

Sacred Heart Church Flitwick



Parish Pastoral Council Annual Report for 2019 11 June 2020

FR. JOHN DANFORD – PARISH PRIEST

This report is rightly focused on 2019. But the impact of the Coronavirus is so far reaching that I think it's important we pause on it now before we reflect on the year that went before it.

Few of us could ever have foreseen a world in which the church was closed for Easter. I know for many that was heart-breaking. And I know the range of online resources and activities the church offered online were a source of great comfort and hope. Before those tragic events, as this report shows, we achieved a lot in 2019. I want to thank you all our wonderful volunteers; and, of course, thank Deacon Philip and Suzanne our pastoral administrator for their continued work to support.

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ROGER WILSHAW – CHAIR'S REPORT

Father John has already kindly thanked us all for our contribution to our community during 2019. On behalf of the entire parish, I want to thank Fr. John. When Fr. John arrived in our parish he brought such energy, warmth and insightful and inclusive spiritual leadership. It is those gifts that sustained and strengthened us all throughout the year. Let me also take the chance to thank the outgoing chair of the Parish Council, Siobhan McGrath, for all she has done for us all over many years, as well as all the members of the council for their commitment and leadership.

I don't know about you, but I find it hard to remember last year, it seems like such a different time, even though it's only a few months ago. But when you look back over the last twelve months there is so much to celebrate and thank God for. During 2019 we launched our new Pray and Play initiative which has thrived over recent months and helped so many families support the spiritual growth of their children.

Our charitable commitment was as strong as ever as we raised over £5,700 for Missio (the highest in the diocese). Speaking of support for Missio it was great to Pat King recognised on Mission Sunday for the fourteen years she has spent promoting Missio at Sacred Heart. Pat was awarded a long service award by Fr. Vincent Oates. Many congratulations. We also concluded our fundraising for Just One House, to house a refugee family, by presenting a cheque for £3,500 to the British Red Cross, who are responsible for fitting out the House, alongside a cheque for £1,100 for Refugees Welcome Milton Keynes for their commitments to the families.

During 2019, our formation programme continued to thrive thanks to a talented and committed band of volunteers. Thank you all. We also started a major initiative to tell the wider community we are here, and we'd love them to join us. This resulted in the development of a leaflet to tell the new residents in our area about Sacred Heart. The leaflet drop was inspired by the Pastoral Area Council chaired by our own Peter Leatherhead. Peter was the driving force behind the PAC's three-step plan to boost the number of parishioners in the area. Many thanks for your leadership, Peter. We were overwhelmed by the number of volunteers who came forward and collectively dropped over 1,000 leaflets into letter boxes across the parish.

We know the leaflets resulted in more people coming to Mass for the first time or returning after a break. Thank you to everybody involved.

I'm not sure many of us could have foreseen the events of recent months, and I'm not very confident in my ability to foresee the year ahead. But I am confident in our collective ability to continue to use our talents and commitment to thrive and grow as a loving committed Christian community.

Our Spiritual Year, 2019 – Deacon Philip

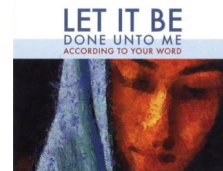
We set our usual schedule of spirit-filled events of the 2019 with an amazing response from the people of the parish to the range of opportunities provided.

We may not have set out to have a theme yet as we look back we see that 'The Way' featured in a variety of ways. Kicking off the year, the Quiet Day explored the images of Jesus in his descriptions of himself as 'I am ...'. As if to offer a kind of bookend to the year, our September retreat helped those who took part the time to discern their journey of faith – their 'Way' through life.

The Lent formation sessions drew us into the life of faith of Our Lady, Mother of God, through the CaFE programme 'Let it be'.



Catherine Davies and I led three Advent talks that initiated the start of the year 'God who speaks'. They took up the 'way' theme with study of all the prophets, especially Isaiah, and the evangelists canvass for the nativity.



Our young people were also active again in the year with five attending the NYMO Lux weekend. They thoroughly enjoyed their time and shared their experience with the parish through the weekly newsletter. Their journey to Northampton was mirrored by the parish group attending the diocesan pilgrimage to Walsingham in June, and in the autumn Fr. John joined hundreds of thousands in Rome who witnessed to the canonisation of John Henry Newman.

What we achieved in 2019

PRAY AND PLAY

In 2019, the PPC spent a considerable amount of time looking at ways to encourage families with young children back to church. The last change of Mass times had proved unpopular with many families. Starting in September, we organised a Pray and Play group once a month on a Sunday afternoon for an hour. It was targeted at families with children up to those in Year 6.



Most of the sessions were well attended and both the children and parents had a holy and fun time. Helen Burgess organised the sessions with the help of Siobhan Campbell, Frances Rowntree and Suzanne Yates.

