

PARISH OF ST. ANTHONY AND ST MARK



Parish Priest: Fr. Stephen Reilly
Assistant priest: Fr Christopher Igwe



Parish Renewal and Evangelisation update Jubilee Year 2025: Pilgrims of Hope

This weekend marks the end of one liturgical year (Year C) and the beginning of another (Year A). This provides an opportunity to look back at and evaluate our ongoing journey of parish renewal and evangelisation, which at diocesan level is called the Wellspring process.

A glance backwards

Since Fr Stephen arrived in September 2023, he has tried to continue the renewal process undertaken by his predecessors, providing continuity & allowing the parish to develop organically. The 2019-20 Pastoral Vision outlined three priority areas, which reflects the three core things which Jesus asked us to do:

- **Community Building** (“Love the Lord your God and your neighbour as yourself”)
- **Outreach to the Wider Community:** (“Go and make disciples of the nations”)
- **Faith and Worship:** (“Do this in memory of me”)

The Parish Council meetings in 2023 and 2024 praised the numerous things that had been started, achieved or significantly developed since 2019/20, to help actualise the 2019-20 Pastoral Vision, e.g. A sense of “one Parish” across two churches; TV screens and streaming services; Parish Foodbank; Social media presence greatly increased; Tutoring service; Children’s Masses & Liturgy; Sunday Café / Cuppa Club; Justice & Peace activity; SSVP; Ministers of Welcome; Community Choir; Improvement of the Stalls; Fabric improvements; Strong cleaning and finance teams.

Our mission

The 2023 and 2024 Parish Council meetings also established some Wellspring renewal priorities, above all one key mission entrusted to us by Jesus: “go and make disciples”. This means prioritising mission and outreach, looking outwards rather than inwards, and asking why would someone want to be an active part of our parish, and/or how could we help them to return?

Our renewal priorities 2024-25

The Parish Council meetings therefore developed some specific pastoral priorities. Here are the priorities, and how they have developed over the past year or so:

1. Parish fabric:

The Parish Council underlined the importance of having a modern, warm and welcoming environment in our parish buildings as an essential backdrop to any pastoral growth and outreach. The parish Fabric Committee has overseen the following works:

St Anthony’s: renovation of side chapel to provide a space to welcome families and host parish groups; new insulation in the hall; carpeting of main church; repaint of the hall.

St Mark’s: insulation of loft space; secondary triple glazing installed; destratification fans; new carpet; new heating system in the hall; hall path fully tarred; altar servers’ sacristy redeveloped.

2. Engagement with families, children and young people:

The Parish Council focussed on families, children & young people as the present and the future of our parish & therefore the central key to pastoral renewal. A Family Engagement Team has been established, which (with other parish groups) has overseen the following new events & initiatives:

- Fr Stephen and Fr Christopher become chaplains at Trinity High; weekly clergy visits to both primary schools; Annual Mass for babies and children baptised over the past year; Little Miracles group for babies and toddlers; training for new altar servers; Ignite Club parish-based catechesis for First Holy Communicants; new Nativity play at St Mark’s (as well as the long-established one at

St Anthony's); LifeTeen group for teenagers S2-S5; Justice and Peace Caritas Award project for S6 pupils; SALT RE materials introduced in both primary schools.

3. Communication:

The importance of good communication to outreach was underlined at the Parish Council. The refreshed Media and Communication Team has overseen a strategy across social media, the church screens, local press etc leading to the following initiatives this year:

- Parish Christmas card distribution; overhaul of social media engagement, platforms and logos; improvement of screens and livestream in both churches; change of bulletin style to become more of a news/magazine of parish life; feeding good news stories to local media and Fontes.

4. Encouragement of New Scots Parishioners:

In reading the signs of the times around us, one clear area of potential is the number of young New Scots families attending our parish. Many are taking responsibility as readers, altar servers, welcome ministry, or attending the children's liturgy. This year we have been blessed with the presence of Fr Christopher, and the parish has undertaken the following initiatives:

- Annual New Scots Mass on Pentecost Sunday; child dedication ceremonies at Sunday Mass; Mass of Thanksgiving celebrations for Fr Christopher in both churches; strengthened relations with the Syro-Malabar Catholic mission.

5. Sacramental preparation:

Being an outward-looking and welcoming parish brings us many opportunities outwith the norm e.g. many school-age children seeking Baptism; children attending non-denominational schools seeking sacramental preparation (including many New Scots children noted above); and teenagers/adults wishing to complete their initiation. Here is what has been achieved this year:

- Registration scheme for the sacraments; Baptism preparation involving home visit and Baptism course in the parish house; adoption of Ignite parish-based catechesis for First Holy Communicants; Alpha evangelisation process in its 3rd year; 4 people in the RCIA process this year; Advent retreat for RCIA candidates and parishioners.

Jubilee 2025 initiatives:

A Jubilee steering group – open to all parishioners – was established in January 2025. It is hoped this group will develop into a permanent Parish Pastoral Planning Team from January 2026. The group was guided by Pope Francis' two main principles for the Jubilee: that the Jubilee should seek outreach and service to the weakest; and that it should serve as a springboard for the ongoing pastoral renewal of the parish, creating a legacy rather than being dominated by one-off events. The group and many other parish groups have overseen the following Jubilee initiatives this year:

Legacy initiatives: Weekly AA meeting at St Mark's hall; Weekly Holy Communion service at Duncreggan Nursing Home; Initiatives to engage with families, children and young people as above (Ignite; SALT; LifeTeen; Little Miracles).

Legacy events, which began in the past year and have become annual events in the parish calendar: Hogmanay Party (January); Church Workers' Social (February); Lent Holy Hours (March); Parish Foodbank Fundraiser (June); Annual Mass for babies baptised over the past year (June); Parish day at Carfin (June); Parish Showcase event (November); Caritas Award J & P Holy Hour (December): joining existing events e.g. Altar servers' trip (January); Taizé evening of prayer (February); Parish St Patrick's Night (March); New Scots celebration on Pentecost Sunday (May/June); annual parish pilgrimage (September) and Carols by Candlelight (December).

Moving forward, priorities will be set by the clergy, Parish Pastoral Planning Team & regular Parish Council meetings: parishioner ideas & feedback are always welcome. Priorities may include a co-ordinated approach to those in need; improved disabled access at St Mark's; a directory of Parish life; an annual Mass for the sick; and improved contact with the housebound & elderly.

Thanks to all parishioners for a very enjoyable and hope-filled Jubilee Year 2025!