

PARISH OF ST MARY MOTHER OF GOD

REPORTS TO PARISH ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING, 15 JUNE 2016

1. 100 CLUB COFFEE SHOP

The St. Mary's Parish Presents Committee apart from fund raising for the improvement and updating of church premises also run the 100plus club (a lottery draw) in which members pay £12 per year to enter the draw. The money is collected and given in to the parish office where it is held until the end of year when the proceeds are split equally between the church and school. Winning numbers are drawn monthly in the 100 club coffee shop in the parish hall on the last Sunday of each month. I ring the winner and inform the Parish Office of their name and a cheque is made out for 50% of that month's subscriptions.

This year was poorly subscribed and only 60 people entered the draw at various points from October till now. This is recorded in a spreadsheet that is held by myself and the Parish Office to ensure all dealings are correct. At present the amount a winner will receive is £30. Due to the poor uptake I am not sure if it is worth all the hard work to rerun the draw in October this year when a new year starts. For it to be viable the church and school need to better promote and support the draw.

As the draw takes place in a coffee shop we of course raise funds through the selling of coffee, tea etc. All profits from this go to providing a function for a group in the parish. Last December the money was used to give the elderly in our parish an afternoon tea. This was voted for by our committee.

We currently hold £412 and will soon decide how and when this money will be used. It has been suggested that once the parish hall kitchen has been refurbished we will hold a function to allow people to see the revamped kitchen. Possibly a small social. The decision has yet to be made.

Brenda Kivlehan
Chair of St. Mary's Parish Presents and manager of the 100 club

2. CHURCH CHOIR

The commitment that the choir has is to voluntarily support the parish with choral provision once a fortnight at 11.30am Mass from September until July. In addition to this, the choir supports the congregation during the Easter Triduum and at Christmas at what was formerly Midnight Mass. When requested to do so, the choir will attend weddings, for which it is paid a fee, and occasionally sings at funerals.

In order to meet these commitments, the choir meets each Monday evening for an hour's practice except on Bank Holidays and during the summer holiday, supported by Julia McAusland, who plays the organ, and by Brian Rodgers, who conducts. There are currently 12 members of the choir including Brian, comprising of 2 bass, 2 tenors, 2 altos and 6 sopranos. Choir practices generally cover practising hymns for the fortnightly Sunday Masses, including psalms, and for any up-coming weddings. From September to December, Christmas Mass is the focus during practices, while Easter is practised from January to March/April. From April to July new hymns and other new music is learned.

From June to December 2015 the choir has sung at three weddings, and two funerals, while in 2016 so far there have been 2 weddings attended by the choir.

Sadly, the choir's leader and soloist, Catherine Collett, stepped down after serving our parish for some 20 years, as did Trisa Mahoney. Veronica Smith and Mary Finch have been welcomed onto the soprano line following successful auditions. While the opportunity of leading the choir was offered to one long-standing member of the choir, this was declined and so the responsibilities associated with this role are largely being borne by Jackie Caprari who liaises with wedding couples over their music selections and the collection of fees; Jackie also organises the Mass commitment and Monday practice dates, ensuring that all choir members are aware of Mass, wedding and practice dates well in advance. Furthermore, Jackie manages the acquisition of new music and liaises with Father Martin on choir-related matters.

New music learned this year has principally been the new Mass setting which was ready in time for the Easter Vigil Mass. Jackie Caprari conducted extensive research and came up with the Mass of Christ the Saviour by Dan Schutte. The new Mass setting was learned quite rapidly and it seems that the congregation is starting to get used to it. Other music being learned are those from number 859 onwards in the newer version of the hymn books - these hymns will be sung as communion hymns. Mass hymns are always chosen to reflect the readings, seasons and special Mass days. The choir aims to introduce new hymns to the congregation when it can so as to provide variety and avoid repetition. The Celebration Hymnal For Everyone is used principally with some hymns sung from Power Praise and Songs of the Spirit.

To be a good choir, it relies on the commitment of each member to attend regularly at weekly practices and fortnightly 11.30am Masses; as advance notice is given regarding weddings, once a commitment has been made by a member to attend, then it is expected that this commitment is honoured so as not to let down the wedding couple and other members of the choir. The courtesy of a message to be forewarned of any absence from practice, 11.30am Mass or wedding is expected and much appreciated.

To give of its best, the choir also relies on regular liaison between its leader and the parish priest as it is difficult to manage affairs if outside parties become involved. Otherwise, the choir is happy to manage itself and be trusted to serve the parish to the best of its ability as it has done for many, many years.

