

St Canice's Church

125th Anniversary Celebration'

4 May 2014

Today we give thanks for the 125 years of service, both spiritual and practical, given by the parish of St Canice. We remember in our prayers the generosity and devotion of the founders and those who have maintained the parish since its foundation. Now we must ask ourselves whether the parish of today remains as relevant to the lives of the people as did the parishes of years gone by. Pope Francis addressed to that question in *Evangelii gaudium*. He said:

“The parish is not an outdated institution; precisely because it possesses great flexibility, it can assume quite different contours depending on the openness and missionary creativity of the pastor and the community. ... [I]f the parish proves capable of self-renewal and constant adaptivity, it continues to be “the Church living in the midst of the homes of her sons and daughters”. This presumes that it really is in contact with the homes and the lives of its people, and does not become a useless structure out of touch with people or a self-absorbed group made up of a chosen few. The parish is the presence of the Church in a given territory, an environment for hearing God’s word, for growth in the Christian life, for dialogue, proclamation, charitable outreach, worship and celebration. ... It is ... a centre of constant missionary outreach. We must admit, though, that the call to review and renew our parishes has not yet sufficed to bring them nearer to people, to make them environments of living communion and participation, and to make them completely mission-oriented.”

Older Catholics may tend to hear this as a nostalgic call to return to parish life as it was, in earlier and less pressured times, when the Catholic community was

identifiable by the regularity of their church attendance, by bountiful priestly and religious vocations, public displays of Catholicity, lay dependence on clerical instruction, commitment to Catholic schools and hospitals and missionary endeavours devoted to the proselytising of non-Catholics. Then the Church was indeed living in the homes of those identified as her sons and daughters. But that is not what Pope Francis was speaking about.

Pope Francis is speaking post Vatican II which opened eyes, minds and hearts to the universality of Divine love and mercy, to the common humanity of every person, to their equal dignity and to their entitlement to a share in the world's riches to sustain that dignity. Now, as in the past, the Church must live in the homes of her sons and daughters, but those homes are not confined to the ghettos of the past. As a parish, St Canice's has been proud to welcome all who have chosen to worship here, but parishioners today are called to know, to respect, to care for – indeed, to love – all people. And that may impose on us, the parishioners of St Canice's, a particular obligation towards all in the local community, the people who live on the streets and those who live in comfort, the people who work in boardrooms, in bars and in brothels, people who staff offices, hospitals and hotels; all who are our neighbours to be loved as ourselves. And then to recognize the world of poverty and need in other places.

It is for us, the parishioners in the pews, to ensure that our minds and hearts respond to Pope Francis' call to make St Canice's an "environment of living communion and participation and to make [it] completely mission-oriented". That is our challenge for the years to come.

Gerard Brennan