



PARISH REPORT (SEPTEMBER 2019 TO JULY 2021)

Overview

This report aims to provide a summary of updates of the scope of activities in the Church of St Michael (CSM) since the Parish Assembly (PA) in August 2019. It aims to address the feedback and areas of concern that were raised by the CSM community as well as take stock of the activities and plans that were laid out for the last two years, especially with the evolving COVID-19 restrictions that are in place.

1) Background

Initial Changes

Father Terence Pereira joined CSM as Parish Priest in 2017 and laid the ground for changes that started taking place in 2018 to revitalise the parish. In December 2017, the new CSM logo was introduced and in January 2018, the new Vision and Mission statements were launched, signaling the start of a new chapter for CSM.

Working with the Parish Pastoral Council (PPC) headed by Marian Xu, plans were formulated and implemented in 2018 and 2019 to focus on reviving the parish through a myriad of activities for parishioners. This was the first and most basic stage of creating a “vibrant” parish, as reflected in our parish vision: A vibrant loving community of disciples making disciples for the Kingdom of God. In 2019, the PPC also focused efforts on intensifying faith formation among parishioners.

The CSM calendars for 2018 and 2019 included social events such as ‘O what a night!’, ‘Meats and Bites’ which created bonding opportunities among parishioners as well as formation events and programmes such as the ‘Burning Bush’, parish/ ministry retreats and camps to awaken and deepen our faith.

This led to general observations and sentiments from among our parishioners that CSM has become livelier, with parishioners appreciating the opportunities to get to know one another and grow in faith.

PA: Feedback from the CSM family

After close to two years of efforts in revitalising the parish, the PPC organised the PA which was held on 25 August 2019. PPC members also held several rounds of focus group discussions prior to the PA with all ministry members to gather feedback on what has been done and what they hoped to see in the parish, moving forward. At the PA, participants also shared their thoughts on how CSM was doing in relation to the parish vision and how we could work together to build our parish community.

Broadly, the PA highlighted five key areas that were of interest and concern to parishioners:

- a) Improving Infrastructure and facilities
- b) Fostering a welcoming, inclusive and integrated community
- c) Formation programmes and deepening of faith
- d) Reaching out to more parishioners
- e) Nurturing an evangelising church

At the PA, nominations were also made for members of the new PPC. On 28 March 2020, after a simple induction programme, a new PPC took over.

II) Addressing the PA's concerns

a) Infrastructure and Facilities Improvements

To better cater to the needs of the parish, addition and alteration works were made to the church building. This was completed in July 2021, after a delay due to COVID-19. These works addressed and fulfilled many parishioners' 'wants' for better facilities in the parish.

Please refer to [Annex A](#) for the 'wishlist' from parishioners.

i) Key infrastructure alterations

- Addition of a 'cry room' in Worship Hall
- Larger adoration room with a more conducive environment
- New pantry/ kitchen area for community bonding
- Repainting of both the Grotto of the Sacred Heart and the Grotto of Mary.
- Renovations and upgrades to classrooms and function rooms
- Creation of an air-conditioned foyer on Level 1 (St John Vianney)
- A new central lift that serves all four floors of the church
- Upgrading of pavements, flooring
- Landscaping improvements

ii) New/ improved facilities

- New toilets with shower facilities
- New pews in Worship Hall
- A parish library was also set up and opened from mid-June 2021
- Installation of water coolers
- Creation of community spaces outside new kitchen/ grotto

Plans are in progress to beautify and decorate the walls of the church and to engage parishioners to co-create the homely environment for our parish to nurture a sense of belonging and ownership. For a start, banners with Scripture verses have been put up along Jalan Semerbak to enhance the branding and visibility of our parish.

b) Fostering a more welcoming, inclusive and integrated community

i) Hospitality training programme

In response to feedback from the PA to build a more welcoming parish and nurture a more loving community, a hospitality training programme has been drawn up and rolled out since early 2021. Two cohorts - the members of the SMM team and wardens - have been trained as they are the first points of contact to parishioners coming for ECs. The programme is being rolled out to all ministry members.

ii) New Family Life Ministry

The new Family Life Ministry is also being set-up to look into the needs of different groups and profiles of CSM parishioners, so as to formulate plans and initiatives to better engage and support them.

III) Adapting to the Impact of COVID-19

COVID-19 hit Singapore in January 2020 and on 14 February 2021, for the first time, masses had to be suspended. The key challenges were to ensure that the spiritual needs of parishioners could be met and that parishioners could remain connected, despite the restrictions amidst the pandemic.

i) Moving the celebration of the Eucharist online

Within a very short time, CSM was able to move its ECs online *via* the Zoom platform. As a result, when Singapore announced that it was going to implement the “circuit breaker” period on 7 Apr, 2 days after Palm Sunday, we were able to celebrate the Easter Triduum and Easter Sunday 2020 online as a CSM family.

