**St Gregory's Parish Council**

**The Vision and Purpose for the Parish Council**

**Presentation Notes**

1. Scripture - 1 Cor 12 v4

"To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good."

2. Song - "Christ has no Body now on earth but yours" (John Michael Talbot)

3. We are Christ's Body

"We" in this instance means the parish Community of Faith, the Eucharistic Community - those gathered for Mass.

"We" are the Body of Christ. Through us, Christ is present here in this part of Preston; we are the visible presence of Christ here.

4. Baptism

By our Baptism, we belong to a Community called to share in the life and mission of Jesus who is Priest, Prophet and King.

By our Baptism, all us belong equally to a priestly, prophetic and serving community.

a. Priestly Community

Worships God - especially through the Eucharist

Prays

Draws attention/points to the holy and the sacred in everyday life

b. Prophetic Community

Bases its life on the Word of God

Lives life according to the teachings and values of Jesus in the Gospels

Challenges the accepted values and standards of our culture

Has a vision about how things could be different - better - in everyday life, not just for ourselves, but for everyone and especially for the poor and the disadvantaged

c. Kingly or Serving Community

Helps those who are in any kind of need, whether they belong to the Church or not

Organises itself in ways that encourage and promote relevant works of service

5. The Parish Council

Was formed -

- to work with the Parish Priest to raise awareness among the Parishioners of what it means to be baptised into the Body of Christ

- to promote the widest possible participation and involvement of Parishioners in the life and mission of the Parish Community

- to help identify the gifts which are a "manifestation of the Spirit"

- to assist people to use these gifts in the service of "the common good (1 Cor 12 v4)

The starting place over and over again must be the discernment question "What does God want of us at this time and in this place ?"

Essentially we already know what God wants of us

God wants that we -

- act for justice - work for peace

- forgive and show mercy - act with compassion

- pray - feed the hungry

- clothe the naked - look after the sick

- free the trapped and overburdened

But how ? What do we have to be doing here, now, in this place in order to be doing these things ? What does God want of us at this time and in this place ?

In order to feel our way forward as we ask this question, it is necessary to practice listening - with the emphasis on practice -

* listen inwardly to our own feelings, to what moves within us
* listen carefully and without judgement to what others say
* cultivate silence and the ability to wait

Thomas Merton, the Trappist Monk, wrote :

"We are like the pilots of fog-bound steamers, peering into the gloom in front of us, listening for the sounds of other ships, and we can only reach our harbour if we keep alert. The spiritual life is, then, first of all a matter of keeping awake ......always able to respond to the slightest warnings that speak, as though by hidden instinct, in the depth of the soul that is spiritually alive." [[1]](#footnote-1)

This is what I formed the Parish Council to be - a group to be formed in and then lead a culture of discernment in the Parish Community.

6. Prayer and Presence

Every meeting begins with half an hour of "becoming present" during which the focus is on listening. This is a substantial period of time out of a meeting which lasts two hours. Some people will find this more difficult than others, and all have to set aside the urge to "get on with the business".

This time of Prayer and Presence consists generally of -

- coming to quiet, perhaps listening to a piece of music

- a few moments of reflection on a piece of Scripture

- some silence

- a time of listening to one another as those present share an answer to the question "what is in your heart and mind as you come to this meeting"

During this time of sharing, we are practicing listening. There should be no comment on anything another says, no comment; nothing other than a respectful silence in which what is spoken is simply received. Nothing said is minuted; nor should anything shared be spoken about by anyone afterwards, not even to the person who spoke whatever it might be.

Once the sharing is concluded, the business of the meeting is addressed - always having in mind the search in response to the question "What does God want of us at this time and in this place ?

Edward Gannon

St Gregory's Parish

Preston

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1. Thomas Merton - Thoughts in Solitude [↑](#footnote-ref-1)