

## **CHAIRMANS REPORT – PARISH COUNCIL AGM – 12<sup>th</sup> June 2012**

This report provides a summary of some of the work of the Parish Council over the past few months since the last AGM back in June last year. It will also look at some of the other events which have taken place which have provided a witness of Christ's work both within the Parish and the wider communities of Tolworth and Surbiton.

I would like to start by thanking all members of The Council for their work throughout the year, and especially Elspeth who has tirelessly supplied us with minutes of our meetings.

Since last year, we have held a number of social events in the parish which have been well supported, including the St Petersburg Blagovest Ensemble with some 140 people in attendance, the annual parish meal with around 100 people, and several events organized as part of the Lenten Project.

The spiritual and prayer life of the parish is, and must remain centre to our existence as a Catholic. The liturgies this year have been carried out with much thought, grace and reverence by all involved. We currently have nearly 1300 people attending mass at the weekend, which is a figure which continues to rise. Weekday masses continue to be very well supported, as is holy hour on Fridays. Once again, midnight mass on New Year's Eve went well, and the return of Evening Prayer of the Church throughout Lent was also very well supported. The carol service just before Christmas was also a great success.

The Sacramental Programs have been run, as always, very well, and our thanks must go to all of the catechists involved. The First Holy Communion Programme this year has over 60 young people preparing to receive our Lord for the first time, there were 40 in the Confirmation programme, and as always, it was a privilege for all present at the Easter Vigil, to witness the climax to the journey of all those who had been part of the RCIA program for the last few months.

At last year's AGM, we were looking forwards to the New Translation of the Roman Missal, which has now been fully implemented. For those who have accepted this transition with an open mind, it has given the opportunity to re-connect with the liturgy as we study and learn the new texts. Along with this is the new music which has been written to reflect the truer translation of the original Latin texts which all Masses are getting to grips with. It is essential that we all find our own way to engage with the liturgy in order to keep our experience of Mass alive and fresh for ourselves, and in order that we can pass on our faith to our children and the young people in our care. Congratulations must go to the clergy and musicians in finding their way through these changes, along with maintaining a degree of sanity!

Let us remember the many organisations in the parish who work tirelessly week in and week out for the good of our community: from those involved with the liturgies of the Church, the cleaners, catechists, prayer groups, musicians, servers, welcomers, those working with the youth of the parish, the school, finance committees, maintenance, and everyone who helps in any way, large or small. The Lenten Project has, as always, been superbly run and they must be congratulated on raising another superb amount of money, made even harder again this year due to the economic situation of the country and individuals. OLI is a large organisation, so we are grateful to everyone for their contribution.

Our primary school is not only an incredibly important asset to the parish as a whole, it is an integral part of the triad which is so vital to the passing on of the faith to future generations: that of Church, Family and School. We wish the school, teachers, parents and children every success in all their ventures over the coming year.

The fabric of the church building and grounds takes much looking after due to the large volumes of people who use it and the Council would like to thank the members of the Maintenance Committee for all of their efforts. The narthex has now received its new lighting, and it is hoped that in the coming weeks some tidying and re-organisation of notice boards can take place. The RDJ Room has been tidied, and in the coming weeks will receive new paint and decoration, along with new curtains – all users will be encouraged to keep it tidy so it does not return to a general “dumping ground.”

Looking ahead to the coming year, the parish will celebrate on 31<sup>st</sup> May next year the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Consecration of the building. The Archbishop will visit on that evening and celebrate Mass with us, and we will have some form of celebration with refreshments in the hall afterwards. On 21<sup>st</sup> July (next month), we have the Churches Together in Surbiton Family Fun Day using the Olympics as the theme (it is actually in breach of copyright to call it an “Olympic” Fun Day as we cannot use the brand, so it is just a Family Fun Day!) and OLI is one of the key players in that. Additionally, we are looking at twinning with an overseas church or community and we hope that will come to fruition in the coming months and that as many people

as possible will become excited in building relationships with that community. We also have our pilgrimage to the Holy Land coming up in October, and some of our parishioners have just returned from Lourdes.

