

Sacred Heart Flitwick Parish Pastoral Council Annual Report 2023

10 September 2023



OUR MISSION

Through the power of the Holy Spirit, we will be a parish renewed in our knowledge and understanding of the love of Jesus Christ, to enable each of us to fulfil our Christian mission.



PARISH PASTORAL COUNCIL CHAIRPERSON – MYRIAM RINCON

Reflecting on 2022-2023 I want to start by reminding us of our parish mission above. Our mission statement is linked with the reflection from the Catholic Bishops Conference of England and Wales following the compilation of the Synodal National Synthesis Document. I would like to thank everyone in the parish who participated in the process in response to Pope Francis' call that we become 'experts in the art of encounter', which was an essential part of the considerations of the Synod results. He encourages us to spend time with the future, looking forward with the light of the Gospel.

At the beginning of my role as chair of the Pastoral Parish Council, we agreed to focus on the following six areas:

- Provide opportunities for parishioners of all ages to grow in holiness and enrich the quality of parish life.
- Identify new ways to connect with young people.
- Raise the awareness of church activities with new parishioners.
- Demonstrate that we are a caring church by being kind to each other in all that we do.
- Create opportunities to grow the number of people who volunteer for the church.
- Search out and respond to the needs, hopes and ideas of parishioners, all of which are linked to the issues considered in the Synod.

At the beginning of 2023, a review of the 2022 Christmas celebrations took place, and feedback gathered from parishioners indicated that they were all very pleased with the various Christmas celebrations we had. We had a pastoral visit on 11 March 2023 and Bishop David was very pleased with the number and quality of the activities offered by our dedicated volunteers. No doubt they deserve to be acknowledged and recognised for the importance of the work they do for the functioning of the parish, for which I am very grateful. On the Feast of the Sacred Heart on 16 June, the conclusion of the 40th Anniversary of Sacred Heart church was recognised by the celebration of a Mass where Bishop David was the principal celebrant. This was followed by a social event.

First Communion took place on 1 July, where eleven children received communion for the first time. Fr. Jerry celebrated this wonderful Mass and the children were joined by their family and friends. Cassie Wood, the lead catechist with the help of Kath Greenwood prepared the children for this wonderful day.

Kath Greenwood reminded us of the LiveSimply award we received for our work in the church, in response to Pope Francis' invitation in *Laudato Si* to 'work with generosity and tenderness in protecting this world which God had entrusted to us'. The LiveSimply award was earned by demonstrating that we were trying to live simply, live in solidarity with people in poverty and live sustainably with creation. We plan to continue this work later in the year.

A pilgrimage to Burgundy took place from 22 to 26 May as part of our 40th anniversary. It was attended by 28 parishioners and they visited a number of sites related to the seat of the formation of the devotion to the Sacred Heart. This originated with the apparitions of St Margaret Mary Alcoque in 1672 at Paray-le-Monial. Additionally, there was a chance to visit a vineyard and learn about wine-making in the area, this included a wine tasting. I know everyone was pleased and grateful to Hugh Davies for his wonderful organisational skills.

The PPC will continue to work to support the parish in all its needs.

I will be grateful if you can help in any way you can to 'show that we are a caring church by being kind to each other in all we do'.

God Bless you and your family, Myriam Rincon.

PLANNED GIVING AND GIFT AID 2022/2023 – PETER LEATHERLAND

Like all organisations, our parishioners financial support is the life-blood which the parish needs to carry out such day to day operations as keeping the fabric safe, in good repair, warm and welcoming. It also provides for our priest, without whom the parish could not perform its main purpose of spiritual guidance, moral support, and comfort to all who look to the Church for support. What is Planned Giving? It is a scheme which enables parishioners to make regular financial donations to our parish and the most popular way is by monthly standing order. This scheme helps us to work out how much we can expect to receive in a month and thus budget accordingly to meet our financial commitments. Currently just over 100 parishioners support us in this way, others donate via the offertory plate, and some use the contactless card reader situated in the entrance – all very welcome and much appreciated. Additionally, donors are asked to sign up to the Gift Aid scheme which enables the diocese, on our behalf, to claim a refund 25% on all these offertory donations. If anyone would like more information on these schemes, particularly if you wish to set up a new standing order or increase a current one then please contact the parish office for details.

BAPTISMS, FHC, CONFIRMATION, RCIA, WEDDINGS AND FUNERALS

In the last twelve months we had twelve baptisms and eleven candidates for First Holy Communion. In 2022 there were fourteen youths and one adult who received confirmation and two people were received into the Church. There were no confirmations in 2023 as they take place every other year in our parish. There was one wedding in 2022 and one wedding in 2023. We had nine funerals in the last twelve months.

SVP – MAUREEN GRAHAM

We have twelve active members of our Conference and we ring and visit beneficiaries in their own homes and visit two care homes in the area, we drive people to church and help with shopping etc. Two highlights of our year are: In December we collected items for the homeless in Bedford and Luton and the parish gave over 1000 items which we distributed between the homes both for Christmas and throughout the year. In June we had a Mass for the Sick where around 40 people attended, we had a lovely Mass, blessings and anointing and then we had afternoon tea in the Canon Denis room.

