Sacred Heart Flitwick
Parish Pastoral Council Annual Report 2024

9 July 2024

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.

THE AGM REPORT 2024 FROM FR. JERRY

This report seeks to assess the activities of the Parish Pastoral Council in the past months based on the vision statement of the parish. The parish desires to achieve through the power of the Holy Spirit, a renewed knowledge and understanding of the love of Jesus Christ, to enable each one to fulfil their Christian mission.

The mission of the Holy Spirit in the liturgy of the Church is to prepare the assembly to encounter Christ; to recall and manifest Christ to the faith of the assembly; to make the saving work of Christ present and active by his transforming power; and to make the gift of communion bear fruit in the Church (CCC#1112).

I wish to thank the Parish Pastoral Council members for their commitment and wisdom during the year under review. The Parish Pastoral Council reminds us of a spirituality based on Christ's mission lived by the local parish community. The Christian community grows with chrism and ministries. By our baptism, every lay faithful is empowered with gifts of the Holy Spirit necessary to build up the whole body of Christ.

Their role in the parish reminds us of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. It encourages everyone to be open to the Holy Spirit. The work of the Parish Pastoral Council is not a democratic institution which is determined by a vote of the majority. The Pastoral Council makes the mission of Jesus Christ still relevant in our changing society even as people respond differently to the Gospel of Christ and approach the celebration of the sacraments.

In response to the vision of the parish, Bishop David visited the parish and bestowed Papal blessing on Suzanne and Klara and decorated them with Benemerenti medals. Also, the parish observed a 24-hour Adoration during the season of Advent and Lent which was very successful because there were new parishioners who embraced this way of prayer. I wish to thank everyone who made time for this spiritual exercise.

On catechetical formation, the parish prepared and celebrated the Sacrament of Confirmation for the 17 young people after a successful interview. The parish celebrated the sacrament of Confirmation with Bishop David coinciding with the celebration of the parish Sacred Heart feast day.
The catechists journeyed with these young people through various courses enabling them to become confident about their Catholic faith. In the course of the year, 7 new extraordinary ministers of communion were commissioned.

We thank the catechists for preparing the children for the first confession and Holy Communion. The parish was blessed with young children who attended the children's liturgy. The parish is committed to the core mandate of caring for our children and the young people of this parish. I am grateful to other volunteers involved in the adult formation and spirituality of the parish, especially during the holy season of Lent and Advent.

I wish to thank the team of volunteers who clean the church, the catechists, musicians, sacristans, readers, and extraordinary ministers of the Communion, the welcomers and appreciate the efforts of the finance committee, Hugh Davies, Peter and other members who count the money. I thank Aggie for excelling in her new role as parish secretary.

In conclusion, I hope and pray that with a new group of Parish Pastoral Councillors, the parish will be renewed in our knowledge and understanding of the love of Jesus Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit, to enable each of us to fulfil our Christian mission.

PARISH PASTORAL COUNCIL CHAIRPERSON – MYRIAM RINCON

I would like to start by reminding ourselves about, our parish mission above.
At the beginning of this year, we continued to focus on the following six areas:

- Provide opportunities to parishioners of all ages to grow in holiness and to enrich the quality of our 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 several people who do volunteer work for the church.
- Search and respond to the needs, hopes and ideas of Parishioners.

We also focused on the structure of the PPC, where Kath Greenwood and Siobhan Lees presented to the committee a proposed new pillar structure for the PPC that would represent all aspects of parish life and the various groups involved in supporting the church. Work to date on the structure of the PPC was discussed and passed to Fr Jerry. Recommendations were made to identify roles that are already been undertaken by individuals. A suggestion was made at the AGM to see if a budget could be made available to have proper Stations of the Cross put in place. In fact, at the time, Hugh Davis had already done some work identifying suitable, designs and costs. Thanks to the amazing generosity of the parishioners, we have (from the same money pot), purchased not only the Stations of the Cross. The Stations of the Cross will be recommissioned and be blessed at the feast of the Holy Cross Mass on Thursday, 14 of September 2024.

Sacrament Programmes 2023-2024. In 2023, 17 youngsters signed up for First Reconciliation. First Holy Communion Preparation started in November after school's half-term. On the 22 of June 2024, 17 children Received First Holy Communion at a mass celebrated by Fr. Jerry.

A review of the Easter celebrations was undertaken, and everyone was very pleased with how they went. Easter Sunday was special, when a great number of visiting families attended Mass.

On the 4 of December, it was announced in the bulletin Bishop David's message for us, on the theme of Love. I do hope you saw his message which no doubt it touched your hearts. A foreword from Bishop David communicated to us, that this year 2024 has been designated by Pope Francis as a particular time of prayerful preparation for the forthcoming Jubilee Year in 2025, Pilgrims of Hope. We are invited to reflect upon the central place of prayer within our life of discipleship. During this year, we will focus on the Our Father. This prayer given to us by the Lord Jesus himself, is the heart of all prayer. It is worth reminding ourselves that saints used these very words to pray to, our heavenly Father.

