine Church which dates from 1864. Imposing above the Leamington Skyline, it has a fine presence. The interior of the Church is tired, dirty and in need of TLC, if the funds were available.

It has a dynamic and diverse congregation who are very committed to the life of the parish. There are many different groups and activities which meet throughout the week and enhance the Sunday liturgy.

The Parish Priest is Fr Stephen Day, who arrived only 18 months ago, and is now settling into the parish. He is highly respected by the parishioners.

Our Lady, Lillington is a separate parish, but only 4 miles from St. Peter's. This parish community is also served by Fr Stephen Day. The Church dates from 1963. Built in a residential area on the outskirts of Leamington, this is a very fine Church, with extraordinary stained glass, and fine architecture. Sadly, beyond the Church itself, the facilities (parish Meeting Rooms) are not of the same quality.

There is lively congregation, with a number of younger families, which is in part due to sacramental preparation taking place after Mass. This draws a large number of Children 20+ and their parents.

Fr Stephen is responsible for four schools:

Our Lady & St. Teresa's Primary, Lillington.

St. Peter's Primary, Leamington Spa.

St. Patrick's Primary, Leamington Spa.

St. Anthony's Primary, Leamington Spa.

This is too much for one priest, or even one parish.

Further amalgamations should be explored.

This parish is blessed with two very fine Churches, a dynamic congregation, who have a great sense of social outreach both at home and internationally and an experienced pastor in Fr Stephen. Perhaps, its most notable feature is the presence of two very fine Choirs, and fine musicians. It is a pleasure to celebrate Mass in both Churches.

The Parish Meeting

The aim of the parish meeting was to discuss the implementation of the Diocesan Vision: *'Our vision is to be a Catholic Diocese which is faithful to the mission entrusted to us by Jesus Christ, full of missionary disciples who work together co-responsibly in vibrant communities of faith, joyful in their service of God and neighbour'*.

Prior to the meeting Canon Paul meet with a number of groups to explore how they might implement our diocesan vision. The Catechetical team are a very committed group who seek to engage with the formation of parishioners, young and old, settled, and new. I am pleased that Paul Milton (deacon in training) has joined the RCIA. As Canon Paul remarked, *'He has to raise his profile'*.

The response to Pope Francis' invitation to 'walk together' along the Synodal Pathway' was heard in Leamington Spa, with over 80 persons participating in structured conversations and listening exercises. This has led to a large number of responses which

have been filtered and refined in two stages. The second stage in July 2023 has discerned five major themes:

‘Building Community’ – getting to know one another better and recognise our gifts.

Becoming more inclusive and welcoming.

Deepening and sharing our faith.

Prioritizing young people

Parish infrastructure (covering issues as communications, finance, and the use of parish spaces and of technology)

The first four of these priorities are being addressed.

However, it is clear just by walking into St Peter’s or around Our Lady’s, that the Parish Infrastructure will have to be a major priority in the next five years, probably greater than many of the ‘headline’ ideas.

St Peter’s could be a diocesan Gem, Our Lady’s a jewel, with a fine meeting space for greater social interaction. However, the parishes do not have the financial resources, at present, to undertake the level of work that is required, and may become urgent if allowed to deteriorate further. There had been no heating at St. Peter’s for over a year, but through the generosity and hard work of parishioners, the necessary funds have been raised and the heating restored. I hope this will encourage the parishes as a whole to form a fabric group who might seek to build on this momentum.

The Open Parish meeting was very well attended with 45+ coming out at 4pm on a winter Sunday afternoon. There was an interesting conversation, with Canon Paul reporting his experience (as outlined here) and thanking the parishioners for the kindly welcome. The topics of conversation were the issues which have been discussed in this report.

As with many parishes, there was a sense of frustration that the Synod has not borne ‘fruit’ as yet, but we are only halfway through the process, and the work of discernment continues. Canon Paul outlined how this deanery (Banbury and Warwick) was making firm progress to develop a Deanery Pastoral Council, which will offer a particular setting in which the work of discernment, conversation and action; including the implementation of the Diocesan Vision, can take place.

Parish Masses and Liturgy

The parish Masses and Liturgy are of a very high standard at both Churches. Both Churches have very good altar servers, sacristans and are well cared for.

There is music at all Masses.

St. Peter’s (5pm) there is accompanied hymns with a good pianist.

Our Lady’s (9.15am) is a mix of outstanding traditional and contemporary music, and hymns. It is no surprise to learn that members of this choir form the nucleus of the Diocesan choir, will next gather in the Cathedral for the Rite of Election.

St. Peter’s (11.15am) has a fine choir and excellent organist. There is a wide range of music and hymns, with a fine Motet, *‘O taste and see’*.

The liturgy and readings are proclaimed well, and the congregation participate fully. The 11.15am is best attended with the Church nearly full, with a rich diversity of backgrounds, ethnicity, and ages.

Social Outreach

St Peter's and Our Lady's have strong sense of the call of the poor at home and internationally. Both parishes have long-established charitable groups which have given over £1.5m in aid over the last 50 years. Both have their roots in the Justice and Peace Group and part of an ongoing concern for all in need. It is remarkable that both groups [SPAN: St. Peter's Aid to the Needy and KINDAID, Our Lady's Social Outreach] have kept their momentum over such a long time.

At Our Lady's, KINDAID's monthly activities are one of the drivers for the vibrant parish life, as the fundraising activities draw the parishioners together. For example, a family breakfast in February. Given all this activity, it is commendable that the parishes continue to support the work of CAFOD and seeks to continue to educate and inform all through CAFOD's social enterprise. As a *LiveSimply Parish*, the parishioners are able to inform and draw upon a younger group of parishioners for whom green issues have an urgent priority.

The SVP is active and seeks to support those in the parish who are in need, visiting them in their homes as well as supporting national issues such as the acre for asylum seekers in Leamington.

These parishes fulfil this element of the Diocesan Vision and have much to offer other Churches and parishes across the deanery and the Diocese as a whole.

Affirmation of Parish Life

Canon Paul enjoyed his visitation of the parishes of Our Lady and St Peter, the Apostle. These are dynamic parishes in which much of our diocesan vision, has already become a reality. It was a great pleasure to celebrate Mass in each of the Churches and pray with these lively parish communities.

Finally,

I should like to express my thanks to Fr Stephen and his family for a very warm welcome and friendly hospitality.

Canon Paul Fitzpatrick
30 January 2024