



Parish of Our Lady of Kirkstall, Leeds



REPORT ON THE LIVE SIMPLY PROJECT

1. Background about the parish

- 1.1. The parish of Our Lady of Kirkstall was formed in 2010 by merging three previously independent parishes, Holy Name, St. Mary's Horsforth and the Assumption. All three churches were retained, and the new parish has been served by 2 priests: Fr. Pat Smythe has been parish priest throughout (though he will retire in summer 2019) but we have had 4 different assistant priests during these 9 years. Attendance across all Sunday Masses in the parish in October 2018 was 626. Each of the parishes which came together to form Our Lady of Kirkstall had a very distinct ethos, and one of the challenges in the new structure was to maintain the vitality of each church community while also building an identity for the parish as a whole and encouraging a parish-wide approach to those activities where this was most appropriate or effective.
- 1.2. All 3 churches had a strong tradition of undertaking fund-raising and other events to demonstrate solidarity with disadvantaged people across the world. The Assumption had a strong focus on supporting CAFOD and participated in CAFOD's Connect2 El Salvador programme (which came to an end in December 2018). The church community at Holy Name has long supported the work of Sylvia Wright in one of the poorest regions of India, though the Sylvia Wright Trust has gained support from the whole parish and well beyond. Support for the Peter Trust – which was established by Fr. Pat Smythe to assist poor people in East Timor – has also been supported by Holy Name and by the wider parish. St. Mary's too has a number of development charities that it supports on a regular basis. In addition, a parish-wide "CAFOD Group" has focussed particularly on raising awareness of the underlying issues (including climate change), organising activities and events and also suggesting/inputting into special liturgies.
- 1.3. The parish also had 2 strong SVP groups working with the poorer members of our community across the parish.
- 1.4. In 2015/16, the refugee crisis generated by events in Syria made a strong impression on opinion in the UK, including within our parish. A number of activities were undertaken in support of refugees and asylum seekers locally and the all-parish celebration Mass in October 2015 took as its theme "Welcome the Stranger". At the same time that the parish was considering undertaking the Live Simply Project (autumn 2016 and into 2017), the Parish Council also agreed that we should undertake additional and more sustained action in relation to local refugees and migrants.

2. Background and launch of the Live Simply Project

- 2.1. The Parish CAFOD Group became aware of the Live Simply programme in the course of 2016 and decided to recommend to the parish priest and the Parish Council that we work towards the award. Our parish priest saw this as an opportunity to deepen the links between the 3 church communities of the parish as they worked together towards a shared goal. He also appreciated how it could provide an opportunity to make the people of the parish more aware of Catholic social doctrine and encourage them to live Gospel values. In Autumn 2016, in drawing up a new framework for the Parish Council, the Live Simply principles of living simply, sustainably and in solidarity with the poor were embedded within its actual constitution, and the decision taken to work towards the award.
- 2.2. It was decided to launch the Project with a survey which would help us understand where we were as a parish in terms of the actions that groups and individuals were already taking that aligned with the aims of the award. This information would also help us draw up a plan setting out the actions we would take to obtain the award. In March 2017, at every Mass in the parish, a member of the Parish Council gave a brief overview of Live Simply and invited parishioners to complete the survey questionnaire. 535 individual responses were obtained.
- 2.3. In early summer, the Parish Council convened an open meeting to begin the process of drawing up a project plan, and agreed that a separate working party (formally a Subcommittee of the Parish Council) should be asked to coordinate the various strands of activity. In parallel to this, a separate meeting and working party were convened to look in detail at the concrete steps the parish should undertake in support of refugees and asylum seekers.
- 2.4. The Live Simply Project plan was drawn up over the course of summer 2017 and was approved by the Parish Council in September. It was then submitted to CAFOD on 28th September when the parish formally signed up to begin its Live Simply journey.
- 2.5. Throughout the Project, activities have been monitored and coordinated by the “Live Simply Group” on behalf of the Parish Council. The Group has met every two months, usually with between 12 and 15 parishioners in attendance. Meetings are publicised in the parish weekly bulletin. Business is also conducted via a mailing list which currently has a total membership of 36. Each meeting of the Parish Council receives a written report summarising progress and highlighting any areas on which guidance or decisions are sought from the Council. In September 2018, a plan for the second year of the Project was submitted and approved.

