

Report to the Parish ---October 2024

When we set up the Parish Pastoral Council, I as chair undertook to give you, the congregation, regular updates as to our activities as well as the key developments about the new Moderated Parish. So, with the summer well and truly done for, it's time for me to tell you what's going on.

In relation to the Moderated Parish, and to remind you this the new Parish of ten churches which stretches from

Esher and Thames Ditton to Englefield Green, Father Sebastian and I recently had a discussion with Canon Chris Spain. He is the designated Moderator of the new Moderated Parish. We shared the details of our progress within our own Parish and what we're aiming to achieve. Canon Chris outlined in turn how he saw the development of the new Moderated Parish, and particularly the structure, but left us with the clear impression there's still much work to be done before any real changes can be made. Since Canon Chris currently has his own Parish with two churches, although he has ideas on how he wants to develop the new Moderated Parish, we believe it could take as long as 2 years before these really come to fruition. His ideas about sharing services and certain training are sound, for sure, but they likely won't happen in the very near future.

The Moderated Parish that's seen as being the pilot for the Diocese is Guildford, and they recently asked for the implementation of their new model to be deferred – they feel they need more time to get organised. Change is never easy, I suppose, and shouldn't be rushed!

So, what are we doing in the meantime in our own Parish?

Firstly, we shared recently that a decision had been taken to recruit a Parish Youth Worker. Our concept is to create a pathway that takes our young people from Baptism through First Holy Communion to Confirmation and beyond. The young are crucial to the future of the church and of course to our Parish. The list of current youth activities, as you see each week listed in our Parish Newsletter, is thankfully long – but we can't sustain this simply with the present combination of Father Sebastian and volunteers. So, we've advertised in our Parish Newsletter, in neighbouring churches and in local universities, for a Parish Youth Worker. We're encouraged that the Diocese has been very supportive of what we're doing in this area, but you can help us too! If you know of anyone you think could be suitable for this part-time role, please direct them to the Parish website where they'll find the job description and details of how to apply (by 13th November).

Secondly, we're very focussed on our church premises. Holy Name Esher is fortunate that its Parish Rooms are well furnished and equipped. Our Lady of Lourdes isn't quite so lucky! Although the renovation of the main church has been positive, the Parish Rooms aren't currently fit for purpose, and so we've commissioned an architect to draw-up plans for a major refurbishment. In the next couple of weeks, we'll share these plans with all Parishioners to get your feedback and support. This project won't be completed overnight, and will likely be undertaken in stages. The speed of it will be dictated by our ability to raise the necessary funds. In the interim, the congregation at Our Lady of Lourdes has done a splendid job of making the Stevenson Room a more comfortable space in which to serve coffee after weekend masses and for the various Friday activities that take place there, but more volunteers are needed to assist, please!

Father Sebastian said to me recently that he has never known a parish where so much is going on. Personally, I am surprised but gratified by the attendance at Mass every Thursday at Holy Name where on occasions there are over 40 parishioners and of over 30 at OLOL on Friday. After both masses coffee is served as well as cakes. Attendees are parishioners who traditionally have attended one church or other but who are now content to attend the church where there is a mass. In addition, parishioners from St Barnabas very often join us. This is helping us build our community.

And we must not forget to thank the volunteers who make the bake the cakes and brew the coffee please, but we need more particularly at OLOL where we wish to open on more days.

We must never forget however that even though we should enjoy social interaction we are a Christian Church with a clear mission to promote and enhance our Faith. And the PPC has been thinking about how we can get you directly involved in the future evolution and development of our Parish. We've all become very comfortable with the model of having a priest in every church, relying on that priest to undertake everything from administering the sacraments to changing the lightbulbs! Those days are over, and, as one of our Parishioners said to me recently when Father Sebastian was away, 'we just must get used to different priests saying mass for us on different Sundays'. I guess we should be glad we have a Priest at all, as there are many places in the world where one might be available only once a month or so. In fact, this isn't all bad - as another Parishioner said to me, 'the spirit of Vatican 2 was for much greater involvement of the laity in the running of the Church. 'Vatican 2 is 60 years old, but that change is just happening to us now.

So, the question is 'What sort of Parish do YOU want to see in the future?'

I've said before that the Vision Committee did a splendid job in setting the course for our Parish - they proposed the creation of the Parish Pastoral Council, confirmed the Parish Vision of 'Welcoming all into the joy of Jesus', and argued that we must explore various activities which I call Vision Pillars to support the achievement of that Vision. As a reminder our Parish activities were collected by the Vision Committee under the following headings or Pillars: Liturgy, Growing the Parish, Young Families and Pastoral Work, together with Finance, and Charities and Communities. Good progress has been made in relation to some - we have an active Parish Community & Charities Committee, as well as a functioning Parish Finance Committee.

But, to really move the Parish forward successfully, we as the laity need to don our thinking caps to put true meaning into our parish activities. How can we attract more people to join our congregation? How can we provide better pastoral care to our community, and how we can help our young people in their path to adulthood, for example.? What services would you like to see? This is OUR Parish, and it's up to us (YOU) to decide what we do in these areas.

So, the Parish Pastoral Committee has agreed we should set up working groups to develop our thinking, and on Saturday 16th November in the morning we'd like groups of Parishioners to come together to put the flesh on our Vision Pillars. Parishioners will be arranged into four groups – one for each pillar - and we'd ideally like 4/5 people in each of those groups. The groups will be assisted by the members of the previous Vision Committee and the exercise will be facilitated by Bart Michels, who is very experienced in this sort of activity. Do not be daunted by the process, you will be guided through it. After the groups have fed back their thinking to the meeting these ideas will be consolidated into a Parish Action Plan which the PPC will present to the Parish early next year,

Your representatives on the Parish Pastoral Committee (Karen Hazelden for Our Lady of Lourdes and Alan Verschoyle-King for Holy Name Esher) and myself will be at the back of church after this mass to sign you up for the working groups session, or you can email or visit the Parish Offices to confirm your involvement. And please, with all due respect, we don't just want the usual suspects – we also want those of you who've previously held-back. You should view this as a real opportunity to contribute to the development of our Parish in the way YOU want to see it happen! Please get involved – this is vital for our Parish as we chart our way in to a very different future: one that will require the much greater involvement of Parishioners in the running of our - YOUR – Parish!

I hope this update has been useful for you. Please do let me, Karen or Alan know if you have any matters you'd like to raise to the attention of our Parish Pastoral Committee, and we look forward to seeing you on 16th November! And Karen asked me to remind you that there is a meeting of the OLOL group on Thursday 14th November at 19:30.