

CHAIRMANS REPORT – PARISH COUNCIL AGM – 9th June 2015

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 September 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.

The work of the Council is in part organizing things which don't fit within the remit of any other parish organization, and in part a consultative body for the Parish Priest to gain the opinion of a group of people which represent the wider community. I would like to thank the Council for their work throughout this past year and for their commitment to all that The Council has been involved with.

You cannot help but have noticed that the narthex is much tidier than it has been for a long time, and the notice boards much more organised and accessible than they have ever been. In due course, we plan to re-decorate this area of the church building and try to make it lighter.

Through liaising with RBK Council, they have very kindly painted a "Keep Clear" sign in the road making it much safer when turning right into the entrance driveway to the premises. The Council has also been lobbying RBK to try to reverse the plans of some of the local roads being turned into permit holders only. If this were to go ahead, the church car park could easily end up being the overflow to the local streets which would have an adverse effect on parishioners accessing the buildings. Safety would also be a grave concern.

Back in December, we were very pleased to welcome Bishop Paul to the parish to help us celebrate our patronal feast. Not only our patronal feast, but the 80th anniversary of the formation of the parish. In line with repeated requests for us to organise more socials within the parish, after a beautiful Mass, we held a social in the hall to celebrate this amazing milestone. It was a great shame however, that attendance on the night was rather poor, so if we are going to go to the trouble of organizing socials in the future, we would encourage people to get behind them and support them.

Just after Easter, we held our annual parish meal, and although down in attendance from previous years, the 70 or so people who did attend had an amazing night, and we will definitely be repeating this annual event next year.

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 reached our target which is fantastic and that has allowed Richard to put the job out to tender and we hope that building work will start next month. 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.

Our Stewardship Committee has continued to work well behind the scenes. Our Taize service in Unity Week was a huge success. Coffee after Mass continues to develop, although it must be said that more support from people in using this facility would not go amiss. We have held two meetings looking at the ministry of welcome and look forward to developing this vital ministry in the months ahead. 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 new SVP group has started to meet, and once the administration associated with setting this up is complete, along with CRB checks and so on, they will be in a position to start their valuable work in and around the parish.

In the last 5 years we have run two hugely successful pilgrimages to The Holy Land, and one to Rome and Assisi. We will continue this tradition later this year by travelling to Paris as is currently being advertised, and we hope to tour the sacred sites of Italy in the summer of 2017.

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 37 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.

Our young people are a very important part of parish life, so let us thank all those who work with our young people. The Children's Liturgy goes from strength to strength and we are grateful to all those who run this group. Unfortunately, due to lack of support from young people and their parents, it was very sad that our Young People's Group, known as Odyssey, had to close its doors back in November after 8 years. This has left a hole going forwards for post confirmation age young people which is far from satisfactory, but it is where we are. However, we have arranged to take most of this year's confirmation group back to Whitstable, the Diocesan Youth Centre, for an Advent Retreat this November. The leaders of the Junior Youth Club for those in school years 7 and 8 must be congratulated for all they do. They, however, are not immune to the issues of recruitment either, and we really wish them every success in finding sufficient adults to help run this group as we do not want them to go the same way as Odyssey.

Our primary school is not only an 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.

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, flower arrangers, catechists, prayer groups, musicians, servers, welcomers, UCM, KSC, J&P, 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. We must also pay tribute to all those who have been instrumental in raising money this year in the Lenten Project and for all those who ran, and supported, the various events.

In the Roman Catholic Church, a parish is described as *"a stable community of the faithful within a Particular Church, whose pastoral care has been entrusted to a parish priest under the authority of the diocesan bishop."* Of course, the parish priest is not expected to run the parish entirely on his own, but with the help and support of volunteers who take on many roles within the parish in order to make it tick. Whether a role takes many hours to fulfil, or a relatively short amount of time, it makes no difference: all are vital to the wellbeing, continuation, and indeed development of the parish as a stable community of, and for, the faithful. The good people who choose to give of their time do so voluntarily, and fit their work within the parish around employment, family life, children and so on: they work selflessly for the good of others, and we owe them all a massive vote of thanks for all that they do.

It is of course disappointing, therefore, that on occasions, some people within the parish, a minority of course, criticise others and cause upset by what they say and also by their actions. This is naturally quite hurtful to those on the receiving end when all they are doing is their best for others. It is not just our volunteers who sometimes receive this abuse, but also the clergy. We all have a responsibility to think before we criticise or attack others: we are a community, and should behave as such, and remember that those who are working for the good of the community are doing their best and sacrificing their own valuable time for the benefit of others.

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 Chris continues to hear confessions on Saturdays and we are grateful to him for that.

Fr Tom has now been a priest for nearly two years now 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 years of his priestly ministry, and thank him for all that he does for us.

Fr Ed has been with us for almost a year now and has done a valiant job in what has been, at times, quite trying circumstances, whilst also trying to settle into his new home. I am sure I can speak on behalf of everyone here today in saying that we are truly grateful that he is with us in our parish, and we will continue to offer him our support throughout the next year as we continue to work together in building an even stronger community here in Tolworth for all of the faithful who make up this wonderful, vibrant, and diverse parish of ours.

Given by Andrew Richardson, Chairman of the Parish Council, at the AGM on 9th June 2015