3. What we have done

3.1. Inspiring our community to live more simply

3.1.1. Perhaps the most visible element of the whole Live Simply Project has been the production of a monthly “bulletin” each issue of which contains a number of separate features:

- An introduction to the theme for the month, usually followed by a short extract from *Laudato Si’*.
- Two articles or reflections: sometimes on practical matters such as food waste or recycling; sometimes more spiritual in their focus e.g. an extract from the “Canticle of the Sun” or a reflection on Our Lady as a model of simplicity; and sometimes reporting on activities undertaken in our schools or by our uniformed organisations (Scouts, Guides, etc.).
- A monthly prayer intention, often linked to other content in the bulletin or to activities taking place in the course of that month
- “Practical suggestions for daily living” – 3 simple ideas which parishioners can adopt in their daily lives. Of the three, at least one will be achievable by children also.
- Cartoons or graphics linked to the theme.
- Since September 2018, there has also been an activity for children such as a picture to colour, a wordsearch or a maze.

The Live Simply bulletins are handed out with the parish weekly bulletin on the first Sunday of the month and have been well received (in March 2019 77% of parishioners said that they read them). In particular, a lot of people have commented favourably on the “Practical suggestions”.

3.1.2. In our original Project Plan, we thought that we would draw up a formal plan of how Live Simply principles could be embedded in our liturgies. In practice, the commitment of our priests to the whole Live Simply ethos has allowed us to adopt a less formal and more fluid approach. Key elements within the Sunday liturgy have included:

- A formal “launch” in October 2017 and again “relaunch” 12 months later when each church has been decorated appropriately and the homily has focussed on the Project.
- Celebration of the first year of the project at all Masses on Sunday 1st July 2018.
- Using the “Live Simply Prayer” at the start of Mass on the first Sunday of every month.
- Various homilies throughout the year e.g. about refugees, Catholic Social Teaching, etc.
- Bidding prayers incorporating Live Simply values on a regular basis.
- Using Live Simply themes in children’s liturgy sessions.
- Embedding of appeals for CAFOD, Sylvia Wright Trust, Peter Trust and other charities within the Mass.
- Use of a special penitential rite based on the “Joy in Enough Confession” (February 2019).

3.1.3. One very successful event was the organisation of a “Walk to Church” Sunday in July 2018. Those parishioners who could were asked to walk or cycle to church, catch a bus or do a car-share that day. A large graphic was put in the entrance to each church, with stickers for these

modes of transport. The stickers suggest participation by at least 100 parishioners, but we believe others took part who didn't use a sticker. Cycling racks have recently been installed to encourage use of bicycles.

3.1.4. We also organised a Live Simply day of recollection in October 2018, which was led by Margaret Siberry and attended by 20 people.

3.2. Bringing our community closer to God's creation

3.2.1. The teaching of Pope Francis has been a major source of inspiration to the Live Simply Group, something which we have attempted to share with the whole parish community. *Laudato Si'* is of course a key resource on which we have often drawn in our monthly bulletins, complemented by *Gaudete et Exsultate* which speaks eloquently of faithfulness in the little things of life. Such explicit and powerful teaching from the Papacy also allows us to demonstrate how Live Simply is faithful to Catholic doctrine and the Magisterium.

3.2.2. In our original Project Plan (v5), we envisaged "developing a vegetable and flower garden on land at all 3 churches". However, once we gathered together a group of people interested in participating in this aspect of the Project, it became clear that this might not be practicable because so much of the land is in partial or deep shade, whereas most vegetables (and many flowers) require an open and sunny aspect. We equally discovered that Leeds is one of 8 cities involved in a national project called Urban Buzz which aims to increase the number of urban locations suitable for pollinating insects: bees, wasps, butterflies, moths and beetles. Such insects are essential to the life-cycle of many crops and garden plants, but the countryside no longer offers such a hospitable environment because of agricultural monocultures and the use of pesticides. In contrast, urban parks and gardens already provide many plants rich in pollen. Urban Buzz works with schools and community groups to develop these and other spaces with this in mind. Planting native plant species such as primroses, bluebells, ox-eye daisies and champions is particularly encouraged. The Parish Council therefore agreed a revision to the Project Plan (v6) and a focus on improving habitats for pollinating insects.

