

## **PARISH COUNCIL AGM.**

Father John, Chairman, Fellow Councillors, Fellow Parishioners.

How I would love to stand here today and to deliver a very positive report, telling you all how well off our Parish is financially.

Sadly I am unable to do that, - Unfortunately I have to report instead that once again last year – Year ended the 31<sup>st</sup> of March 2012 – we ended up with costs over £14,000 higher than our income and, as in the previous three or four years, we have had to dip into our reserves to balance our books.

Unfortunately, that is not the end of the bad news. Unless our income goes up appreciably, at the end of this financial year, year ending the 31<sup>st</sup> of March 2013, we will see the whole of our reserves wiped out.

We cannot and must not allow this to happen. So, what have we done, what are we doing and what do we need to do, to get back onto an even keel and begin to rebuild our reserves?

Over the past two years, since I became chairman of the Finance Committee, we have looked carefully at all our expenses, to make sure that we are making the best use possible of our available resources.

I can tell you that, so far, we have not been able to identify vast areas of potential savings. On the contrary, if we had the money, we could use it in many ways to improve on what we have at present.

Tony DeVletter now shares the book-keeping burden with Dan Taylor. He looks after the Parish affairs whilst Dan continues to look after the Carmelite Accounts.

In welcoming Tony to the Finance Committee, I would like take this opportunity of thanking Dan for his many years of service to the Parish and to say how grateful we are that he continues to be available to us for advice and guidance. His knowledge of Parish financial matters and Diocesan procedures and personnel has been and continues to be very much appreciated by Tony and myself.

At the beginning of this financial year, because of the difficulties we had in identifying historical costs accurately, I suggested that we should draw a line over the past and introduce a new accounting report. The accounts schedule we have attached to my report now covers income and expenditure in this new format.

We put a limit on maintenance expenditure, stopping all non-essential work and only spending on unavoidable and urgent items, such as roof leaks and gutter repairs. This is not a policy I personally like or would advocate, because, as we all know, “A stitch in time saves nine” – delaying repairs and maintenance leads to much higher costs when we have to do it because we can no longer delay.

I would like us to get back to a sensible planned maintenance system for our premises as soon as we can afford to do so.

We had hoped to bring our financial situation to the attention of the Parish as soon as we became aware of it but Father Tony was unable to make an appeal as, at the time, our Bishop was launching the Diocese campaign "Together in Faith" and it was felt that we would need to wait to avoid a clash of interests.

Eventually, Father John managed to appeal to Parishioners last February and, as predicted, the response was very positive. We saw an estimated increase of about 10% in our income as a result.

This had an immediate effect of reducing our deficit at the year-end from an estimated £20,000 to just over £14,000.

The level of income has more or less remained at this new level, which, if sustained may see us back to a break-even position, but we need more than that. We really must aim to rebuild our reserves and to have enough money in our accounts to cope with any emergency needs for funds, and we all know, do we not, that emergencies do happen?

Our two boilers are a good case in point. The running and maintenance costs became unacceptably high and one of them was no longer serviceable and packed up all together.

Fortunately, the Events Team, with the generous help of all the Parishioners who had supported the many events of the past few years, had accumulated sufficient funds to finance the cost of replacement boilers and we now have two state-of-the-art boilers that are going to be far cheaper to run and maintain.

Our telephone system is in a similar way. The system we have is now obsolete. Spares and component parts are no longer available, because they are no longer manufactured. So, we have asked the Events Team to fund a new and up-date system that will serve our needs for the foreseeable future. The new system will be installed by Christmas, God willing.

Father Bob and Joan Barham, have been working tirelessly, in improving our office facilities, creating computer-based records that will be easier to keep updated. We have a web site and much of our communication can now be done by email. The Events Team have been asked to continue to raise funds needed to update and modernise our infrastructure.

The monthly contributions from the Furniture Market are also very gratefully received. Last year all the funds were used in the day-to-day running costs and especially for maintenance. It looks very much as this will have to continue, as our income does not yet cover our costs.

Paul Smith, our covenant secretary, has worked tirelessly to increase the number of Parishioners participating in our gift-aid scheme. He has succeeded in increasing participation to some 60% of Parishioners.

Tax refunds from HMRC, meant that Gift aiders last year contributed an extra £21,000 to our income. Paul continues to campaign to persuade tax payers in our Parish to gift aid their contributions. The Diocese average is 65% and Paul would like to see us achieve at least this level of participation.

Unfortunately, it looks very much as if the current financial situation is likely to continue for some time to come. Costs, as we all know, will continue to rise.

Our Parish has always and continues to respond with great generosity to appeals for funds and long may this continue! However I now need to appeal to everyone to think of the needs of our own Church and yes! By all means continue with your generosity and respond to all other needs, but Please! Not at the expense of your contributions for the upkeep and running of your Church.

Remember to review your standing orders, or the amount you place in your envelopes or in the collection and if you can afford to do so, please consider an annual increase. Our income needs to rise at the very least to keep up with increasing costs. But, we should be aiming to rebuild our reserves. We should always have sufficient funds in our accounts to provide for rainy days.

I thank you all for your kind attention. I'll try to answer any questions you may have.

God Bless.