3. FLOWER GROUP

This year has seen a slight improvement in the numbers of volunteers to the flower group. We have also been able to use Saturday morning, on occasion, to complete flower arrangements. The flower group is still nowhere near the numbers of volunteers needed in order to arrange a proper rota - that is, where the same volunteers do not have to attend every occasion, but it has meant that there are more volunteers to learn tasks, e.g. to arrange pew ends for weddings.

One of my main objectives was to be able to train volunteers to take over arranging pew ends when Ruth Carroll retired after forty or so years in the flower group. This has been achieved and Ruth was kind enough to provide a 'master class' to three volunteers so that the same volunteer doesn't have to do this for every wedding.

However, it became clear at Christmas that parishioners and parents of children at St. Mary's School appear to have an unrealistic view of the flower group: we had a volunteer who attended the planning meeting for Christmas and although having agreed to help out for Christmas, then didn't appear. When I next saw this person and enquired if everything was ok, I was told that from the meeting it looked as though everyone knew their job and nobody extra was required and that it, quote: "wasn't for them", unquote. I did point out that Christmas is, perhaps, one of several occasions where every volunteer is required but that the whole point of having plenty of volunteers during the year was to ensure that the same people didn't have to come on every occasion. I also said that it was a shame not to have come because there are always a number of jobs to be done, which don't necessarily involve direct contact with the flowers.

This is exactly what one of our new volunteers has said in that they don't feel very confident to arrange flowers but are happy to do other things and only get involved by 'shadowing' other, more experienced people. On the other hand, another new volunteer asked to do an arrangement and is now confident to work on their own.

We also have a volunteer from another Parish, and two of our younger volunteers who are parents with children at St. Mary's feel that it is a great pity so few are volunteering as they believe they are not only achieving things they didn't know they were capable of but are thoroughly enjoying the social activity.

Obviously, there has been a very noticeable and considerable drop in the numbers of weddings booked this year but the month of August would be extremely difficult to provide flowers if there were weddings on a weekly basis, given that the Group is still well under the numbers of volunteers needed to cover weddings during the highest point of the holiday season.

A suggestion I would put to the Council is to have, say, two or three special collections for flowers, namely for Easter since the cost of flowers is always increasing and as Easter is the most important Feast of the Church's year, I am sure that Parishioners would not object to contributing to this. To fill our Church, it is going to cost about £300 (including oasis), next year. However, if it is considered that the decorations should be 'scaled back', the Flower Group will obviously carry out whatever is agreed.

Angela Bennett

4. ORGANIST/PIANIST

I am not really a group, but I felt I should write a report as last year there seemed, for the first time ever, to be some confusion over what I do for the parish and how I do it.

I have been a member of this parish for almost 56 years, apart from 8 years when I lived in South East London in the 1980s. I have been supporting the parish in a voluntary role with organ accompaniment since 1973. On my return to the parish 23 years ago, I was asked by

Sister Teresa to join the choir and soon became their pianist.

Over the years I have taken the role of organist in a voluntary capacity at as many 6.30 pm Saturday masses as possible and fortnightly 11.30 am Sunday Masses when I support the choir. With regards to the choir, I attend all weekly choir practices. In addition I play the organ at weddings and occasionally at funerals, when requested, on Holy Days of Obligation when possible, as well as at the Christmas vigil mass, the Christmas Mass, formerly known as Midnight Mass, and the Easter Triduum. I have in recent years been asked to provide piano accompaniment at First Holy Communion Masses and, although this year I was not required for the Confirmation Mass, I have played at each one of these Masses for the past 20 or so years.

I choose the hymns for every 6.30 pm Saturday evening Mass regardless of whether I am there or not and these hymns are used at 11.30 am Mass when the choir is not present.

If you wish to know any more, I should be most grateful if enquiries would be addressed directly to me rather than asking other parties since I am best placed to answer for myself.

Julia McAusland

5. R.C.I.A. JOURNEY IN FAITH

The R.C.I.A. is a rolling process; for 2015/2016 we ran from 6th July 2015 – 9th May 2016.

We met each Monday evening, a total of 41 group sessions which ran from 8-9.30 pm. Additional one-to-one catechesis and support was given where needed. We would also like to thank those members of our parish community who agreed to be Sponsors and support the Catechumenate on their journey.