During Lent, the children's Liturgy group adopted the theme 'Prayer Journey ' with weekly promises, which were a response to Pope Francis's call, for a year of prayer in preparation for the 2025 Jubilee Year.

The existing parish website layout has been mapped, research has been undertaken into best practices for a modern engaging website and a new layout has been created. No doubt this will attract your attention as soon as you open it and read the beautiful, meaningful, empowering messages and their contents. Caspar database: Hugh Davis and Peter Leatherland are working with the designers of the Caspar system, so the software can be tailored to our requirements.

On the 4th of October 2023, on the Feast of Saint Francis of Assisi, Pope Francis published a new Apostolic Exhortation Laudato Deum, 'which is a part two of his Encyclical Laudato Si, directed to all people of God on the climate crisis. The Pope has said, "it is necessary to stand with the victims of environmental and climate injustice, striving to put an end to the senseless war on our common home, which is a terrible world war.'

I would like to remind you of one of the six areas we are focusing on which is to create opportunities to grow the number of people who do volunteering for the church. I will be very grateful if you can consider helping in any way you can to show we are a caring church by being kind to each other in all we do.

Thank you for listening. God Bless you and your family.

FINANCE CHAIR, HEALTH AND SAFETY, MAINTENANCE, MUSIC – HUGH DAVIES

Building and Property

- Following a fire risk assessment requested by the diocese we have installed two new smoke detectors; an external fire exit lighted sign and intumescent strips to five doors plus some updated signage. In all other respects our fire safety status was considered excellent.
- Given the large amount of information now coming from the diocese rather than increase the size of our parish newsletter we have installed two larger notice boards in the lobby to accommodate all the Diocesan information.
- The new Stations of the Cross have arrived and will be blessed and installed in September.
- All the people who sponsored individual Stations have been given certificates of appreciation. At the donors request their names will not be released but Station No 15 is dedicated to the people of the parish.
- We were able to get a good discount so there is some money left over which we would like to put to the cost of a height adjustable readers lectern

Finance

- Thanks to some sterling work by Peter Leatherland, we have once again managed to submit a budget in a format requested by the diocese (which is very complicated).
- Peter has prepared a financial statement and statement on Planned Giving which are attached.

Pilgrimages

- Sadly after 30 years in business Special Pilgrimages are now winding up the company. Most of their work is the Middle East which is now a difficult location for pilgrimages.
- We will have to re-think our plans.
- Please also see the notices for the Diocesan pilgrimages available on the notice board.

Liturgical

- Congratulations to our newly appointed Extraordinary Ministers of the Eucharist. It was noted at retreat that some people have been exercising their ministry for over 30 years. Congratulations to them too.
- Given requests from some mass attenders the musicians are looking at introducing some new hymns including some more modern ones.
- We now have four guitarists, an organist and a cantor so we are able to have music at all masses.
- At the 11.00 am mass we have now added a sung memorial acclamation and sung Great Amen to our repertoire.
- From the start of Advent new translations of the Liturgy will come into effect. This means we have had to change the Lectionary and Book of the Gospels. Information on the implications for personal missals will be available shortly.

Health and Safety

- No accidents, incidents or near misses to report.
- We have now relaid the uneven paving slabs to the front of church.
- All fire extinguisher testing and servicing is now complete for this year as is the electrical portable appliance testing.

PLANNED GIVING AND GIFT AID 2023/2024 – PETER LEATHERLAND

We currently have 90 parishioners who have signed Gift Aid Declaration to allow the diocese to claim the tax donation back from HMRC. For the year to the end of March 2024, we have received an additional £11,400 to help boost our income. Over the last two years we have progressively transferred regular donations from the old envelope system to payment by bank standing order direct to the Diocese. This has helped reduce the amount of work done by the counters who have to count the weekly offertory collections, particularly important in these days of reduced banking facilities. Standing order income is just over £47,000 pa and we also receive various other donations which help us keep our heads above water. On behalf of Fr. Jerry and the Parish Finance Committee many thanks for your generous support to Sacred Heart.

BAPTISMS, FHC, CONFIRMATION, RCIA, WEDDINGS AND FUNERALS

Between 1 April 2023 and 30 June 2024, we had 21 baptisms. In 2024 16 children received First Holy Communion. One candidate received First Holy Communion in December 2023. In 2024 there were 17 candidates for confirmation. There were no confirmations in 2023 as they take place every other year in our parish. There was one wedding in 2023 and 11 funerals between 1 April 2023 and 30 June 2024.

