

CHAIRMANS REPORT – PARISH COUNCIL AGM – 14th September 2010

The past year has been somewhat more bitty than usual, with fewer meetings held than normal due to the absence of Fr Anthony. For that reason, I am sure you will be glad to know, my report will be somewhat shorter than usual!

On that note, Fr Anthony, can I say how delighted and relieved we all are that you are back amongst us, and we all hope that it will remain that way for many years to come!

This report provides a summary of some of the work of the Parish Council over the last year, but also 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. The Council over the coming year will continue to act in its role as an advisory council to the parish priest on a number of issues, and looks forward to undertaking any special projects as required.

Back in November, The Council spent a day of reflection on the elements of the parish survey which was completed in mass during one weekend in September. This report has allowed the Council to form priorities in various areas of the parish which it needs to look at, and it will continue to use this document in the year to come. The document will, in fact, form the backbone of Council discussions for a 2 year period.

At the beginning of this year, The Council asked Christine to take charge of the music at the 9am mass and to encourage new additions to their ranks, which she has done to great success. We wish them well in their endeavours and hope this group continues to grow under her expert leadership.

It has not gone un-noticed that the 9am mass needs some TLC to make it a time more open to prayer and reflection, and a place where young and old can worship in harmony together. We hope and pray that in the coming weeks and months a better balance can be found between some acceptable noise level due to the nature of the mass, and time for silence and prayer.

The survey makes it evident that only a relatively small number of people actively get involved in the life of the parish outside of mass, and there is a long way to go, especially with regards to the young families, in getting them to be more involved in the life of the parish. It is good to see everyone at mass on Sunday, but just "ticking a box" and not re-appearing till next Sunday, does nothing to bring new blood into all areas of parish life, or foster a feeling of community or sense of belonging.

That said, the Parish Meal was held in January with over 100 people enjoying a fantastic evening of food, wine, and chat and was an outstanding success. Congratulations to those organising this event, and to echo the words of many in attendance – roll on next years!

Another event which drew huge crowds, and indeed standing room only in the church was the occasion of Fr Chris O'Brien's Golden Jubilee of his anniversary of ordination to the priesthood. To see Fr Chris celebrate a large parish mass again moved so many people, and the gathering in the hall afterwards showed just how much he was loved by the parish as a whole as stories reminiscing his time as curate were shared.

Last year we reported that we had started gathering thoughts and comments from the wider parish to see if we should become a fair trade parish. We already are in many respects, as we use fair trade products at many public meetings, and we sell merchandise at the end of mass, but the question is whether we should adopt the logo or not. Many of the parish groups who commented on this issue said they approved of become a fair trade parish, and after consideration, the parish priest has given the go ahead for that to happen. Clearly individual

groups must be allowed to run their meetings their own way and provide refreshments as they see appropriate, but the parish will furnish each meeting room with a supply of fair trade tea and coffee and keep them stocked in the future to make using these products at meetings as easy as possible.

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, whether that be Easter or Christmas, masses with the Bishop, or normal weekend mass. 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. We had over 200 people at midnight mass on New Years Eve, and the return of Evening Prayer of the Church throughout Lent was also very well supported. The service of Nine Lessons and Carols and social afterwards which was held for the first time last December drew over 100 people and was a truly uplifting experience.

The Sacramental Programmes 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 had over 60 young people receive our Lord for the first time, there were nearly 50 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 programme for the last few months.

Evangelisation is one of the key focuses of any parish, and so too was the fun day on 2nd August last year and again on 8th August this year in the Fishponds in Surbiton. Known as Re:Act, and facilitated by the organisation Urban Saints, this gave 8 of the local Christian churches the opportunity to come together for fun and friendship, finishing with a Church Outdoors ecumenical service. As part of our Christian lives, we all have a responsibility of evangelising, and this gave us as Catholics the chance to take part in something that does not always come naturally to many of us. This event was attended by some 1000 local people last year, and 1500 this year.

Thirty parishioners are departing to the Holy Land at the end of next month, and I can tell you that we are very excited at the prospect of walking in the footsteps of Jesus as we re-trace his life from the Christmas Story, through His working Ministry, and ending with the Easter story. Rest assured, we will keep you in our prayers.

The above is really a brief overview of the activities of the Parish Council and Parish as a whole over the last year. I would like to thank all members of the Council past and present for their commitment and dedication in getting involved in the life of the parish in this way.

Let us also not forget 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, those working with the youth of the parish, the school, finance committees, and everyone who helps in any way, large or small. The Lenten Project has, as always, been superbly run by Justine and Petra, and they, and their committee must be congratulated on raising another superb amount of money, made even harder 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.

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. They have undertaken many maintenance issues during the past year, including the re-laying of the speed bumps which we had received many complaints about. They are currently working on the plans for the Chapel of Remembrance which we hope will be built in the near future.

The Year of the Priest ended in June with a mass to mark the event. In his pastoral letter to mark the start of the year, The Archbishop said that "without priesthood, there can be no Eucharist, which is not our own creation, but a gift that empowers us to live in love and becomes the source of life itself." The Year of the Priest was an opportunity to thank God for our priests who lead us in worship and who give their lives for their people, although that thanks and consideration should not be just limited to the past year. The Church (with a big "C") must do all that it can, and indeed far more than it is at present, to encourage vocations to the priesthood and the religious life in order that future generations may feel the love and support we receive from our clergy.

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 the marriage preparation course, to visiting the sick and housebound, and I know he is a great support to Fr's Anthony and Arbo. They in their turn 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 14th September 2010