

# **2016 PARISH COUNCIL AGM**

## **INTRODUCTION**

Chairman, Fathers Michael, Martin and Maurice, Fellow Parishioners, thank you for giving up your Sunday afternoon to come and listen to the moans, groans and excuses of your Finance Committee Chairman, thanking you for your continuing financial support and, like Oliver, asking you for more!

My duty at this meeting, as you know, is to report to the Parish on our financial affairs for the year ended 31<sup>st</sup> of March 2016, but our centenary year was such a momentous and busy year, that I cannot possibly ignore mentioning some of our many activities and giving you more details on the huge project of our Church refurbishment.

Let me begin with what seems to be becoming customary with my reports. Yes! You've guessed it! Yet again we managed to spend more than our income! This year, the deficit amounted to £14,131 pounds. Let me make it absolutely clear, this over-spend has nothing to do with the million plus pounds we spend on the Church Refurbishment. I am referring specifically to our income against our running costs. On average, every week we are spending £272 more than our income, and it is only thanks to our regular Mass Attenders and a few other Parishioners, who are very generous with their weekly donations that our financial position is as good as it is.

From Father Michael's report it would appear that less than 70% of our registered Parishioners can be called "regular Mass goers". If only we could persuade the other 30% to come to Mass more regularly, that shortfall could well be wiped out and when we see that out of a Catholic Population of over 2,700 in the Parish only 1,057 families are registered, how many more could become regular contributors to our running costs? May I please appeal to all our regulars that, if you know anyone who should visit our churches more frequently, you will do your best to persuade them that they too should become regular visitors.

You will find the detailed accounts at the end of my Parish Report, together with a summary of the Refurbishment costs and where that money came from. More about that later! Now I will concentrate on Parish affairs.

## **Parish Affairs**

Our continuing shortfall in income means that we are not able to look ahead and re-build our reserves and what that means is that, should we have to deal with an emergency, or should we wish to consider further improvements, we will now have to beg or borrow. A state of affairs I personally don't like to be in and, let's face it, a situation that such a large, active and relatively well-to-do Parish like ours should not be in.

We are indeed very lucky that we do have many willing volunteers in the Parish who, as well as their monetary support, do accept their responsibilities to give their time and talents to helping and supporting our Priests. Can you imagine how much more we would need to find to pay for cleaners, or flower arrangers for example?

Unfortunately, many Parishioners behave and believe that their responsibilities end with putting money in the weekly collection and little or no thought is given to donating a little of their time and talents each week or month, to help our Priests with those chores and tasks that we, - the laity – can do, to give them more time to concentrate on providing us with their Priestly duties and Spiritual Guidance.

I'm sure our volunteers won't mind me saying this, but our present army, as you can see in many of the Activity Group reports, needs re-enforcements. Our army's average age is getting older every year and we need to encourage the younger members of the Parish to join and discover the fun and satisfaction they will get by giving up an hour or two each week, or even once a month to do a little work for their church.

We are very grateful to all our volunteers and thank God for them. "The harvest is rich but the labourers are few." May He inspire many others to "come to his harvest".

## **Gift-Aid**

Many of our tax payers continue to make a valuable contribution to our income by gift aiding their donations, but, I believe that there are still many others who could and yet, for whatever reason, don't. This year we were also able to claim a tax refund for our plate collections which boosted the amount received from Inland Revenue to a total of £29, 863. Our Gift Aid Administrator, Teresa Evans, is determined to increase the numbers of participants and will continue to remind tax payers to join the club!

She, with the help of Joan Barham and Mary Forsyth, has also been responsible for the production and distribution of the Pamphlet "*Supporting Your Parish*" which you will soon be receiving. Copies will also be left at the back of your Church. The pamphlet is designed not just to list out the best ways that Parishioners can contribute to the Parish but also to give an idea of the costs of all those items we tend to expect and take for granted.

Teresa will also be responsible for running the 200 Club, which we re-launched on Parish Day. This should help to bridge that gap between Income and Expenditure. It is our aim, of course, to have a full membership of 200 and if you have not yet joined, or know someone else who hasn't, please come on in and join the fun of the monthly draw.

I am very grateful to Teresa for all her hard work and, indeed, I thank all the members of the Finance Committee for their contributions and especially the support that I receive from them all.

## **The Furniture Market**

There is a slight error in the accounts, showing the Furniture Market contribution as £7,550. It was in fact £15,500. The Market had to be closed for a few weeks, whilst asbestos was removed from the building. Added to this, sales seemed to be adversely affected by the closure of the Church and Car Park nevertheless their contribution to our expenses, normally around £16,000 a year, was only slightly down at £15,500. The asbestos removal from the building however, cost the Parish £12,000.

## **Maintenance**

The closure of the Church did not diminish the need for maintenance in other areas of our buildings and all maintenance needs identified were dealt with. Maintenance of the newly refurbished Church should be easier as many of the improvements made will require less attention in the future.

The management system now in force for identifying, reporting and dealing with maintenance is working reasonably well, but, unfortunately, there are still too many occasions when our contractor is asked to deal with previously unreported issues. This diverts him to carry out unscheduled work, which, naturally, causes delays in dealing with previously reported items. To prevent this happening, we will carry out a review of the procedures currently in force as soon as we can.

We will continue with the bi-annual inspection and review of all areas of our buildings that was introduced two years ago, to ensure that we keep up to date with all our general maintenance.

