

CHAIRMANS REPORT – PARISH COUNCIL AGM – 16th September 2014

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, Surbiton, and beyond. I would like to start by thanking all members of The Council for their work throughout the year.

At the last meeting we spoke about the many activities and events taking place to mark the 50th Anniversary of the Consecration of the church building. The one "event" which had not taken place at that stage was the installation of the new Consecration Candle Sconces (which are located below the 12 crosses in the building where the sacred oils were applied) to replace the ones which were there which were rather unattractive and unfit for purpose. They have since been installed and I hope you agree with me that they look fantastic (although the eagle eyed amongst you will have noticed that they are disappearing two at a time to be re-lacquered)!

The Year of Faith concluded back in November. As this drew to a close, we felt it was important to find new and creative ways to assist people and the parish in becoming more proactive with our message of evangelization. Our Stewardship sub-committee was formed and although still very much in its infancy has already achieved some amazing things through the dedication of its members: we now have a twice annual New Parishioner evening where new parishioners come along for a cheese and wine evening to properly meet the clergy and some members of the community, the number of times tea and coffee are served a month after a Sunday Mass has been extended, Lenten discussion and prayer groups took place culminating with a beautiful penitential service, Holy Hour and Mass are now held on the first Friday evening of each month, and the course on Evangelisation started two weekends ago. Evangelization of course is the process in which the Church seeks to spread the Gospel and the knowledge of the Gospel throughout the world. It is essential that we all find our own way to engage with the teachings the Church, with scripture, and our experience of Mass and prayer, in order to keep our Faith alive and fresh for ourselves, but also in order that we can pass on our Faith to our children and the young people in our care. The Parish Library is an amazing resource which we can all dip into, and I am sure they would welcome any number of new members!

The sub-committee of The Council tasked with raising funds for the Old Chapel has worked extremely hard alongside that of the maintenance committee and we are grateful to all of them, and all those who have donated money for this cause. As you know, we are now at 68% of target which is fantastic. However, we do have a little way to go if we are to get to the target amount by February next year: it is essential that we achieve this if we are to undertake the building works next year, so a final push by everyone would be gratefully received. I am sure Richard will mention more about this in his report, but we are all grateful to him and the Maintenance committee for all their work on the fabric of the buildings throughout the year.

Earlier this year we ran a pilgrimage to Rome and Assisi which was a huge success. I am sure you have read the write up on the parish website and you will have seen that our trip was clearly filled with much joy and happiness. It was indeed a privilege to visit the place of the ministry of St Francis, and also where St Clare lived and worked and where the order of the Poor Clare's started.

Never let it be said that the parishioners of OLI would do anything for a party! The annual parish meal back in January was a sell out as always. The Lenten project events seemed to be very well attended. Fr Ford's party was a roaring success (other than the fact that star of the show was unable to attend), but it was great that he could celebrate Mass with us a few weeks later. Later this month, we have Fr Anthony's leaving party, and next month Fr Edward's welcome party after his Mass of Induction. In December, we will celebrate the 80th Anniversary of the Formation of the Parish, and we will have a Mass on Friday 5th December (which is more convenient than on the patronal day itself) and a party afterwards. If anyone can think of any other excuse for a party, then let me know!

Storage is of course at a premium as so many people and groups use the buildings on site. The hall is no exception, especially with the building of the new school kitchen in what was the storage room. The old white tables stored at the back of the hall were heavy, and splintered. The blue chairs took a phenomenal amount of storage space. So, working with the school, we have sourced new tables and chairs which arrived during August, and are in use today. The next project in the hall is to re-order and refurbish the parish kitchen.

We pay tribute to The Lenten Project team which has, as always, worked so hard, 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. Thank you also to all those who supported the various events and for helping to raise what I believe is over £20,000.

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 some 1200 people attending Mass at the weekend, and weekday Masses continue to be very well supported, as is holy hour on Fridays.

The Sacramental Programs have been run well, and our thanks must go to all of the catechists involved. The First Holy Communion Programme this year had a record number of young people preparing to receive our Lord for the first time, there were 45 in the Confirmation course, 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.

Let us remember some of 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, UCM, KSC, those working with the youth of the parish, the school, finance committees, maintenance committee, and everyone who helps in any way, large or small. 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.

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 Groups. The Children's Liturgy goes from strength to strength and we are grateful to Elspeth and her team for all that they do. The Young People's Group (known as Odyssey), for school years 9 and over, sees the members benefiting from the social time spent together, along with the catechetical time held at the end of each session to facilitate their continued journey in faith, and once again, they had amazing weekend Advent Retreat on the first weekend of Advent last year to further deepen their relationship with God and his Church. However, the huge pressures on young people these days with homework and other commitments at the weekends does make it increasingly more and more difficult to recruit, so it is vital that all parents get behind this important part of parish life to ensure it is still here this time next year. It is very exciting that the younger Junior Youth Club for those in school years 7 and 8 is now over a year old, and this has been a fantastic addition to all of the youth or young people related activities within the parish. The young people there really seem to appreciate the facility to be able to meet with their friends in a warm and welcoming environment. They, however, are not immune to the issues of recruitment either, and we really wish them every success in finding a plentiful supply of year 7 children to fill the places left by those who have moved on due to age. A huge vote of thanks must be passed on to all of the leaders of all groups for their commitment to our young people.

Speaking of young people, we must pay tribute to Elaine who runs the Parish Office with so much skill, patience, and organization, and thank her for all she does for the parish.

Having talked about some of the various groups in the parish, and some of what is going on for the good of the parish community, and further afield, I cannot finish without mentioning the 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 preparing those for baptism and so on, and I know he is a great support to the clergy. We thank Al and Trudie for all that they do for us.

Fr Tom has now been a priest for over a year and I am sure everyone would join me in saying what a privilege it has been to get to know him and share in the first year of his priestly ministry, and thank him for all that he does for us.

Fr Edward has just joined us, and we welcome him to our community and our parish, and wish him well for the future.

Of course, as much as we can look forward at an AGM to what is still to come, it is with massive sadness that we have had to say goodbye to our dear friend and shepherd, Fr Anthony. For 14 years he has led us as a community and helped us shape the parish into what it is today: it is warm and friendly, it has beautiful liturgies, it is a home to many people no matter what their background, it is a place which I, and I am sure you, are proud. We will thank him formally later this month, but as far as this AGM is concerned, let it be noted that we offer him our heartfelt thanks for all he has done for us. We thank him for his friendship and his accessibility at all times. We thank him for the opportunity of working with him, getting to know him, and sharing social times with him and for the laughs, the many many laughs that we shared. We wish him well in his new parish, and assure him of our love and prayers now, and always. He will indeed be sorely missed.

Given by Andrew Richardson, Chairman of the Parish Council, at the AGM on 16th September 2014