SVP – MAUREEN GRAHAM

The Sacred Heart Flitwick Conference of the SVP was founded in 2006. It currently has 16 members.
While there is undoubted physical poverty in this area, and we respond, when necessary, our main focus is visiting anyone who is 'poor in spirit' for any reason and we respond to all requests without regard to belief or lack of it.
Last year (April 2023 – March 2024) we made 1050 visits and made 575 phone calls to 81 individuals or families. We also organised:

- 'Mass for the Sick' followed by afternoon tea.
- The Advent Giving Tree – providing essentials to two homeless charities and a women's refuge.
- Soup for Sudan – in aid of the SVP in Sudan and South Sudan.
- In co-operation with Flitwick Parish Church helped to fund food and Easter Eggs for families during the half-term break.
- Hosted coffee mornings at Flitwick Village Hall to raise funds and publicise our work.

CHURCHES TOGETHER – DEBBIE LEWIS

We have six churches who are members: Ampthill Baptist, Greensand Community Methodist (Ampthill and Flitwick), SS Peter and Paul, St. Andrew's and Sacred Heart.
We hold quarterly meetings, hosted at rotating member churches. We begin with breakfast at 8.45am and discuss, in a cafe style, local events we are organising/involved with. The meetings finish by 10.00 am.
In the last year we have represented our Christian faith at Remembrance Day and Civic Services, and have organised the following events:

- Carol singing in the park
- Week of prayer for Christian unity
- World Day of Prayer
- Good Friday Walk of Witness
- Easter Sunday Sunrise Service

- Breeze in the park (Pentecost)
- And we hosted a hustings for the General Election!

We have also raised money for Christian Aid by holding two coffee mornings at Flitwick Market and cooking a Big Brekkie at Sacred Heart, these are very popular events and raise approx. £1000 per year.

FOOD BANK – ANN AND PETER 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

Over the years our parish has actively supported this Food Bank Project by accepting regular food donations from parishioners and our designated collection basket is easily accessible in the church porch. The donations received continue to increase and the charity collects them regularly once a month and our regular contact continues to be full of praise for the strong support the parish gives.

It is a cause for great concern that cost of living pressures are still affecting the many families who rely on the charity for support and demand for its services. The number of referrals is now exceeding 300 per month, the help being mainly by way of food parcels. Our parish support for The Need Trust is very much appreciated.

CHILDREN'S LITURGY – KATH GREENWOOD

Sacred Heart, Flitwick Children's Liturgy 2023-24. Children's Liturgy is well established during Sunday 11am Mass. Attendance varies between four and 18. In line with Pope Francis' call for a Year of Prayer, several opportunities were created to encourage involvement of children.

- Parish Day of Prayer resources were available for all ages.
- A specific hour set aside during 24-hour Eucharistic Adoration encouraging all children from the parish to experience the presence of the Lord. Attended by those preparing for Sacraments of First Holy Communion and Confirmation.
- Lent theme was 'Prayer journey through Lent' with daily prayers and weekly Promises placed on the display board.
- Stations of the Cross for children on Holy Saturday morning. Involving Children's Liturgy, past and present First Holy Communion groups, pre-Confirmation group volunteering to participate.
- At the beginning of June Fr. Jerry celebrated a children's mass in Canon Dennis room.

YOUTH HUB – KATH GREENWOOD

The Youth Hub this year has been well attended by this year's confirmation group.

This year's members of the Hub are actively involved helping on the coffee morning rota after 11.00 am Mass.

Participants are available as readers at the Family Mass on the first Sunday of the month along with younger members of the parish. On Easter Sunday they helped to provide the music at the 11.00 am Family Mass as well as support the Easter Egg Hunt. They were also actively involved in the Stations of the Cross for young children on Holy Saturday.

Youth Hub members sold Raffle tickets at Easter, money raised helped with the costs incurred when attending Blaze, day retreat for Confirmandi organised by Northampton Diocesan Youth Team. Members have also been actively involved in the Parish CAFOD Appeals – Harvest Fast Day (October), Fast Day (February) and Sudan Crisis Appeal (April).

BOOK CLUB – ANN LEATHERLAND

Sacred Heart Book Club is now in its 11th year and the group meets every other month, usually on a Thursday evening at 7.00 - 7.30pm. The subject of the chosen books varies widely, spiritual, reflective or motivational, fictional, or based on real live experiences, the life of the Church, Advent and Easter, the scriptures, and appropriate readings for each season. Works by Christian writers and theologians including Pope Francis. Members volunteer to host the meeting and the in between period allows each of us to acquire and read the selected book. Our evenings encourage informed discussion and reflection, always supported by tea and cakes. New members are always welcome and copies of the books already read and discussed are available for anyone to read.

MOTHERS' PRAYERS – SUE BARLEY

Mothers' Prayers has been running for 22 years and we have a dozen members. We meet every fortnight after Friday's 10.00 o'clock Mass in the Canon Denis suite. As well as praying for our children and grandchildren, we pray for the concerns of the parish and for any wider issues on our hearts. The Lord in his mercy has answered many of our prayers. After meeting for so many years we have grown close and are able to offer each other support and prayers as needed. We also enjoy fellowship together perhaps in the form of a shared Agape meal together or an outing for an afternoon tea. September will see us begin our 23rd year of prayer meetings. Praise God.