

Communication to the Parish about the PPC

Our Heritage is Rich

The Development of the Catholic Community in Esher and Thames Ditton is an inspiring one of how the community went from being an off shoot of St Raphael's in Surbiton to one where we are served by two fine churches and a primary school . The drive behind this came from remarkable clergy supported by active and generous parishioners. We should be proud of our legacy.

Change is a constant

Society and thus the Church cannot stand still but it was still a shock, although we had been warned, when Father Rob and Father David were replaced by one priest Father Sebastian. The reality is that there are insufficient priests to run the diocese churches in the traditional way.

The Parish is adjusting, but thriving

The new Parish of the Holy Family, founded a year ago, is operating well and successfully: we (you) have adjusted to different mass times on Sundays and Weekdays. Sunday mass attendances reach over 700 with many more on major festivals.

The number of children receiving First Holy Communion last month was so large that it had to be broken into three groups; 73 children received Holy Communion for the first time. The number of young people confirmed by the Bishop at St Georges was 78. We have a new website, we stream services, and our Newsletter goes out to 1200 parishioners weekly. Parishioners who attend OLOL may be sad that there is no priest living in the presbytery but should be delighted that it is now let out to a Ukrainian family.

Our new Parish is a success and we should all enjoy our success. I sense a tremendous energy around the Parish.

Has it been easy? Maybe yes and maybe no but we (you) have achieved something as inspiring as anything in our history. And the merger is now part of our history —there is no going back.

And onto the future

The formation of the new Parish of the Holy Family was always only an interim phase - We need to look to the new Future.

The Bishop tell us about changing our current deanery into a moderated parish stretching around the M25 from Thames Ditton and Esher to Englefield Green with our few priests working as a team to perform their sacramental duties and pastoral care.

So how is this going to work for us?? For our Parish?

Before they left Fr Rob and Father David set up a Vision Team to oversee the transition from two churches to One Parish. This group of highly motivated, experienced parishioners have been meeting regularly to discuss the future of the Parish and to support Fr Sebastian to think through the future directions. They were aware that we will be part of what the Bishop calls a moderated parish which encompasses seven parishes in North Surrey .

Put very simply the Bishop's problem is this :there are seven parishes, ten churches and ten presbyteries but only five priests in our area . And don't forget our priests' lives will be very different than in the past and they need our prayers to help them find happiness in a new way of working as a team .

Canon Kieron O'Brien, Episcopal Vicar for Pastoral Planning wrote recently "Within the overall framework of the Plan there is great flexibility for parishes to discern how to meet their unique needs and deliver this at a pace to suit them"

What do we do ?

What is a Parish? It is a community that chooses to practice its religion together. We all live close to other churches but we have chosen to worship in the Churches of the Holy Family.

In the past we had the luxury of a priest living next the church who did everything: those days are gone. Father Sebastian lives next door to Holy Name. We cannot assume this will be so in the future.

We have an opportunity; we the laity need to take responsibility for our Parish of the Holy Family.

So the Vision Team recommended the setting up of a Parish Pastoral Committee (PPC).

This Committee has three objectives;

- 1) To promote the Mission of the Church within the Parish of the Holy Family.
- 2) To be responsible for the sustained management and operation of the Parish.
- 3) To give our Priests the time to exercise those duties for which they were ordained.

The Parish Pastoral Committee will be a simple structure: Chair, a Priest representing the moderated diocese, a lead for Holy Name (Alan Verschoyle King) a lead for OLOL (Karen Haizelden) and a Treasurer (Michael Burke) . Plus of course our office team. We intend to meet bi monthly. The many other committees and ministries such as Finance and Community & Charities will operate under the PPC umbrella.

Why these people? Because the Vision Team who understand the needs of the Parish identified that these people as having the skills and experience to continue the Parish journey as part of the new moderated parish. This is not democratic and the PPC needs to make the processes more democratic in the future: but the need for action requires us to act decisively.

How will this work?

If it works now don't break it and it works well most of the time because of you.

The Vision Team tried to map all the current activities of the Parish but soon realised that the Parish runs through a series of often overlapping informal and formal networks. But it works. Readers and Eucharistic Ministers are there at mass: singers sing: social events are arranged: charities are given to and so on and so on. Our networks function well and should be encouraged.

In no sense will the PPC take over the control or centralisation of these activities for the sake of it.

The PPC's role is to bring all these activities together, to ensure that support is given where needed and to create a healthy environment to allow the Parish to prosper and grow. We will need even more of you to help in the future to help you make things happen and there are particular problems relating to our buildings.

Let me remind you what we are trying to do. We are faced with an acute shortage of priests: we want to ensure that both the Mission and Community of the Parish thrive in the years ahead. We the laity - the Parishioners - have to grab responsibility for the future of our Parish.