To enable more parishioners to participate in the Eucharist with the rest of the CSM family online, especially when the number of physical attendances in church are limited, ECs are accessible on Zoom every Sunday. CSM also started the Children’s Liturgy on the first Sunday of every month from October 2020 to cater to families with young children aged between two and six.

ii) Welcoming parishioners back - Safe reopening

Even as Singapore exited the “circuit breaker” period in June 2020 and moved towards a phased reopening, there were many restrictions governing congregational worship and other activities. Masses and private worship resumed in July, subjected to evolving national restrictions. The parish had to quickly put in place Safe Entry measures and procedures to enable parishioners to worship safely. CSM continues to adapt to the evolving situation today as the COVID-19 situation remains volatile.

Cakes, cookies, CSM masks and cards from the parish’s priests were distributed to parishioners as gestures of welcome and support during the transition period as our church reopened after the “circuit breaker”. A survey was also conducted in December 2020 to gain insights on how CSM can better reach out to parishioners to meet their spiritual needs and encourage more to return to ECs.

The parish continues to adapt and respond quickly to restrictions so that it can cater to as many parishioners coming back safely for physical ECs as possible.

iii) Adapting to parish activities online

In order to comply with the evolving COVID-19 restrictions that were put in place, while resuming some sense of normalcy, CSM has tried to move the bulk of physical activities online, where feasible, using the Zoom platform.

A number of key events in the parish calendar for 2020 and 2021 that were supposed to take place physically were moved online. These include (but are not limited to) Pentecost Rally 2020 and 2021, Easter Octave 2020 and 2021, Bible Symposium 2020, CSM Feast Day celebrations 2020 and Christmas celebrations 2020.

Ministry meetings, talks, prayer and training sessions were also held online since 2020. While inter-ministry retreats could not be held since the start of 2020, Ministry members made an effort to connect online, especially during the height of the pandemic in mid-2020.

Several talks such as 'Art in the Holy Week' and 'Let's talk about exams' were held online. Training sessions continued despite the disruptions caused by COVID-19. New sessions commenced for leadership training, presenters' training and training specific to the needs of Ministries. Arrangements were also made for catechism classes to be held online over Zoom. For the first time, preparations for children receiving their first Holy Communion were also held online over four weeks.

c) Formation and deepening of faith

Despite the pandemic, faith formation sessions and talks continued to be organised for parishioners online, in response to the PA's feedback.

i) Parish retreat 2020 and 2021

In May 2020 and June 2021, the annual parish retreat was also conducted over five days online, with short talks in the morning, afternoon and evening each day conducted by Fr Terence. Participants were able to take time out of their work schedules to participate in the online parish retreats, given the greater flexibility of work from home arrangements.

ii) Bible studies and information sessions

Since 2020, bible studies, formation and information sessions have been conducted on a regular basis once parishioners started getting more comfortable with using the Zoom platform. Some of the sessions that have been conducted included: Praying the Psalms, Lectio Divina, Bible studies sessions on St Paul's letters to the Romans, Book of Ecclesiastes and Book of Samuel, as well as sessions on Church history and Church documents like *Lumen Gentium* and *Christifideles Laici*.

iii) Prayer sessions

Over the last one and a half years, the parish has also gathered as a community online to pray the Divine Office prayers (Lauds, Sext and Vespers) every day. Other prayer sessions that have been held online include the Intercessory prayers, rosary recitations, Divine Mercy devotions and the monthly CSM Columbarium prayers. In July 2020, about 20 parishioners also took part in the Week of Guided Prayer programme facilitated by seven Sojourners' Companions.

The Zoom platform has made these sessions and initiatives more accessible and convenient to parishioners when they are able to log on from the comfort of their homes, especially for those who were able to work from home for most parts of 2020 and 2021.

iv) Interim physical activities

For a short period of time, when the COVID-19 situation appeared to be stabilising, the prevailing guidelines allowed for the following activities to be conducted physically, including:

- Burning Bush 4 commenced in April 2021 (currently suspended)
- Holy Spirit Retreat (27-28 February 2021)
- Monthly Evening Brew sessions (resumed in January 2020, currently suspended)
- Monthly Praise and Worship sessions (resumed in September 2020)

Please refer to Annex A for a list of the examples of activities that were suspended due to COVID-19 and those that were carried out online during this period.

