**Statement regarding Gardiner Street Parish**

The Irish Jesuit Province intends Gardiner St Parish to become part of the neighbouring parish of the Pro-Cathedral from 1st August 2024. The Church of St Francis Xavier would then cease to be a parish church and will continue to be a public church attached to the Jesuit religious community, as was the case prior to 1974. St Francis Xavier’s became a parish church only 50 years ago when established by Archbishop Dermot Ryan in 1974.

Even without the status of being a parish church, St Francis Xavier’s will continue to provide public Masses, confessions, devotions, funerals, and the Blessed John Sullivan Masses. The Novena of Grace and the Sacred Heart Novena, so identified with Gardiner St, will also continue. Baptisms, confirmations, first communions, weddings, and the Easter Vigil, however, will take place in St Mary’s Pro-Cathedral as the parish church.

St Francis Xavier’s, with its Jesuit community, will continue to be an integral part of the Matt Talbot Parish Partnership, which includes the parishes of the Pro-Cathedral, Sean McDermott St, and Berkley Rd. St Francis Xavier’s will also have representation on the Pro-Cathedral’s new Parish Pastoral Council to be established in September 2024.

Outgoing Parish Priest of Gardiner St Fr Niall Leahy SJ says that back in 1974 there were many more Jesuits who could take part in the day-to-day running of a parish with a growing Catholic population. “Nowadays,” he adds, “Jesuit numbers have fallen considerably, as have the number of Catholics living within the parish boundary. The Irish Province of the Jesuits decided it would make more sense to have the Pro-Cathedral as the parish church with the Jesuits and lay people at St Francis Xavier’s working alongside it, sharing the Mass schedule and supporting other ministries and outreach.”

The Archbishop of Dublin, Dermot Farrell concurred. He asked Fr Kieran McDermott, the Administrator of St Mary’s Pro-Cathedral, to assist with the transition and integration of St Francis Xavier’s. Fr Kieran says: “Over the past two years the leadership of both faith communities have been working well together as part of the larger Matt Talbot partnership. The integration will mean greater pastoral planning and better use of our respective resources.”

Fr Kieran also notes that in the Archdiocese of Dublin the *Building Hope* pastoral initiative involves people and priests creating a joint mission in a changing Dublin. He references a quotation from Pope Francis, shared by Archbishop Farrell in his homily at the Chrism Mass last year when he emphasised the shared co-responsibility for mission.

*Our first duty is not to be a Church that is perfectly organised, any company can do this, but a Church that, in the name of Christ, stands in the midst of people’s troubled lives… walking in the midst of and alongside our people, learning to listen and to dialogue, cooperating as ministers with one another and with the laity. Let me repeat this important word:‘together’”* (Pope Francis address, St Theresa’s Cathedral, Juba, South Sudan, 4th Feb 2024).

Fr Niall says that most of the local people attending Gardiner St will notice very little difference as a result of the change. “We Jesuits hope to continue and enhance our ministry in collaboration with our lay colleagues and the diocese,” he notes, adding: “Together we will serve the local church by continuing to develop our adult faith formation programmes, Ignatian spirituality courses and youth ministry. Recent fundraising efforts and significant financial investment has ensured that the St Francis Xavier’s will continue to be a hub for this mission”.

The Church of St Francis Xavier also offers space to local community groups in an area that has suffered unfairly and disproportionately from the effects of homelessness, poverty, and drug addiction.  “We have three St Vincent de Paul groups here that look after those in need in the area,” says Fr Niall. “The church rooms also host 12-step recovery groups such as Narcotics Anonymous, Al-anon and Gamblers Anonymous.”

Five years ago, the Jesuits took over the running of Gardiner St Primary School from the Sisters of Charity. This school will continue to be part of the Jesuit Education Trust. The children will make their First Communion and Confirmation in the Pro-Cathedral, the parish church.

Since January this year, a series of consultations began with clergy, the respective parish pastoral councils, school community and staff. These conversations will continue with parishioners and volunteers, those involved in lay ministries are invited to participate in parish gatherings to be held on 1st May at 7.15 pm, Gardiner Street and 16th May at 7.15 pm St Kevin's Oratory, Pro-Cathedral.

2024 marks the 50th anniversary of the inception of Gardiner St parish. “Back then nobody might have foreseen the way vocations would decline, and religious practice would change in Ireland,” says Fr Leahy. “But we Jesuits, along with our lay colleagues, are committed to responding to the needs and challenges of today. We are privileged to be able to do this with our neighbouring parishes working together to serve the wonderful people of this inner-city area. That’s what our founder St Ignatius would have wanted. With their help, and the grace of God, that’s what we will continue to do.”

**ENDS 20th April 2024**