The Year of Faith starts in October, and as part of that we hope to be able to become more proactive with our message of evangelization, especially where “resting” Catholics are concerned. As Christians, we all have a responsibility of evangelising, and the Council will be discussing ways of reaching out to the community especially during this Year of Faith. Representatives of the parish have recently been on a course entitled ‘Crossing the Threshold’ which has given many fantastic ideas for our consideration.

Of course, evangelization, being the process in which the Church seeks to spread the Gospel and the knowledge of the Gospel throughout the world, in many respects must start with ourselves as we challenge our own faith and knowledge of scripture, which in turn gives us the tools we need to look beyond the comforts of our own lives and spread The Word. The ‘Catholicism’ course which Fr Anthony has recently started (with much hard work being done by Marie-Helene Cook) is a fantastic opportunity to look in much more detail into the teachings of the Church and the words of scripture, and I for one would commend it to all.

Also, along the theme of “reaching out,” it is fantastic that the parish will be joining other Christian Churches in Surbiton and Kingston by supporting the Kingston Foodbank. As individuals, we might find spreading The Word through evangelization somewhat challenging, but no one can say that supplying some items of packet food each month is beyond our comfort zone, or responsibility. I hope that everyone gets behind this great cause, and we thank Helen and her team for the work undertaken so far to get this off the ground.

Our young people are a very important part of parish life. We have already mentioned the school and the catechetical programmes, but let us not forget the Children’s Liturgy and Young Peoples Group. Elspeth has recently done tremendous work breathing new energy and focus into the Children’s Liturgy, and we thank her, and all of the helpers for their commitment and dedication to this important work.

The Young People’s Group goes from strength to strength with over 40 using the group regularly, and a further dozen or so not quite so regularly. The “fertilizer sessions” (catechesis) held at the end of each session, facilitate their continued journey in faith, and they have requested a weekend retreat to further deepen their relationship with God and his Church. They will attend the Diocesan Youth Centre on the first weekend of Advent for a special Advent Retreat. Of course, World Youth Day last year was a massive success and in many respects, changed the lives of all of those involved, and although we will not be travelling to Rio next year due to the ridiculous costs, the parish is currently working with the diocese to plan a diocesan pilgrimage to Rome instead. A huge vote of thanks must be passed on to all of the leaders for their commitment to our young people.

In time for next year’s Parish Council AGM, it is my intention to discuss ways in making it more “relevant” to the parish as a whole and change the format. The Parish Council has its own projects and ongoing discussions, but under its “umbrella” also reside the Maintenance Committee, Liturgy Committee, and Finance Committee, all of which effectively operate independently of what we call The Parish Council. Next year, I hope to have a representative and report from all of those committees, and an opportunity for questions and comments to be passed to each of them from the floor. Along with suitable “marketing” of the event, I would hope that more people would come along to hear a fuller account of the life of the parish: in other words, the AGM becomes less of a “Parish Council” AGM, and more of a “Parish” AGM.

We are, of course, very fortunate in this parish to have three ordained ministers who work tirelessly for the good of the parish. Deacon Al does so much for the parishioners of the parish from visiting the sick and housebound to looking after Tolworth Hospital, and I know he is a great support to Fr’s Anthony and Arbo. We thank Al and Trudie for all that they do for us.

We were reminded of priestly ministry last weekend in the newsletter when Fr Anthony mentioned the “130 years celebration of priestly ministry” due to be celebrated next month in Aylesford. No, Fr Anthony is not that old himself! This is the celebration of Jubilees of three of our Bishops, but it does serve as a great reminder of the lifelong commitment our priests have made. Fr’s Anthony and Arbo have given their lives to the service of others and it is a privilege to have the opportunity of witnessing their ministry. On behalf of the whole parish, I would like to extend a huge thank you to them for all that they do and assure them of our love, prayers and support in the year to come.

*Given by Andrew Richardson, Chairman of the Parish Council, at the AGM on 12<sup>th</sup> June 2012*