CHURCHES TOGETHER – HELEN BURGESS AND DEBBIE LEWIS

Churches Together Ampthill and Flitwick continues to grow in strength since the pandemic. The group has worked hard to develop greater opportunities to listen to one another, share fellowship and our faith. The regular Saturday morning meetings over breakfast are an important part of this process. At Sacred Heart we hosted the Christian Aid breakfast again this year, 'the big Brekkie' and as well as its fund-raising success it was a source of great joy to see nearly all our local ministers sitting together sharing breakfast. Later when we celebrated our 40th anniversary two of the local Anglican ministers came to join us in our celebration of Mass. There have been many other fruits of this relationship including a vibrant children's craft event to celebrate the coronation in Ampthill Great Park, the annual walk of witness on Good Friday, a sunrise service on Easter Sunday morning, the World day of prayer event, Civic events, the annual Remembrance services, and an ecumenical retreat day at Turvey Monastery to name but a few. We look forward to the next year inspired by these thoughts from Pope Francis, 'For us as Christians, walking together is not a ploy to strengthen our own positions, but an act of obedience to the Lord and love for our world. Let us ask the Father to help us walk together all the more resolutely in the ways of the Spirit'. (<https://www.oikoumene.org/news/pope-francis-affirms-catholic-churchs-commitment-to-the-ecumenicaljourney>).

FOOD BANK – ANN LEATHERLAND

The Need Project was established as a part of the caring ministry of King's Baptist Church in Stotfold. Its main objective is 'fighting rural poverty in Central Bedfordshire', and now works through a number of local village churches including Sacred Heart here in Flitwick. For several years our parish has actively supported the Need Project Food Bank by accepting regular food donations from parishioners and for this we had our designated collection basket in the church porch. Whilst it is pleasing that our parish donations have increased over the last two years, it is sad that such support is needed more and more. With the Covid pandemic and current cost of living pressures on families the Charity has seen an increased demand on its services, and the number of referrals is currently around the 300 per month mark, and the help given is in the form of food parcels appropriate to each family's needs. Your donations are collected by the Charity every four or five weeks and our regular contact is full of praise for the strong support you as parishioners give.

CHILDREN'S LITURGY – KATH GREENWOOD

Children's Liturgy now established at the 11.00 am Mass every Sunday. We rely on at least one parent to be the second adult to fulfil safeguarding regulations. The number of children attending fluctuates week to week. The largest number attending is twelve. During Lent we adopted the theme 'Who Am I'? A display was created on the board at the back of the church. We also held Stations of the Cross for children on Holy Saturday morning. Children from Children's Liturgy, last year's First Holy Communion group, this year's First Holy Communion group, pre-confirmation group and family of parishioners, all volunteering to participate. The attendance was very good with families occupying half the church. An Easter egg hunt was held after both Masses on Easter Sunday. Participation numbers were high, especially after the 9.00 am Mass. Volunteers from the Youth Hub helped with the organisation and supervision.

YOUTH HUB – KATH GREENWOOD

The Youth Hub was formed in September 2022 post confirmation. The small group meet in the Canon Frank room after 5.00 pm Mass on the First Saturday of the month. They have created a CAFOD LiveSimply banner for the parish. It is hoped that they will take on responsibility for promoting the CAFOD LiveSimply Award within Sacred Heart parish. Parishioners have been asked to pledge to look for ways to use less, to share more, and to focus on relationships instead of things. This is in response to Pope Francis' invitation in *Laudato Si*.

Volunteers from the Youth Hub are now members of the 11.00 am Mass Coffee morning rota, the last Sunday of the month usually baking cakes to help boost the donations. We also have a couple of post-confirmation group on the reader's rota. Youth Hub provided the Easter Raffle, money raised helped with the costs incurred when attending FLAME, at OVO Arena, Wembley.

CHARISMATIC GROUP – DEBBIE LEWIS

Charismatic prayer group currently meet at Sacred Heart church once a month for a time of praise and worship, prayer and discussion. When able to, we spend time in adoration with the blessed sacrament.

Each first Tuesday of the month we join with our friends in St John's, Sundon Park at The Well. This is a time of praise, worship and teaching offered by a monthly speaker. A few from our group are members of CHARIS Northampton, serving the diocese within the Catholic Charismatic Renewal team. We are blessed that our Bishop, David, is a great advocate for the Renewal and wishes to see all parishes worshipping in this way. We have attended conferences throughout the year, such as New Dawn Walsingham, Overflow at the Bethal Centre in Birmingham and more local meetings in Milton Keynes and Luton.

MOTHERS' PRAYERS – SUE BARLEY

Mothers' Prayers grew from strength to strength in 2022 with 13 regular members. It works well meeting on a Friday morning after the blessing of receiving Our Lord at the 10.00 am Eucharist. We enjoyed an Agape shared lunch in July and look forward to further times of fellowship. Most importantly Our Blessed Lord has continued to answer many of our prayers. Alleluia!

SACRED HEART BOOK CLUB – ANN LEATHERLAND

Sacred Heart Book Club was started in 2013 by a small group of ladies with Deacon Philip Pugh as its Spiritual Director. The subject of the chosen books varies widely, spiritual, reflective or motivational, fictional, or based on real life experiences, the life of the Church, Advent and Easter, the scriptures and readings for each season. Works by Christian writers and Theologians including Pope Francis are all included. Members read the selected book and the group then meets together to discuss what they had read. Meetings usually take place every other month, on a Thursday evening at 7-30pm. This gives each member the time to acquire and read the selected book. Members volunteer to host the meeting and each occasion encourages informed discussion and reflection.