

# **PARISH MANAGEMENT GROUP**

## **ANNUAL REPORT, JANUARY 2011**

### **INTRODUCTION**

The principal purpose of this report is to provide an account of the activities of the Parish Management Group (PMG) in the past year. However, as it was not possible to provide the review of the year in the parish as a whole at the Advent Service in December owing to the bad weather, this will also be mentioned during and at the end of this report.

### **CONSTITUTION OF THE PMG**

At the last AGM in February 2010, there were two issues. Firstly, membership had become somewhat depleted (and indeed two more resignations of long-serving members have been tendered subsequently). Secondly, Hugh Davies, who had been Acting Chair for a prolonged period, advised he wished to relinquish this role but, fortunately, he was willing to remain a member of the PMG.

This is a welcome opportunity to extend the thanks of the whole parish to Ros Penn and Tony Davis for their hard work while serving on the PMG, and to Hugh for what he did while Chair. We are fortunate to retain Hugh's experience as a member of the group, Tony's in maintaining the parish website, and Ros's as our parish pilgrimage coordinator.

Our other good fortune was that a number of people who attended the AGM agreed to serve on the PMG. We have been delighted to welcome Clare Bevan, Helen Burgess, Eamonn Diver, John Fletcher and Helen Wilson. Their arrival has reinvigorated the group and provided fresh thinking to our deliberations. Subsequently, Martin Brennan, who agreed to take on the Social remit, was co-opted as a member, and John Flanagan has returned to the group after an absence of some years, as Parish Safeguarding Representative. Anne Gadsden was elected Chair.

### **THE YEAR UNDER REVIEW.**

The first concern at the start of the year was Canon Denis's health which led to him being hospitalised briefly and then for longer after a premature discharge. The second concern was how the parish would function in his absence. We owe a huge debt of gratitude to two groups of people: firstly, those who cared for Canon Denis in Bedford Hospital and Slough Hospital, but especially with Fr. Richard Moroney, a brother of one of our parishioners, at St Anthony's in Farnham Royal near Slough where he was for some weeks; secondly, those who from both within and outside the parish made sure that, as far as possible, we were able to worship as we would wish. Special thanks go to Canon Bennie Noonan for his support and practical help at that time and throughout the year, and to Fr. Keith Sawyer who looked after Ampthill.

### **PREMISES PROJECT**

By March, plans for the extension of the church and modernisation of our facilities in order that they comply with disability legislation had progressed well. Despite informal soundings suggesting we would succeed, that was not the case; the planning application was rejected after objections were received from one of our neighbours. Meetings with the planners did come up with an

alternative likely to be acceptable to them but the PMG decided unanimously to split the project and proceed with the upgrade of existing facilities and delay decisions about what to do about an extension until 2011 or later. The philosophy was very much that 'these things happen for a reason' and it was considered right to allow time for reflection to ensure that resources were spent wisely, rather than on a project, which through compromise, delivered less than our goal. Work on the upgrade of the existing facilities began on 4<sup>th</sup> January and is progressing with a target date for completion of the 4<sup>th</sup> February.

The other aspect of this initiative is the fundraising to pay for the building project, where the parish needs to raise at least 50% of the overall cost. This started in November 2009 and as at 31<sup>st</sup> December 2010 total funds raised stood at £10,268. This is an excellent effort and bodes well. With phase 1, which is currently taking place costing £55,000 there is an interim target to achieve £27,500 as soon as possible. For phase 2 of the development to occur, the target rises to a minimum of £50,000, which compared with the start that has been made feels very achievable

The funds raised thus far have come from a range of events in the parish and from donations. Every single contribution is truly appreciated whether large or small, especially where it represents a large proportion of someone's overall resources. As soon as the current work is complete, opportunities to contribute to this fundraising effort will recommence – look in the newsletter and on the website for further details.