The first hour of catechesis was held in the Van Meenen room. We then went into the Church for Adoration for half an hour. The whole parish was invited to join us for the Adoration. It was a very special time for all of us.

On 14th February 2016 the group, along with their Sponsors and Catechists, went to the Cathedral at Brentwood for the Rite of Election. Two of our group who have residence in Menorca were unable to be with us, however the Vicar General / Diocesan Administrator of Menorca who had been supporting them with additional catechesis celebrated the Rite of Election there for them - a great illustration of the universal Church.

At the Easter Vigil on 26th March a total of fifteen people received Sacraments:

Three adults who had been baptised in other Christian Denominations were received into Full Communion with the Catholic Church, Confirmed and made their First Holy Communion.

One adult Catholic Christian who had not been Confirmed received this Sacrament.

Three Siblings who were baptised Catholic received the Sacraments of Confirmation and Eucharist, and their young brother made his First Holy Communion.

Seven Adults received the Sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation and Holy Communion.

We also had a lady, who as a baby was Baptised, Confirmed and Received Holy Communion in the Greek Orthodox Church, which is in full communion with us, make a declaration of her desire to be a

member of our parish community.

On 23rd April ten children ranging in age from 34 days to 10 years, whose parents received the Sacrament of Baptism at Easter, were Baptised. It was wonderful to see long-standing members of the parish community present supporting the parents who were newly received at Easter.

We continued to meet as a group until Pentecost and certificates will be presented to those who received Sacraments at the 11.30 Mass on 19th June.

This year the R.C.I.A. Journey in Faith will go back to Tuesday evenings and will start again on 28th June. There is a notice in the newsletter with details and there have already been some enquiries. We hope to speak briefly at the end of each weekend Mass in the coming weeks and invite anyone who is interested in becoming a Catholic, or learning more about the Catholic faith, to come and see if the Journey in Faith is for them.

We will keep the format of the last half hour being Adoration in the Church and continue to welcome any parishioners who can join us.

6. REPAIRS AND MAINTENANCE COMMITTEE

The main pre-occupation is to work out how to carry out repairs, maintenance and improvements without increasing the financial burden on Church funds.

Funds are a serious issue because the parish finances show a deficit which is increasing year-on-year. To put it simply: the Mass collections do not cover the necessary expenses of running the parish, to the extent that there is no 'spare' money to cover repairs and maintenance, let alone improvements.

The Parish is responsible for the upkeep of the Church, Presbytery, Van Meenen Room, Parish Hall, and the surrounding grounds.

The school is responsible for the upkeep of the school buildings and grounds.

There are areas shared by both church and school, i.e. front playground and external boundary fencing.

Large/medium-sized projects

Replacement of boilers in church and house completed in 2015, thanks to the huge efforts of the fund-raiser group.

Parish Hall kitchen refurbishment: fund-raising in progress; potential start date of summer holidays 2016.

Parish Hall meeting-room redecoration: no time or funds specified.

Parish Hall exterior decoration: no time or funds specified.

Parish Hall generally: intention to agree a maintenance plan with the school.

Church external and internal security: no time or funds specified.

Church clean-up in preparation for Bishop's visit in October 2016: Gary Redmond has this in hand.

Will need volunteers and community sponsorship.

Church sound and CD system: Brian Rodgers and Gary Redmond have this in hand.

Replacement of gallery carpet: no time or funds specified.

Re-configuration and clear-up of Church entrance/porch area: partially completed.

Minor works

Various minor repairs and maintenance have been carried out by volunteers. This will continue as and when the need is identified and where we can find people with relevant skills. It would be useful to have a body of volunteers with appropriate skills who can be called upon - led by a volunteer co-ordinator, yet to be identified.

Financial resources

It has to be recognised that, whilst much can be achieved with the help of volunteers, a) materials, etc still have to be paid for; b) there remains work that can only be carried out by paid professionals. It also has to be recognised that by putting off repairs and maintenance, we build up bigger and more expensive problems for the future. Ideally, we would like to have a planned, 'rolling' repairs and maintenance programme funded year-on-year. However, this will remain an intention until and unless a regular funding can be identified.

Appeals have been made to persuade parishioners to contribute more to Mass collections, either through increasing their donations or by making use of gift aid. Whilst these have borne some fruit, it has not been enough to lift the parish financial resources out of deficit, let alone into surplus.

Discussion has been held about making greater use of Second Collections for specific, identified purposes. Will this be effective?

