

## **2014 PARISH COUNCIL AGM**

Father Michael, Father Martin, Chairman, Fellow Councillors, Fellow Parishioners. I wish you all a very good afternoon.

– Father Michael – It gives me great pleasure to welcome you back to St. Joseph's, with the good news that, not only is the Parish back on a firm financial footing, but again, thanks to some very generous donations and legacies we have made great strides towards rebuilding our reserves. At the end of this Financial Year on the 31<sup>st</sup> of March, our reserves were back up to a respectable level at £83, 000!

Our Parishioners responded to our appeal last year to review their weekly offerings and, as a result, our income increased and almost covered our expenses. Our average weekly income was £4,890 and our average weekly expenses were £4,909 - just £19 more. I am very pleased to be able to report therefore that, again, this year, we have almost achieved our target of breaking even and we've made good progress towards rebuilding our reserves.

As Chairman of the Finance Committee, I am blessed with the help and hard work of my colleagues:

- Tony DeVletter who keeps the Parish Accounts.
- Dan Taylor who looks after the Carmelite Accounts.
- Paul Smith, is our gift-aid administrator.
- Ed Poole, our buildings and maintenance expert.
- Robert Thompson who looks after our heating plant and other technical equipment.
- John Bates, wearing two different hats to his Parish Council's hat, reports on Events Accounts as well as Safeguarding and Health and Safety.
- Father Martin, having taken over from Father Bob, is our new Bursar and completes the team.

I am very grateful to them all for the help and support they give me. They all spend many hours of their free time, looking after their various areas of responsibility and they all do so happily and with broad grins on their faces. On behalf of the Parish, gentlemen, I thank you all for everything that you do.

Although not a member of the committee, I must also mention David Bentley, who has worked extremely hard to reduce the long list of outstanding maintenance we had to a manageable level. David has produced a Parish Maintenance Manual which lists all those jobs which need to be carried out regularly, in order to keep our premises in good order and to comply with all legal requirements. As a result, we are now in a position to consider a planned maintenance programme which will give us far more and better control on expenditure.

The good news therefore is that we are back on an even keel and we are living within our means. However, we cannot afford to become complacent and we must now do our level best to continue to cover our expenses and continue to rebuild our reserves. We need a healthy Parish to be able to help the very many who are less fortunate than ourselves. Something that this Parish has always been proud to do and, with God's help will always want to go on doing.

This year, as in previous years, we have used Furniture Market's funds to supplement our income and their contribution at £14,500 was £2,100 better than last year's. We are very fortunate to have such a band of volunteers who regularly turn up on Wednesday evenings and Saturday mornings to collect, store, display, sell and even deliver furniture, in order to collect the substantial funds they raise for us and many other worthy causes in the Parish. We are indeed very grateful to David Parkhouse and his crew.

David, as you all know by now, has taken over from Maurice Carkett, who, after many years as Chairman, decided that the time had come to hand over this onerous task to a younger man and David Parkhouse was duly appointed to succeed him. In recognition for his many years' service, however, the management committee of the Furniture Market thought that Maurice should be made Honorary Life President, so you can still see our whiskered friend enjoying a mug of hot tea and giving his many friends a piece of his mind on Saturday mornings.

There was a change of leadership to our Events Team as well. Tony Hetherington, Karen Glover and Mary Forsyth also decided that it was time to hand over the leadership and Father John persuaded Christine Hopson to take on the responsibility. Whilst Tony, Karen and Mary are happy to continue helping at Events, they no longer wish to be involved in organising them and, judging by the success of Parish Day, the management of the Events Team has been passed on to another very safe pair of hands. As previously stated, funds raised by the Events Team will continue to be used for the development and maintenance of our infrastructure. We will not allow our equipment, once we have acquired and installed it, to become obsolete or beyond repair again. We are grateful to Christine and all her helpers for raising the funds we need for this important and growing need in the Parish.

Another piece of good news that I can give you to-day is that the value of gift-aided donations again increased this year. The amount refunded to us by Inland Revenue came to £27,053. This current year, we should see a further improvement as all three of our Mass Centres have qualified to claim refunds on our plate collections. This should take our Parish well over the Diocese average level for gift-aided donations. As you all know, this extra and valuable revenue is achieved at no extra cost to donors who have signed up to gift-aid their donations, but, good as this is, we are sure that there are still many tax payers in our Parish who could gift-aid their donations but, for whatever reason, have not yet done so. Paul Smith will continue therefore to encourage and recruit as many tax payers as possible to sign up to this valuable and painless source of revenue for the Parish.

The good news continues! Of course you have all heard by now that the late Nancy Deeves, bequeathed her house to the Parish – may the Good Lord thank her for her generosity and grant her Eternal Rest – we are currently marketing the house but, so far, although there has been a lot of interest shown, the offers received have not been acceptable. Whilst I cannot tell you therefore how much the sale is likely to yield, I can assure you that it won't be the £1million plus pounds some pundits in the Parish have been spreading rumours about.

In spite of all this good news and at the risk of boring you, I must again emphasise that we cannot be reliant on the generosity of the few in our Parish to keep us afloat. It is the duty and responsibility of all parishioners to give our church sufficient funds to pay our running costs – currently averaging £4,909 each week.

Therefore I continue to ask Parishioners to consider making their weekly contributions by Direct Debit or Standing Order through their banks. Not only does this ease the burden on our volunteer cashiers, but it makes it much easier for us to control and manage our finances. The only snag with this is that it is easy to forget to review the amount donated on a regular basis, so, to remind parishioners to think about this, at least once each year, we have produced this book-mark which can be kept in missals, wallets or other convenient places. I hope that all parishioners will have one by now, if not, there is always a supply in the church porches.

Mr Chairman, I would like to repeat that, pleased as I am at being able to report that the Parish is back on an even keel, we must not allow ourselves to become complacent. Costs, as we all know, continue to rise and it only takes an unexpected event, such as the winter storms that blew the roof off our Church in Denham last winter, to wipe out considerable amounts of money from our reserves. That's why we need to keep money in the bank.

The detailed accounts follow my report and I, or members of the Committee will do our best to answer any questions you may have. Thank you for your kind attention and may our Lord bless you all for your continued and valuable support of His Church in our Parish.

**John Forte** – Chair of the Finance Committee

September 2014