

Parish Anchors

Throughout the Church's history, people have been called to quiet places to pray.

In our communities, we have people who are also called to focus on prayer – especially intercessory prayer. Quite often, they are older and have been active in the life of their parish or school community but are now less able to be involved in this way. Their wisdom and experience gives them great insight into the need for prayer and where their attention might need to be directed.

Other people may be younger – with young families, for example. They are not at a stage in their lives when they can give much time to parish activities but they can form a praying community at home too. We coined the term anchors since it reminds us of the word anchorite. This was given to someone who sensed a powerful call to separate from the world at large and to be given space in a local church where their presence and prayer blessed the community. It was not unknown for the person to be sealed into the room and even to have a funeral service as a sign of their total commitment to their work. It was as if they were praying on the threshold between this life and the next.

We do not ask this of our anchors!

In developing this ministry, we are acknowledging the power of prayer and, especially the prayer of those who may be approaching that threshold between this world and the next: the infirm – the elderly – the sick (and particularly those who are terminally ill). We also value those who pray with their children and teach them the value of praying for others.

There is no formal rite of commissioning someone undertaking this ministry so a very simple one has been prepared.

A few guidelines could be useful.

·Your anchors are already there and will be known to parish priests, deacons and Eucharistic Ministers. Ask their permission for their name to be put forward. Emphasise that it is a simple ministry and one they are probably undertaking already.

·If people are well enough, invite them to a short service for the commissioning – with refreshments afterwards. Even housebound people can often come out for a short while with suitable transport and it emphasises that they are still part of the community.

·Offer a holding cross, candle or anchor-bookmark or pin-badge as a symbol of their work.

·Think about having a Coordinator. This is not someone who checks up on people but who keeps in touch with the Anchors and ensures that they know of any special intentions for prayer. These can range from this month's Finance Committee – to the First Holy Communion session – to the illness of another parishioner (with that parishioner's consent).

·Remind Bidding Prayer writers to include Anchors in the intercessions from time to time.

·Send Christmas/ Easter/ patronal feast cards to the Anchors who are not able to be physically present for the celebrations.

·Hold an annual "renewal of commitment" and light refreshments event... perhaps involving the local school.

·A tri-fold information leaflet is also available..