What would be the most effective way to persuade parishioners of the need to increase their regular donations at Mass?

Repairs and maintenance group members:

Eddie Allen	Gary Redmond
Brian Rodgers	Susan Squire

7. KNIGHTS OF ST COLUMBA

The Knights of St Columba is an organisation of Catholic men whose aim is to support the mission of the Church and to serve the Community, both near and far. It will be celebrating its Centenary in 2019. One of our on-going services to the Church is the distribution around our diocese of Brentwood News (ever quarter) and the Diocesan Directory (every November).

Although the Knights do not currently have a large presence in St Mary's, we are hoping to change this by having a Membership Drive later this year or early next. Any Catholic male over 16 years of age is eligible to join – contact Brian Rodgers for details!

In recent years, St Mary's have helped the Knights considerably by supporting projects they have organised, such as fund-raising walks, e.g. the Walk to Canterbury in 2015, and charitable collections, e.g. for Tools for Self-Reliance, a charity based in Nottingham that refurbishes old tools and other items and sends them to the developing countries. We have also done Clothing Collections to help the homeless.

The Knights would like to thank St Mary's for the continuing use of the Parish Meeting Room for our Provincial Officers meetings and more recently the use of the Van Meenen Room for our Romford Council meetings. Romford Council 224 covers the parishes of Romford, Collier Row, Gidea Park, the two Harold Hill's and of course St Mary's.

Brian Rodgers
Secretary/Deputy Grand Knight Council 224 Romford
Secretary Province 10 Brentwood

8. ST. VINCENT DE PAUL SOCIETY

We have lost several members over the past year (moved, illness, bereavement) and our group has reduced from a healthy 12 members to 7. Despite this and with the ever generous support of our parishioners and school we have managed to continue supporting the Rainham Foodbank through our fortnightly delivery to Holy Cross church. We have established a good relationship with Holy Cross and they are very appreciative of our support and the food we deliver. Again, with the support of St Mary's we collected sheets, blankets and towels for the homeless shelter in Romford - the response from our Parishioners was overwhelming. We have been supporting the local Women's Refuge with Food and toiletries. Through collaborating with the Lighthouse Furniture Project we have also managed to help refurbish the homes of 3 local families.

We continue to visit local residential homes, the elderly and lonely at home, hospital visits and mass transports.

At the summer fete we are running a stall to support the church and school. We will also be giving out SVP leaflets and hoping to attract some new members.

9. ST MARY'S YOUTH CLUB

A new management committee is running the Youth Club since September 2015, and the youth club has a membership of 60 plus with approximately 30- 40 regular attendees weekly.

The requirement for the School's caretaker to remain on site to allow the youngsters through the school exterior onto the playground / field is working well especially as safety is paramount, and we have the benefit of CCTV to keep 'an eye'. The Youth Club Team appreciates the support of the parish toward their young people with regard to the nominal donation towards caretaker costs - thanks to Lee and Steve too.

Membership is generally from years 7, 8, and 9 with a number of Year 10's, and above, who've joined as part of their community commitment to fulfil their 'Duke of Edinburgh' requirements.

We have been reinstated again with the Jack Petchey Foundation, and this year we're pleased to say have received one award for a worthy young individual, who is due to attend a formal presentation at the Queen's Theatre in June. This venture is one that the new Youth Club Team will be keen to preserve, and it's anticipated that more applications for funding will be made to them as the appropriate time arises.

The Youth Club ran a successful Lenten Stations of the Cross in March with much positive feedback from the Parish, who were also pleased also with their Lenten bookmarks, designed and drawn by the youth. They also served parishioners with tea, coffee and hot cross buns which again received much positive feedback.

The Youth Club went to Better Extreme (a trampolining evening) on 10th June with a helpers' meal planned also towards the end of term. Other treats included selection boxes for every member at Christmas, and Easter eggs at Easter.

Another 'Taster Evening' is planned for St. Mary's current year 6 on 17th June, to come along and see what's on offer with the hope they'll become full members in September.

It's hoped that new 'parent helpers' will also be recruited at this time as well. Donna Coy, the parish safeguarding officer has been overseeing all the appropriate DBS / Safeguarding checks.

First Aid for the Helpers' will be undertaken in the new academic year, courtesy of Crusader Training (David Leech senior).

We wish our older members well as they leave us, and thank all our helpers for their commitment and hard work throughout the year.

John Fells

For and behalf of the Youth Club Team

Dated: 11th June 2016