

St John the Evangelist, Portobello.

Report of the Open Parish Meeting.

8 June 2025.

35 parishioners met with Fr Jock in St John's church hall. Donald Scott, Chair of the Parish Pastoral Council, welcomed everyone. The meeting began with the reading of *A Reflection for Pentecost Sunday* by Piers Linley OP. Following this, there was a short period of sharing, in small groups, around the question 'Who is the Spirit to me?'.

Apologies had been received from Jeremy Thorp.

Fr Jock summarised parish events since the last OPM on 17 November 2024 and then outlined some future plans. His comments were made in the context of the Key Areas of Parish Life document, copies of which were circulated.

Liturgy, Celebration of the Sacraments, Prayer

St Mark's Episcopalian congregation held its Sunday morning Eucharist Services in St John's for about four months from late November 2024, while major refurbishment was undertaken in St Mark's church. Use of the ESV Lectionary is bedding in. During Advent, there was a joint St Mark's & St J's Carol Service. Since the last OPM, there have been reconciliation weekends, Bereavement Masses, monthly Healing Masses (which typically attract 90 -100 people), many funerals and lots of baptisms (thus far in 2025, as many as in the whole of 2024). Deacon Eddie continues to offer monthly Holy Hour and Benediction. Advent, Christmas, Lent and Easter have all been celebrated. The recent First Holy Communion celebrations went very well - Fr Jock thanked all those who prepared the youngsters, the church and the hall for such a special occasion. The Cosy Corner for families with young children, is being very well used. The fledgling Taizé group for teenagers has had a modest start.

Future plans include further development of the Cosy Corner area, thanks to a generous donor.

Faith Formation

There has been a training course for new Eucharistic Ministers. The Sacramental Preparation Teams for First Communion and Confirmation are increasing their focus on the adults who are presenting youngsters for the Sacraments. Without the ongoing support and encouragement of their families, youngsters may struggle to maintain their church connections. During Lent, Fr Jock gave three talks (in-person and live-streamed) on *The Old and New Testament and the History of the Church*. There have been two Cluster Retreats. One of the 2024 Lenten House Groups is continuing to meet, to view and discuss further episodes of *'The Chosen'*. Eight RCIA catechumens and candidates were received into the church during the Easter Vigil.

Future plans include the provision of online 'faith resources', which Tracy Burgess has researched and collated.

General Governance

Chris Vinestock reported that there is a continuing snagging issue with the church central heating system which she is pursuing. The final payment to Lothian Heating will be retained until this is fully resolved.

Fr Jock thanked Chris for her perseverance and diligence throughout this major project.

Gary Zoltie reported that, following the 'Stewardship Weekend' talks in October 2024, the Offertory collection has increased. Year on year, there has been an increase of about £6K during the first four months of 2025. Gary thanked everyone for their positive reaction and for their increased generosity. The underlying trend is still showing a lower surplus than in previous years. The parish has been very fortunate in receiving a very generous legacy. The heating project, covering both the church and the Parish House, has come in slightly under budget (£240K rather than £250K). The parish has had to change banks, due to the closure of the Portobello branch of the B of S. As matter of urgency, parishioners are being encouraged to change the payment details for their SOs and DDs. A card reader has been bought, which will be pre-set at £5 (with a facility for an individual to amend this pre-set to suit themselves), giving people the option to donate with their contactless cards.

Deacon Eddie reported that the live-streaming team continues to support an online community. Positive feedback from house-bound viewers proves the ongoing need for this service. Since St J's building is open throughout the day, the live-streaming team have to re-set (and pack away) the kit for every service.

Fire drills were successfully held recently, for both the Vigil and Sunday morning Masses.

Future plans include the relaunch of an Eco Group. The Parish Handbook is being reviewed and a limited reprint for visitors and new parishioners will be available soon. Plans for the proposed refurbishment of the Blessed Sacrament Chapel as a more welcoming space for private prayer are developing. Research continues into sound-baffling for the hall.

Outreach

Fr Jock reported that there are now over forty Eucharistic Ministers, taking Communion to the housebound and also helping with distribution during Masses. He made particular mention of the daily EM visits to the sisters in Lauder Lodge Care Home. He is now offering Mass at LL once a month.