## **SOCIAL**

The periodic censuses carried out have demonstrated a desire for regular social activities in the parish. It was recognised that it was an area where success was mixed – there had been well-received activities but they had been somewhat irregular and uncoordinated. Since joining the PMG in the spring, Martin Brennan has done a lot of groundwork, which we hope will pay off in 2011. Already it has resulted in another Christmas bazaar, which was even better, attended and raised more money for the building fund than the event in 2009. The aim is to provide a mix of events to suit as many tastes as possible. Some, but not all, events will be fundraisers for the building project. Being planned at the time of writing are a quiz night, a dinner to be held in the newly renovated social area and a concert by Flitwick Singers.

## **PLANNING**

In 2007 a three-year plan was prepared for the parish. For a variety of reasons, events have meant that the outcomes have not always matched the plan but it is also recognised that it had been beneficial to take a medium-term view to provide direction to our deliberations. That plan has therefore been reviewed and the PMG are in the process of putting together a five-year plan for 2011-2015. This is no easy task covering a period, which is expected to see considerable change, and yet further growth in the population within our boundaries, especially around Ampthill. Nevertheless, it is recognised that to have such a document to evaluate progress against will be of value in ensuring our goals are not lost sight of. The plan is being developed to cover all key areas.

## **CELEBRATION**

We were honoured to be able to witness Clare Bevan receiving her Bene Merete medal, which is awarded by the Pope personally for her vast contribution to the life of the parish over many years.

## **OTHER AREAS ON WHICH THE PMG KEPT A WATCHING BRIEF**

Safeguarding	This issue is of such importance that the parish safeguarding officer was co-opted onto the group so that it can be kept fully informed on this matter.
Papal Visit	For security reasons, involvement by parishes was very tightly organised. Jonny Stynes and Rebecca Lawton represented the parish outside Westminster Cathedral and Hyde Park. Nineteen from the parish drove through the dark and assembled in Cofton Park for the beatification Mass of John Henry Newman, conducted by the Pope.
Little 'Uns	This is seen as an important social group within the parish, which also familiarises the very young with the church and encourages them to feel comfortable and confident in our community. In addition, this group has for many years organised the Macmillan Coffee Morning for us and 2010 was no exception.
Ecumenical	<p>The parish has participated in a wide range of ecumenical activities over the year including</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Women's World Day of Prayer in both Ampthill and Flitwick</li> <li>Good Friday Walk of Witness</li> <li>Ampthill and District Churches Together choir performances</li> <li>Christian Aid – after the retirement of Mary Bray, the challenge was to find someone to take over the coordinator role and we are grateful to Eamonn Diver for having taken this on.</li> <li>Pentecost in the Park</li> <li>Christian Prayer Stall at the Mind, Body and Soul Fair</li> <li>Hosting the Bedfordshire Ecumenical Committee Forum</li> </ul> <p>The parish is represented on the Bedfordshire Ecumenical committee by Michael Lawton, and on the local group by him, Judith Latham, Canon Denis and Suzanne Yates, who is also their secretary.</p>
Walking Humbly	Don Perrett continues as the parish representative on the Pastoral Area Council team and keeps the PMG informed of their deliberations from time to time, so that parish plans can be developed in ways that will be flexible enough for future needs when the full outcome of this consultation is known.
Finance	<p>As a management group, this is an important area. The group member with responsibility for this is Hugh Davies who reports as required to the group as a whole.</p> <p>The offertory figures quoted in the newsletter are only part of the picture where income is concerned as this is augmented with contributions made by standing order and Gift Aid, which is reclaimed. Regular sources of income generated in excess of £56,000 in the year against expenses of around £52,000. At the moment, this shows a surplus but this does have to cover any one-off costs that arise, and concern has been expressed about the rate at which some parish expenses are rising. There is no room for complacency. Our longer-term reserves are held by the diocese.</p>