BAPTISMS, FIRST HOLY COMMUNION, CONFIRMATION AND RCIA

We had fourteen baptisms, nine candidates for first Holy Communion, one confirmation and one person received into the Church in 2019.

WEDDINGS AND FUNERALS

We had three weddings and fourteen funerals in 2019.

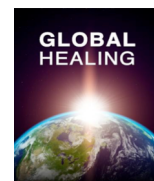
On All Souls Day, at both Ampthill and Flitwick cemeteries, we held services to remember those who had died in the last twelve months.

CARE FOR OUR COMMON HOME GLOBAL HEALING

Over the twelve months of 2019, we worked hard on caring for our common home both in our own homes and in the church.

Each month, we had a suggestion in the bulletin on what we could do, ranging from saying grace before meals to using less plastic.

We spent time organising our recycling at the church so as to make the best use of our resources.



EUCCHARISTIC MINISTERS AND READERS

We have a number of Eucharistic ministers who offer a Service of the Word with Communion on Wednesdays and when Fr. John is on leave.

We have a strong group of readers who are available for all Masses.

A small group of dedicated Eucharistic ministers visit our sick and housebound parishioners.

BOOK CLUB

The book club continued in 2019 and we read

📖 *The Things He Carried* by Stephen Cottrell for Lent,

📖 *Five People You Meet in Heaven* by Mitch Albom and

📖 *Hind's Feet on High Places* by Hannah Hurnard and

📖 *Pathway to the Stable* by Ivor Thomas Rees



PLANNED GIVING AND GIFT AID

The offerings made by envelopes and loose plate have steadied during this financial year, although the closure of the church in the last few weeks due to coronavirus will have impacted slightly into the final totals.

Since the closedown a few new standing orders have been instigated. It is possible that some parishioners may have taken up the invitation to continue to make offerings through the methods shown on the diocesan website, although it is expected that the uptake will be modest.

The positive news is that the trend of parishioners now making their offerings by standing order is still increasing, (results below) with the average offerings equating to approximately £790 per week. This should ensure that the parish will have a steady income stream until the church is able to resume normal masses.

2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20
Offertory Envelopes Used					
75	70	62	56	45	35
Gift Aid Declarations					
99	105	101	98	99	90
Standing Orders					
53	69	72	76	78	84

This year, the parish will again be able to take advantage of the Gift Aid Small Donation Scheme which will allow us to claim a tax rebate on non-Gift-Aided offerings up to a maximum of £8,000. This should result in an additional £2,000 each year.

Churches Together in Ampthill and Flitwick

In 2019, parishioners from Sacred Heart joined with the other churches in

- Open Churches in Lent, we did a session on *Forgiveness* on 10 March
- Walk of Witness through Ampthill which was led by Sacred Heart
- Pentecost in the Park – held in Ampthill Great Park in 2019
- Christian Aid Week took on a new format in 2019 with no envelopes being delivered but they were distributed at the churches; unfortunately we did not have a very good response
- Wreath-laying on Remembrance Day which was led by Sacred Heart in Flitwick
- We participated in the Sheep Train though Ampthill again this year
- We hosted the first of a series of ecumenical discussion forums in November
- Planning an ecumenical retreat in 2020

We have two representatives on the committee: Helen Burgess and Debbie Lewis.



**More we
achieved in
2019**

MACMILLAN COFFEE MORNING

Our 2019 Coffee Morning was a great success with many parishioners coming to the aid of Suzanne to assist in cooking,

serving and collecting money. A wonderful time was had by all and with our 20+ raffle prizes and the coffee and cake consumed. We raised £516 but we were outshone by Deacon Philip who Braved the Shave and raised £1,013.



SVP Report May 2019 to April 2020

We have 16 members with two more being recruited.

1,420 people visited, in their own homes and in local care homes in this period.

We also visit prisoners in Bedford prison. Help with transport for various appointments and other practical matters.

Soup for Sudan took place in March 2019 and raised £500. The event for this March was cancelled due to the coronavirus outbreak.

Special Mass with anointing of the sick held on 21 June 2019 and 80 people attended.

Coffee morning at Flitwick Village Hall on 11 October 2019 raised £107 for SVP funds.

The Giving Tree in December reached a record of 1,510 donated items.

We financially support three twinned conferences in India and two Indian students. We are also paying for a building project in India to rehouse a family.

The annual appeal in September was generously supported with donations totaling £900.



50th Wedding Anniversaries

1969 was a very good year to get married and we have four couples celebrate this wonderful event during 2019.