Gena Gallagher reported that The Thursday Club continues to offer weekly company and entertainment to older people. Most attendees are now in their 80s and 90s. Transport is arranged, birthdays are celebrated and sympathetic support is always available.

Maria Igoe reported that The Legion of Mary continues with regular meetings.

Fr Jock noted that the joint parishes' SVdP Conference continues its outreach.

Diane Devlin reported that the Oral History Project continues, although it has run into a few technical challenges. It is hoped that there will be a film presentation of the project later in the year.

Since the last OPM, the joint parishes' Justice and Peace Group has hosted two concerts in the church, both of which were generously supported.

On 10 May, there was a successful inaugural Cluster Parishes' Jubilee Pilgrimage Walk. Between 90 - 100 people walked from St Teresa's, Craigmillar to St Mary's Star of the Sea, Leith via St MM, St J's, St Triduana's Well and St Ninian's. Most of the pilgrims continued their walk to the Jubilee Cross at St Mary's Cathedral. Hospitality, prayers and parish histories were offered at each church.

In January, thanks to Mary Iannarelli and her Hospitality Team, Edinburgh's L'Arche community enjoyed lunch and entertainment in the hall. In early Spring, Jeremy Thorpe & The Swells hosted a fund-raising concert for L'Arche.

Gary Zoltie, as a Trustee for STEKA, reported that the parishes have successfully raised the £20K needed for the Women's' Hostel in Malawi, during the 12+ months of fund-raising. Work on the hostel will begin later this year. It is hoped that, in the future, some parishioners might additionally contribute to the cost of a perimeter wall for the hostel, which would give much needed security for the women and their children.

Locally, The Holy Huddle has submitted a joint, strongly worded response to the City of Edinburgh Council's proposed CPZ for Portobello, both through the Parking Review online portal and through local councillors and other elected representatives. Deacon Eddie reported that one supportive, positive response has been received. Professional legal advice may be required to further the debate.

Future Plans

These include informative talks organised by the Inclusivity Group. Anne Gilchrist reported that, later in 2025, Rev Sigrid Marten, Minister at the High Kirk of St Giles, will give a talk on the rôle of women in Ministry from personal as well as historical perspectives. Also later in the year, there will also be a talk on gender dysphoria by Doctor John Crighton, a consultant who is based at The Royal Edinburgh Hospital, Morningside and who will soon take up the post of Medical Director of the Mental Welfare Commission of Scotland. During the Festival, Rev Marion Chatterley, Vice-Provost at St Mary's Episcopal Cathedral, Palmerston Place will lead a workshop on a range of complex issues, drawn from her work with people living with HIV.

Donald then introduced questions for small group discussions.

- *What messages do you personally take from Pope Francis' 12 years as Pope?*
- *What has struck you about Pope Leo so far?*
- *What are the most vulnerable groups in our community?*
- *How can we minister more creatively to them and allow them to minister to us?*

After some stilling silence and prayer, parishioners were invited to share their thoughts within their group.

Donald then invited brief feedback, which included:

- the importance of Laudato Si'
- the importance of Pope Francis' example of care for the marginalised
- the spirit of hope that Pope Francis engendered
- the importance to Pope Leo of his Augustinian background.

Following these discussions, other questions and comments were invited. These included:

- an appeal for the formation of a 'Sunday Morning Welcoming Team for the Hall', to ensure everyone feels included at the post-Mass coffee, and that no-one feels isolated or left out
- more opportunities to build community through listening and discussions groups, following the Synodal model, such as during weekend Masses (perhaps in place of a homily)
- an appreciation of the recent Quarant'ore in St J's, especially for those opening & closing the building and for those who created the 'watching' rota.
- an appeal for provision in the parish to support single people

Gena Gallagher led an acknowledgement and appreciation of the fortieth anniversary of Fr Jock's ordination to the diaconate and, on behalf of those present, thanked Fr Jock for his continued wonderful service and support to the sister parishes.

Thanks were expressed to Mary Iannarelli and her Hospitality Team for the refreshments to be enjoyed by all after the meeting.

The meeting ended with the Our Father being sung.