

Parish Pastoral Council

Minutes — Thursday 1st October 2026

1. Opening Prayer and Scripture

Fr John opened the meeting with prayer.

Gospel

At that time the disciples came to Jesus, saying, 'Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?' And calling to him a child, he put him in the midst of them and said, 'Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me.'

Reflection

One danger in parish life is that we can become very good at organising things without always asking what they are for. Advent is a good moment to recover that purpose.

The Church does not give us Advent simply as a countdown to Christmas. It is a season of expectation, repentance, hope and preparation for the coming of the Lord. So the question is not simply what we can put on during Advent, but what will actually help people live it well.

Services, music, notices, decorations and parish events all have their place. But they only serve their purpose if they help people pray, return to Confession, listen to the Word of God, recognise their need for Christ and approach Christmas with renewed faith.

People come to Christmas from very different places. Some are faithful and practising. Some attend Mass but have little personal prayer. Some families are finding their way back. Some are preparing for the sacraments. Others may come into one of our churches at Christmas having had very little contact with the Church during the year. Advent gives us an opportunity to meet all of them clearly and warmly, without weakening the faith.

That connects naturally with today's Gospel. The disciples ask Jesus who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven, and Jesus places a child in their midst. They are thinking about status and importance. Jesus points instead to humility, dependence and simplicity.

A child receives before they achieve.
A child depends before they control.
A child is capable of wonder.

Advent asks something similar of us. It asks us to become receptive again, to listen, to trust and to make room for the Lord.

Our task is not to create an impressive parish programme. It is to help people become more ready for Christ. That may mean simpler prayer. It may mean returning to Confession. It may mean helping families recover a sense of wonder. It may mean making sure that someone who feels distant from the Church knows that they are still welcome to come near.

Jesus also says that whoever receives one such child in His name receives Him.

So Advent preparation is not only about our own spiritual life. It is also about how we receive others: the uncertain, the returning Catholic, the family beginning again, the child learning the faith.

The question for the evening was:

What will help our parish become more humble, more prayerful, more receptive, and more ready to receive Christ?

2. Welcome, Apologies and Confirmation of Minutes

Those present: Fr. John, Theresa Wheeliker, Okiemute Ekwevugbe, Hilari Chetwood, Lynne Ryan, Keith Betteridge, Helen Ladkin, Genny Hickey and Anne Clark.

No apologies were received.

The minutes of the previous meeting were accepted as an accurate record.

3. Parish Priest's Pastoral Overview

Since our last meeting, parish life has continued steadily.

One area previously discussed was the development of personal catechetical accompaniment. We now have teaching material, apps and a framework for catechists or mentors, but there have so far only been a small number of new enquiries.

At present Fr John has been able to deal with most of these personally. The small number is not regarded as a problem. One of the principles behind the new model is that we are not trying to generate artificial numbers or recreate a mass-enrolment system under another name.

If people come forward, they are welcomed and accompanied. If demand grows, suitable mentors can gradually be involved. There is therefore no reason to build a large structure before it is needed.

For that reason, this was not considered the right moment for a major review of the sacramental pathways. By the November meeting there should be more experience to draw upon, and the Council will then look more deliberately at how the new sacramental arrangements are developing.

The main focus of this meeting was instead to look ahead to Advent.

The Thursday evenings at St Mary's will also be underway by then. Some of those evenings during Advent can naturally reflect the season, but the discussion was intended to be wider than simply planning the Thursday evenings.

The central question was:

How can the whole parish enter Advent more deeply?

This includes Sunday worship, Confession, prayer at home, families, those preparing for sacraments, the housebound, our website and newsletter, and people who may have only a loose connection with the Church.

4. Focused Pastoral Reflection

Preparing the Parish for Advent — More Than Preparing for Christmas

There are several things worth holding together.

Advent should feel different

The Church gives us seasons because human beings need rhythms. If Advent simply feels like another four weeks of Ordinary Time with Christmas decorations beginning to appear, something has been lost.

There should be a certain sobriety about it: a sense of waiting, expectation, renewed attention to prayer and an opportunity for repentance.

That does not mean making everything gloomy. Advent is full of hope. But Christian hope comes from knowing **Who is coming**.

The question is how we help people experience that without making parish life complicated.

Sunday Mass must remain central

Whatever else we offer should lead people towards the Church's worship rather than competing with it.

The readings, prayers and music of Advent already teach beautifully. Perhaps part of our task is simply to help people notice them.

The parish does not need to invent an alternative Advent. We need to help people enter the Advent the Church already gives us.

Confession matters

If Advent is preparation for the coming of Christ, the Sacrament of Reconciliation must have a proper place.

That does not necessarily mean organising a large penitential service. It may mean making Confession especially visible and accessible, preaching about it clearly, explaining it for those who have been away for years, and giving people confidence to return.

Many Catholics have not rejected Confession. They have simply lost the habit or become nervous about returning. Advent is an obvious opportunity to help them.

Prayer at home

Most of Advent is not spent inside the church.

Could we give people something genuinely simple to take home? Perhaps a parish Advent prayer card, a short Scripture passage for each week, a simple family prayer, or an Advent intention shared across all three churches.