Youth activities	<p>Twenty-one teenagers were Confirmed in 2010.</p> <p>In other areas, Jonny Stynes and Rebecca Lawton, who participated in the Pope's visit, are also currently on the Salt and Light Young Leaders' Course with the Northampton Youth Ministry Office (NYMO). Six young people and three adults attended the Lumos events held in January and July, and the parish was represented at the Catholic Youth Ministry Federation conference.</p> <p>Parish-based activities are currently very limited and a goal for the PMG is to identify and support an individual who is interested in reinvigorating this area of activity and generating a higher level of interest among the youth of the parish.</p>
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## **OTHER PARISH ACTIVITIES**

Mothers' Prayers	This group has been part of our parish for 10 years now and continues to prosper.
Parish Prayer Group	This group meets most 1 <sup>st</sup> and 3 <sup>rd</sup> Tuesdays. The group adopted its new name this year to help emphasise the purpose of the group, which is to be busy praying in, and for our parish and its needs, to be more inclusive and able to extend a welcome to new people.
Pilgrimages	Yet another very successful pilgrimage to Oberammergau took place in September to witness the Passion Play, providing those who were able to go with an experience they are never likely to forget. There was also a visit to the beautiful monastery at Andechs, which provided an opportunity for prayer and reflection.
RCIA	RCIA provides a supportive learning environment for those interested in finding out more about the Catholic faith and possibly joining the Church. Sadly, because of Murray Lark's relocation for work, the parish has just lost its coordinator. Another challenge for 2011 is to find someone to take this on, in order that whenever someone feels called to explore his or her faith in this way we are able to respond.
SVP	The parish conference continues to flourish. Members continue to visit people in their homes, and residential and nursing homes. They also support a twinned conference in India and sponsor four students there as well. They have also supported the baby-feeding stations in Sudan. Two appeals for food for the clients on BeCHaR have raised over 1300 tins of soup, peas and carrots.
Tea and talk Teas after Mass	Another group which continues and we hope will do so for a long time. It may be a less well-known fact that funds raised from these activities keep the parish in supplies of tea, coffee, sugar, as well as toiletry supplies. There have also been donations from their surplus funds to the building project.
Music and Liturgy	We are grateful to Peter Miller for his continued support and enrichment of our Masses and other activities; also to Astrid Brown and Andrea Lark who play at the 9 o'clock Mass and to Hugh Davies and Alan Bevan who provide guitar accompaniment on occasion. A very encouraging development has been the start of a children's choir which sings at the 9 o'clock Mass.

Catechists Children's Liturgy	Passing on the Church's teaching to our children is vital to its future as well as something we hope will be at the heart of the lives of the children themselves. While classes naturally focus on the sacramental programme, a wide range of needs continue to be catered for.
Altar Servers	Thank you to all those who do take part in this important service for the parish. We would love you to encourage your friends to join in too, so that more servers are available and both Sunday Masses could be covered. We have lost Andrea Lark who coordinated this activity but we do have people who have volunteered to take over this role and support it, so 'watch this space'.

## **THANK YOUs**

The danger with attempting to thank people is the risk of leaving someone out, but one must try. There are many who do so much so quietly, and this acknowledgement is particularly aimed at them. They are the people who make things run smoothly and include: those involved in Sacristan duties: church cleaners: readers; extraordinary ministers of Word and Communion; those who take Communion to the sick and housebound; greeters at Mass; those who take, count, and bank the collection; and those who manage the administration and finance of the parish day to day.

There are two people to whom I, as Chair of the PMG, would like to offer special thanks and they are Michael Lawton who has spent countless hours dealing with the professionals and the council planners in connection with the building project; and Suzanne Yates who, personally speaking, I would not have got through this year without. In addition to supporting Canon Denis she is secretary to the PMG and supported me throughout the transition into this role for which I shall be eternally grateful.

## **PARISH STATISTICS FOR 2010**

Average Mass attendance	312	Confirmation	21
Baptisms	21	Marriages	4
Adults received	0	Deaths	7
First-Communion Candidates	11		

ANNE GADSDEN  
CHAIR, PARISH MANGEMENT GROUP  
27<sup>TH</sup> JANUARY 2011