## **A Sad Good Bye**

This year also saw the closure of the Infant of Prague. Over the past few years, we have lost several Priests in our Diocese and, as a result, some of our Churches have been closed. Sadly, the relatively small congregations in the Infant of Prague, brought the problem to us as well and, we could no longer justify keeping the Church open. Father Michael had the sad task of proposing the closure and even the sadder one of saying the last Mass there at the end of July, last year. The Church is currently on the market, in the hands of Estate Agents appointed by the Diocese.

## **Events Team and Centenary Celebrations**

On a happier note, the celebrations of the Parish Centenary and the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the birth of St Teresa of Avila were, to say the very least, memorable and befitting these two momentous landmarks in the life of our Parish. Parishioners are still talking about “The Priests in concert” and Richard Cottle’s “Centenary Gala Concert”.

Bishop Peter brought our celebrations to a close by presiding over the Centenary Mass, following which Parishioners were invited to the Community’s lunch and an afternoon of light entertainment and conviviality.

The Events Team, under the leadership of Christine Hopson, worked extremely hard to organise and run the centenary celebrations which many of us enjoyed and we thank them all for their great efforts.

The funds raised by Events also financed the re-ordering of our Oratory, enabling us to celebrate Mass there again. The Monstrance and chalices were cleaned and re-gilded and the Parish Centre and Hall were converted to allow us to celebrate Mass in the hall and continue to hire out the centre to our regular users.

Sadly, Christine Hopson felt unable to continue leading Events and it has proved very difficult to find a replacement for her. Consequently revenue from this source has dried up and, until we do find a new leader, these funds will continue to be sorely missed.

Fortunately, Celia Tobin and Christine Gosling stepped in to organise Parish Day and this event took place last month. The two ladies did a great job and, in spite of the cold wind, many parishioners attended and enjoyed the many attractions.

Finding a replacement for Christine Hopson has now become a matter of priority and we hope and pray that a volunteer will materialise in the very near future. We need the cash!

## **Refurbishment**

At the end of July, the Church was closed and the car park was taken over by the main contractors – Challenge Management – appointed by the Diocese. Over the next weeks, a forest of scaffold poles inside and outside the Church converted the whole area into a huge building site and it became clear to all that we had embarked on a project of massive proportions.

In my report I have included a summary of the costs we incurred, as well as the source of the funds to pay for them.

The cost, mainly due to the unforeseen need to remove asbestos and replace the roof beams, pushed the total higher than anticipated, to £1,129,000. As a result, we had to raid our “Together-in-Faith” account to supplement the funds we had reserved for the work. Thank God that many of our Parishioners had participated in this 5-year pledged appeal by the Bishop and, other than the provision of extra car parking spaces and two other items that could not be dealt with whilst the scaffold was in place, we completed all the planned work and were able to move back into the Church by Advent.

In general, other than teething problems, that are being addressed, most Parishioners seem to be happy with the end results and we can truly say that we have given St Joseph’s a new lease of life.

## **Grateful Thanks**

Of course we know that the closure of the Church and car park, caused much disruption and inconvenience to many Parishioners but, unfortunately, there was no alternative and the main Contractor and sub-contractors, did their level best to keep the disruption as low as they could.

Thanks are due to all our Parishioners for their patience and tolerance during this very uncomfortable but necessary period of essential work. We must also thank Fathers Michael, Martin and Maurice for putting up with the noise, dust and general discomfort of life on a building site. They had to make many alternative arrangements to their normal routine in order to keep their services to the Parish as near as possible to

normal. Their co-operation and availability for consultation was freely given and gratefully received. Similarly, Joan Barham, Helena Sullivan and Karen Peters who were in the front line and had to deal with the many complaints and general enquiries from parishioners, contractors and neighbours and did so with great patience. Our thanks are also due to Hugh Davies, the Property Director of the Diocese and the project manager he appointed, Aidan Lynch, for overseeing the work and keeping the Main Contractor on schedule to return the Church to us in time for our Christmas celebrations.

To complete this very eventful and memorable year, we were privileged to be asked by our Bishop to have a “*Holy Door of Mercy*” to serve the Southern part of our Diocese during the year of Mercy that will end on Saturday the 12<sup>th</sup> of November. Bishop Peter blessed and opened it on the 13<sup>th</sup> of December. So, whilst we have had to spend more than we had anticipated, we do now have a Church our Parish can be proud of and one that will serve the needs of our successors in this, our wonderful Parish of St Joseph’s, for many years to come.

## **Outlook**

*So, where to now?* As mentioned above, before we can say that the Church is complete, we have two items that we still need to deal with, a snagging list still to be completed and some fine tuning and adjustments to the lighting and sound and, depending on the availability of funds, we would like to gain planning permission for extra car parking spaces. We are still awaiting settlement from our Insurers of our claim for the storm damage to the roof at the Holy Name that had been ear-marked for this purpose.

We are also looking at improvements we could make to our cemetery.

In Denham, the Holy Name would greatly benefit with a covered porch and entrance as well as a toilet that could be used by the disabled. The road access could also be improved and last, but by no means least we have to consider what needs to be done with the Parish Centre.

Should we consider refurbishment or rebuilding?

What facilities does the Parish need and want?

What are the options to be considered?

How much will the options cost?

How do we fund any agreed project?

In other words, there is plenty more to be done - but nothing can be done without Diocese consent, planning permission and funds to pay for whatever we decide we want to do.

We, today’s Parishioners must never forget that we have been extremely fortunate that our predecessors provided us with the wonderful facilities we have enjoyed for many years. It is now our duty and responsibility to leave the Parish in a better state than we found it in and, with God’s help, we will do that.

***A.J. (John) Forte*** – *Chairman of the Finance Committee.*

*September 2016*