d) Reaching out to more parishioners

In order to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 on the spiritual life of parishioners and to encourage more to come back to church after the “circuit-breaker” period, two outreach activities were held. In addition, priests from CSM as well as the NCC groups also made telephone and house calls to parishioners living in the McNair and Jalan Bahagia areas to connect with them and offer spiritual support.

i) Outreach in Oct 2020

50 volunteers reached out to different blocks in the St George’s estate to distribute welfare packs to residents and parishioners.

ii) Outreach in March to May 2021

Volunteers reached out to HDB blocks to collect data on the Catholics within the parish boundary. The goal was to target the estimated 30,000 HDB households. This has been suspended due to the national COVID-19 restrictions under the Phase 2A (Heightened Alert) with the increase in the number of cases in Singapore.

IV) Embarking on the Parish 2.0 Journey

e) Nurturing an evangelising church

The COVID-19 pandemic has fundamentally changed the way we worship and uncovered some areas for improvement to strengthen the spiritual lives of individual parishioners, to take steps towards making more disciples for the Kingdom of God, in line with our parish vision. Since October 2020, CSM has started on the journey towards systemically laying the foundation to renew the parish, moving it from a “maintenance church” to a “mission-centred church”. A series of initiatives has taken place to chart the new direction, moving forward:

Oct/ Nov 2020	Parish Planning 2021
Jan 2021	Ministry Assembly to provide an overview for the strategic directions for the reorientation of CSM
Feb 2021	Commencement of Combined Ministry Meetings to build greater synergies and cohesiveness among ministry members
Feb to Apr 2021	CSM Situation Sensing Exercise to take an objective stock-take of the situation in the parish vis-à-vis the Parish 2.0 vision. This culminated in a three-day Parish Planning Retreat (23 – 25 Apr 2021).
May 2021	Parish leaders and Ministry heads briefing on plans to embark on a disciples making journey

A Discipleship Roadmap has been drawn up and there are plans to roll it out for a small group of Ministry members, for a start. Participants on the roadmap will start their journey using a Discipleship Assessment Tool, that has been developed, to gauge where they are on the Roadmap.

Plans are also in the pipeline to put in place systems for the parish in 10 different areas.

Conclusion

Notwithstanding the profound and disruptive impact of COVID-19, CSM has, over the last two years, kept on track in responding to the concerns and hopes raised by parishioners in the five key areas. While many planned initiatives, especially social activities, had to be put on hold, CSM has managed to adapt quickly to the pandemic to work within the circumstances to continue to meet the spiritual needs and growth of parishioners.

Going forward, the parish will continue to put in place plans that will focus on key areas of discipleship, outreach and evangelisation, community-building and faith formation.

*Parish Pastoral Council
July 2021*

Infrastructure/ facilities 'wishlist' from parishioners
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Bigger adoration space and improvements in the adoration room ● Café/ expansion of canteen/ kitchen ● Change of pews ● Children's corner/playground ● Community garden with edible plants ● Cry room in worship hall ● A mini-library ● Prayer petition box ● Stronger WiFi signals ● Water coolers ● Improvements to the Grotto of the Sacred Heart and Grotto of Mary ● Improvements to the toilets with shower facilities ● Soundproofing meeting rooms ● Study room ● Banners in church compound to evangelise
Examples of activities put on hold due to COVID-19
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● All parish social events such as the family camps, sports carnival, bonding activities (e.g. prawning, bowling, movie + BBQ night etc.) ● Eucharist Explained ● Monthly Holy Hour ● Inter-ministry retreats ● Most of the "Let's Talk About" series (e.g. vocations, financial stewardship, health) ● Neocatechumenate Way programme ● Family camps ● Walk in the Spirit Seminar ● Introduction to Mariology
Examples of activities that took place in 2020/ 2021
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Brain Gym, Talks (exam, pornography etc), Art in the Holy Week etc. ● Holy Spirit Retreat (Feb 2021) ● Week of Guided Prayer ● Online Holy Week celebrations (2020/ 2021), Online Easter Octave (2020/ 2021) ● Online Pentecost Rally ● Outreach to St George's, Outreach to households in parish boundary (suspended) ● Baptism of elects in Sept, Dec 2020, Mar 2021, Baptism of elderly in Dec 2020 ● Parish Planning ● Bible Study series: Book of Samuel, St Paul's Letter to the Romans, Ecclesiastes ● Online Parish Retreats (2020/ 2021) ● Formation: Church history, Church documents - Gaudium Et Spes, Lumen Gentium, Christifideles Laici, Praying the Psal ● Bible Symposium (2020) ● Feast Day Celebrations (2020)