3.2.3. A feature in the Live Simply bulletin for November was successful in recruiting 6 additional volunteers, so that we have a team of around 12 people committed to working on the Church grounds. They meet monthly and rotate round the 3 sites, undertaking larger tasks which the regulars at that site would find difficult to complete. Significant successes include:

- Drawing up a plan for developing all 3 sites to make them more pollinator-friendly. This was shared with the wider parish in March 2018.
- Liaison with Urban Buzz so that in March 2018 we received both bulbs and wildflower seed, free of charge.
- Installation of compost bins at Holy Name and St. Mary's (constructed by a parishioner from recycled pallets).
- Using more plants that are pollinator friendly.

- Improving the general appearance of the church grounds.
- Installation of a water butt (with another planned).

Unfortunately, our attempts in 2018 to grow wildflower meadows were thwarted by the weather conditions and very few seeds germinated, but we intend trying again this year.

3.2.4. The Uniformed Organisations, especially Cubs and Beavers, have embraced the Gardening Project and have planted troughs with spring bulbs and subsequently with summer flowers, thereby greatly enhancing the approach to Holy Name Church. With the help of Scouts, who cleared away brambles and other weeds, Cubs have also created a herb garden at the side of the church hall while Rainbows made butterfly feeders out of empty water bottles.

3.2.5. During Lent 2019, we encouraged parishioners to undertake a short walk (about one mile) around a local park, stopping at 15 points to read a short reflection. Copies of a sheet were made available with a map on one side and the 15 reflections on the other. Bird seed and copies of the “Walk with me” booklet (daily readings and reflections for Lent) were also made available for those who wished. This idea proved very popular and was taken up by one of our local primary schools.

3.2.6. In order to reduce the use of disposable crockery and cutlery at parish events, a survey was undertaken of the equipment already present in the church hall kitchens. Additional crockery and cutlery was obtained from a former presbytery as well as reusable plastic cups and plates for children; and Holy Name School PTA donated mugs for Holy Name church hall. Recycling capabilities were also improved.

3.2.7. The Live Simply Group has long been aware of the significance of climate change, and was intending to undertake further action to raise awareness in the parish in 2019, even before we knew that CAFOD were planning a major campaign around the issue. This was the focus for Our Live Simply bulletin for February 2019 and we are planning an event targeted at children in May as part of our preparation for the parliamentary lobby on June 26th.

3.3. Action on Refugees and Asylum Seekers in our community

3.3.1. Because of the parish commitment to improving our support for refugees and asylum seekers, it was decided to make this separate parish initiative the third strand in our Live Simply Project. Priorities for this were set by the separate Working Party, but with shared responsibility for initiating and implementing actions.

3.3.2. At the very beginning of the Project, in October 2018, a Lampedusa Pilgrimage was organised at St. Mary’s Church within the broader framework of a week around refugees organised by Horsforth Churches Together (of which St. Mary’s is a member church). This was very well attended – by around 60 people from the various churches in Horsforth – and was followed by a short talk and musical performance by an Iranian refugee.

3.3.3. A proposal was then brought to the Parish Council early in 2018 to set up a Homework Club to provide additional support to refugee children in Leeds. This has now been running for approximately a year and has around 9 helpers, 5 of whom are parishioners of Our Lady of Kirkstall. It is supported by the Refugee Council who provide premises and identify children who would benefit. Some of the children who attend the club are new arrivals with a limited knowledge of English, so this is the priority in working with them. Others are more fluent but need help with written English and spelling. Some specialised subject help is also offered, especially in maths.

3.3.4. Other ways in which the parish has supported this action include:

- Collecting clothes, toiletries and toys for distribution either via the St. Vincent Centre in Leeds or City of Sanctuary in Wakefield (Christmas 2017 & 2018; June 2018).
- Promoting the Pope's message for the 104th World Day of Migrants and Refugees, including a homily on the subject (January 2018).
- Collecting signatures on CAFOD campaign cards around the global compacts on refugees and migration (June 2018).
- Lenten Alms in Lent 2018 were dedicated to the Medaille Trust, and a speaker subsequently invited to speak at every Mass.

3.3.5. Of course, throughout the Project, the parish has continued to demonstrate its solidarity with the poor in other ways as well, particularly in its ongoing support for CAFOD, the Sylvia Wright Trust, the Peter Trust and the SVP. There are also monthly Fairtrade stalls at St. Mary's and twice-yearly at the Assumption. Other initiatives include:

- In May 2018, our assistant priest travelled to Malawi, where he previously worked for several years. The parish collected clothes, mobile phones and religious objects which were shipped to Malawi for him to distribute during his visit.
- Lenten Alms in 2019 will be donated to St. George's Crypt, which works with homeless people in Leeds.