Congratulation to

- ★ Carmel and John Gallagher
- ★ Clare and Alan Bevan
- ★ Klara and Mike Eves
- ★ Sylvia and Tom Eastwood and
- ★ Jean and Brian Page celebrated their 65th anniversary

Other Fund Raising Activities

Tea and Coffee – raised £600 in 2019 and donated it to Keech Hospice x 2, Mary's Meals, Mercy Ships, Winter Night Shelter (MK) and the Stroke Association. Thank you to all who serve the tea and coffee and all who made the donations.

CAFOD – In 2019 our two CAFOD appeals raised £1,348.03.

100 Club – As at the end of 19/20 financial year we had £3,390.00 in the bank.

Membership at the end of January 2020 was 137 but we lost several members at renewal. Currently we stand at 134.

The 100 Club was changed to the 200 Club in April this year.

**And still more
achieved in
2019**

Sewing Group

The sewing group continued to meet. Numbers dropped to 5/6 but then bounced back to 12 regularly, though we have 14 members. We have been meeting for 8 years. We are an ecumenical group of mature ladies who gather for a chat, a laugh and a bit of sewing or knitting or watching others work ! No pressure. Clare decided to take a back seat and Hilary Brennan volunteered to run the Group with the help of Pat King. Thank you to them. New members always welcome.



Charismatic Group

The Charismatic prayer group has a core of 8 people. We have continued to meet twice a month, to worship, watch spiritual teachings and pray for those on the parish prayer noticeboard, the parish as a whole, anyone who has asked for intercessional prayers and anything else we feel led to pray for.

Earlier in the year, a mutual decision was agreed to by all attend the monthly live speakers' evenings at St John's, Sundon Park for their course on the gifts of the Spirit. This replaced one of our meetings at church. They were amazing speakers, powerful and truly inspirational.

We have continued to be blessed to have been able to offer prayer ministry once a month after Mass, where we have seen Jesus heal and touch many of those who come forward for prayer.



Mothers' Prayers

Mothers' Prayers continued to meet fortnightly on Monday evenings at Sue Barley's house throughout 2019. It was our 18th year of meeting, there are nine of us who meet regularly and five of us who have been meeting since 2011.

After a time of fellowship, we pray using the guide from our Mothers' Prayers booklet, we sing praises to Our Lord before the most sacred part of the meeting when each mother kneels before the crucifix and places her children/ grandchildren's names in a basket at the feet of Jesus. All the other mothers pray as each mother goes up in turn.

Once more this year, the Lord has listened to our prayers and blessed us richly.

November 2020 will see the celebration of 25 years of Mothers' Prayers in Westminster Cathedral.



Social Media



Our Facebook page is a place where we post up-to-date information and inspirational posts, which enables people to engage in what has been posted.

It's a place where we can easily keep our parishioners and others informed of what is happening in our church and in the diocese, as well as within the wider Catholic community. The information is accessed easily, as many users of Facebook have it on their phones.

People can contact us quickly by either leaving comments on our posts, or sending a message through Facebook messenger. These are monitored regularly by the moderator, who is notified quickly using an app on a smart phone.

CORONAVIRUS – NOT JUST COPING; THRIVING

It is entirely right that this report is not overshadowed by the events of recent months. But it doesn't seem right to ignore it either. Father John has talked about the heart-break of church doors closed at Easter. Add to that the isolation that so many in our community faced as they were required to stay at home and it can feel hard to bear. And yet, in those challenging times, as so often in the history of our parish, the true strength of our community shone through. We didn't just survive the lockdown. Our parish, our community, the support and love we offer each other grew and thrived.

These things don't happen by chance. They happen because the foundations on which we build are solid. They happen because we have a history of acting as a warm, welcoming, loving and supportive Catholic community who seeks to find and help those in need. They happen as a result of the dedication and commitment of so many of our volunteers. They happen because each and everyone of us makes a contribution.

It's in a crisis that you are reminded not just of challenges you face, but also the skills, resources and commitment of those around you. With that in mind I want to thank Suzanne, our pastoral administrator, for all she did to turn a physical parish into a virtual one – pretty much overnight! Suzanne now sends our weekly bulletin to over 230 email addresses, and our Facebook and YouTube channels are a growing source of support and resources.

The Call & Care scheme Suzanne co-ordinated was a great success, reaching out with a hand of friendship fellowship and prayer to every single person in our parish. It was not just an amazing achievement, it was the right thing to do and was greatly appreciated. That scheme worked thanks to the efforts of a large number of volunteers. It worked thanks to the hard work and the commitment of our vibrant St Vincent de Paul Society. But it would not have worked at all without the organisational skills, zeal and commitment of Suzanne. Thank you.

Similarly, I know we all have taken great comfort and fellowship from the innovative Zoom services that Deacon Philip has been holding during the lockdown. I know you will all want me to thank him for everything he does for us, and particularly for the gift of community and prayer those Zoom services have brought into our kitchens and living rooms (and occasionally, into the garden!).

Roger Wilshaw