The important thing is not to give people another booklet that sits unopened on a table. One small thing that is actually used is better than ten resources that are admired and forgotten.

Families and children

For families, Advent is easily swallowed by school events, shopping, parties and Christmas preparations.

We cannot remove all of that, but we can offer a Catholic centre of gravity.

Something as simple as encouraging families to pray before an Advent wreath, come to Mass faithfully, make Confession part of preparing for Christmas, and speak about why Jesus came may do more good than another elaborate children's activity.

Those on the edges

We also need to think about people who may come into contact with us precisely because Christmas is approaching.

A Christmas Mass time on the website may be the first parish page somebody has looked at for years. A returning Catholic may be wondering whether they are still welcome. Someone grieving may find Christmas particularly difficult. A family who has recently asked about Baptism or First Communion may be beginning to rediscover their faith.

Our communication during Advent should therefore be unmistakably Catholic, but also warm and intelligible.

The housebound and sick

They should not simply be recipients of parish activity. They can be part of the spiritual work of Advent.

We can invite them explicitly to pray for the parish, for those returning to Confession, for people who will come to Christmas Mass, for our children and young people, and for conversions.

That gives even someone unable to leave home a genuine missionary part in parish life.

Simplicity

Above all, we do not want to create an Advent programme so complicated that everybody is exhausted by Christmas.

A few things done prayerfully and consistently across all three churches would be better.

Our aim should be something recognisable, Catholic and achievable.

Not activity for activity's sake, but preparation for the Lord.

5. Specific Consultation Item

How should we help the parish prepare for Advent?

The Council discussed the following suggestions:

- An Advent prayer card was considered a good idea, giving consistency across the three churches. It could also be given to the sick and housebound so that they can feel included.

- Members were interested in Advent teaching through the Advent wreath. Suggestions included a session teaching people how to make an Advent wreath, a display in church, and encouraging families to pray together before the wreath.
 - Questions were asked about the Walk with Me booklets, which people have found helpful. As the Diocese no longer produces these, similar Day by Day booklets could be purchased.
 - There is also a children's version, with activities for each day of Advent, which parents could be encouraged to use with their children.
 - It was suggested that we hold a family Reconciliation evening, giving families the opportunity to attend Confession and allowing parents to set an example for their children.
 - An Advent theme for Children's Liturgy could be developed and shared with catechists across the churches.
 - Members were enthusiastic that the Nine Lessons and Carols should continue, including the children in the Nativity play, young people in the readings and parish musicians.
 - Fr John would also like a Carol Service during the Christmas season, after Christmas Day.
 - The Thursday evening parish sessions will be established by then. It was suggested that some of these focus on teaching about Advent, with making Advent wreaths as one possible session.
 - The main issue, as always, is communication. It was suggested that, alongside the prayer card, we produce a leaflet listing all the Advent opportunities. This might include a small section for people to write down one thing they will try to do during Advent.
 - It was also seen to be a good thing to encourage attending church in the Advent colour for each week.
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6. Parish Life and Administration

Catechesis and sacramental pathways

It was asked where the apps for the sacramental programmes could be found.

Fr John explained that by clicking on the relevant sacrament on the parish website, people will find the appropriate information and resources.

Thursday evenings

This new initiative, providing a varied opportunity for **prayer, formation and fellowship**, began that evening with a small number of people. It is hoped that participation will gradually grow.

Website and communications

The parish website is now receiving around **10,000 hits a month**, compared with approximately that number over an entire year a few years ago.

Several parishes have asked to use our resources, including some very local ones.

Christmas Mass Times

The following Christmas Mass times were discussed so that they can be published on the website as soon as possible.

Thursday 24th December

6.00pm — Vigil Mass, St John Bosco
11.30pm — Carols, St Mary's
Midnight — Midnight Mass, St Mary's

Friday 25th December

9.00am — Mass, St Edward's
11.00am — Mass, St Mary's

Finance and buildings

The tenants have settled into St John Bosco's Presbytery. There have been a few very small issues, and it is hoped that the rental income will soon begin to be received.

Comments were also made about the new gates being fitted onto rotten posts and the possible safety issues arising from this.

Safeguarding

There are delays at the Diocesan office because the main person dealing with DBS requests is on long-term sickness.

Forms have been submitted for volunteers.

7. Matters Proposed by Members

None offered.

8. Summary by the Parish Priest

Tonight we deliberately looked ahead rather than trying to review things for which we do not yet have enough experience.

Our sacramental pathways are developing, but enquiries remain sufficiently small that they can presently be handled personally. We will return to the sacramental model in November, when there should be more experience to reflect upon.

Our main consideration tonight has therefore been Advent.

We have reminded ourselves that the purpose is not to fill the parish diary but to help people prepare for the coming of Christ.

I have heard the Council's advice about what the parish most needs, what priorities should be emphasised, how we might encourage Confession and prayer, how families can be supported without being overloaded, and how those on the edges of parish life can be included.

I will now take that advice and put together a simple Advent approach for the three churches.

Our November PPC will then give us an opportunity to look more closely at the experience of the new sacramental pathways.

9. Closing Prayer

The meeting concluded with prayer.

10. Next Meeting

Thursday 26th November 2026
7.30pm — St Mary's Hall

Proposed focus: New sacramental pathways.