4. What has been the impact?

4.1. In March 2019, the Live Simply audit of 2017 was repeated in order to assess how the parish at large viewed the project and whether it had prompted any changes in actual lifestyle. 436 questionnaire forms were returned (representing approx. 80% of adult parishioners) and the results were very positive.

- 77% of respondents read the monthly Live Simply bulletin;
- 42% agreed or strongly agreed that the Project has had an impact on their lifestyle.
- A good number of people (58) chose to include comments and these demonstrate both significant enthusiasm for the Project and the very real practical ways in which people have responded to it in their daily lives.

4.2. When we compare the detailed results of the 2019 audit to those from 2017, we can see some evidence of a change in lifestyle, but for many of the questions asked, it is not very marked. And one of the respondents said about the questionnaire that “more questions were needed for the bigger picture”. However when we read the comments, we do obtain a clearer picture. Common themes echoed by several respondents include:

- Working together as a community: “I think it’s a great thing and focuses our minds as a community.”
- Changes in the way we live our daily lives (and awareness of the reasons that make this important): “The programme has given me an extra push towards living more sustainably.” A lot of people said how much they liked the “practical suggestions” in the Live Simply bulletin.
- Valuable for our children: “It’s a good way to link real world issues with the church for my young children. Helps give a reason and a relevance to church.”

4.3. Among the detailed questions, it is noticeable that 68% now say that they agree or agree strongly that “God’s creation is an important part of my life” (vs. 60% in 2017). And 42% had heard of Laudato Si’ (vs. just 30% in 2017). These two questions provide concrete evidence that we have succeeded in bringing “our community closer to God’s creation”.

4.4. Full question-by-question analysis of the 2019 audit and a comparison with the responses from 2017 has been undertaken and a summary displayed in our 3 churches during May 2019.

4.5. Another key outcome of the Project has been the enthusiasm and participation that we have succeeded in fostering in our children.

4.5.1. The Uniformed Organisations have incorporated the Live Simply objectives into many areas of their activities:

- Engaging with the natural environment and with environmental and social issues as they make progress towards their various badges
- Participation through Church Parade in a number of Live Simply Masses
- Working with the gardening project on a regular and ongoing basis;
- Cubs produced the content for one of the Live Simply bulletins (May 2019)
- One of the speakers who spoke during Mass to introduce the 2019 Audit was an 11 year old scout.

This has been beneficial on both sides by tying their sessions more closely into the life of the wider parish and by building closer links between the generations.

4.5.2. Our 2 parish schools have also supported and referenced the Project in various ways in the course of the 2 years:

- A visit to a mock-up of a “refugee camp” in Horsforth in October 2017
- One pupil stood for “Children’s Mayor” of Leeds on a platform of reducing plastic waste

- Both schools have started an “allotment club”.

It is really helpful when children receive complementary input in church, school and the scouting family.

4.6. Finally, our ambition to build unity across the 3 church communities that make up our parish. Several comments in the 2019 Audit referenced this: “It has helped to bring our parish community together even more.” We have seen through the Audit that many individuals have embraced the Live Simply ethos; this has helped build a shared vision and activities in common across the whole parish. New links have been established, new friendships forged by working across churches and across generations.

4.7. Truly the Live Simply Project has been effective in touching the hearts and lives of our parish community.

5. Moving forwards

5.1. As we approach the end of our initial Live Simply Project, we need to consider how we move forward from here. How can we further support our people in living simply, living sustainably and living in solidarity with the poor?

5.2. A period of discussion is planned for summer 2019 – involving our Parish Priest, the Live Simply Group, the Parish Council and inviting input from all our parishioners, including the children. Feedback from the Audit, especially the comments received, should be helpful in this respect. Further examination of which activities have been particularly successful will also offer guidance (this question was initially considered in planning the second year of the current project). The plan is to agree a way forward at the Parish Council meeting in September 2019.

5.3. In what we do, we will:

- Provide an ongoing perspective on what it means to live simply
- Continue to proclaim the glory of God’s creation and our duty to care for it
- Offer regular opportunities for parishioners to:
 - Understand the underlying causes and broad impact of social injustice
 - Undertake action in the public and private spheres to address those issues
 - Contribute financially to charities seeking to alleviate poverty and injustice
- Help our children to embrace these Gospel values.

5.4. Laudato si’, mi Signore – Praise be to you, my Lord!