

Parish Annual Report

2022



Two Churches, One Vision

Worship, Evangelisation, Social Action, Formation and Co-responsibility are the areas which are being developed under our Diocesan Plan with Youth featuring across these.

So, this year our annual report is under these headings.

Worship

One priest once wrote that there are three 'H's to consider when it comes to meaningful worship. These are hospitality, homilies, and hymns (singing really). As a parish we do take these seriously and are blessed with fine wardens and welcomes, friendly people and musicians and singers that are constantly trying to make our worship meaningful, prayerful and full of joy. After the pandemic we have made extra efforts to strengthen these areas.

Annie and Alex welcomed Jo Boyce earlier in the year to help us revamp our music and choirs. We have used technology to help individuals prepare for singing psalms and new hymns at home. We are more consistent at all Masses so choir members can join a choir at any Mass, and we can have joint practices. But we would still welcome more musicians and singers. We are often stretched.

Regarding homilies, we do review these as a team every week and welcome comments from parishioners.

One other element (that doesn't begin with 'H') is children's liturgy. This has grown and strengthened reflecting the importance of welcoming families and bringing the Good News to our children.

We have also enjoyed school masses, wonderful school carol services, prayer and praise evenings. We look forward to all those baptised in 2022 coming to celebrate that occasion on the feast of the Baptism of Jesus.



Formation

How are we formed? It's always a combination of different experiences.

Liturgy is one of those but also the priorities of the parish can shape us.

In 2022, we provided opportunities for people to be formed in the image of Jesus whether through Parents Catechesis, Home Groups, Alpha courses, talks in Lent, retreat days, Journey in Faith, prayer, sacrament of reconciliation, adoration but also all the social action work we do.

Fr Subba also spent time in each school on a weekly basis and the development of a children's and adults library run by Nicky. 'Prayer bags' were also available for families in Lent alongside 'Walk With Me' booklets.

Our two fine schools and teams of excellent catechists work hard on forming our children for their Sacraments. It is often forgotten that parents are primarily responsible and involved in this too. 59 made their first Holy Communion in May. 57 were confirmed in June by Bishop Stephen Wright.

There were no pilgrimages last year. These are another great way to be formed and something we should return to in 2023.



Co-responsibility

In the past, the Church's work was seen as the priest's job with a few 'helpers'. Everyone else just turned up for Mass. That is clearly not what Jesus asks of the baptised. He calls on us to be disciples sharing in the responsibility of evangelising, worship, and care for the poor. So, laity are 'co-responsible'. When we live this out, it makes the work of spreading the Gospel more fruitful and more fun.

As a parish we have developed more leaders. People have come forward who have already been leaders before, in education, health care or business and brought their faith and skills to parish leadership. We have also had away days at Alton Castle to evaluate and plan for the future. These have been facilitated by Nick St John and Natalie Orefice from the Diocese.

The parish council is also key to this. 12 members of the parish are involved in shaping or challenging what we do as a parish and in ensuring we make the right decisions. The parish council is chaired by Anne Goodeve and the constitution was re-written during the year to reflect parish developments.

The Parish Team has key workers whose names are on the bulletin each week. Names that are not there are Wojciech who manages the website, live streaming and IT and people like Lisa Fahy, Kathy Steggles and Pat Standen who come in daily to work on catechesis or administration. There are about 12 who work together to develop all aspects of parish life – some are paid, and others do it as volunteers.

But then there are another 200 or so additional volunteers, who bring plans to life in Liturgy (readers, choirs, wardens, cleaners, flower arrangers etc), Catechesis, social action and events. Examples of events include the Commonwealth Games Baton Event in July with over 500 local people present (it was a wonderful success), the summer-scheme was led by 40 volunteers and the Bonfire night.

This year we also heard the word 'synodality' for the first time. It means that clergy and laity do the pilgrimage of life in a way that honours the Holy Spirit speaking through every person. We discern together by listening to God and responding in the light of the Church's teachings. Terry led us in this discernment so that our experiences might help map out a fruitful path for the Church. This way of working is not a one-off. As a parish we are being asked by Pope Francis to make this the way in which we will always work.



Social Action

The Gospels, Acts of the Apostles and Letters all make it abundantly clear that care for the needs of the poor are at the heart of the Gospel message. To preach the Gospel and fail to look after the poor is not the action of authentic disciples. It was this knowledge that led the parish to found Heart of Tamworth. So much of our pastoral work is channelled through this.

Catherine Smith is the new chair of HoT and has done an amazing job this year in leading trustees to develop a new 3-year strategy. She is also applying for more funds to employ a full-time manager and try to make HoT a little more financially self-sufficient.

There are four key areas of work. Firstly, the HoT Café run by Jenn and her wonderful team of volunteers. Each week members of groups and local people flock to feel part of a community where they are welcomed and valued. Great food and hospitality give an ethos of Christian welcome, a sense of belonging to all. But it's hard work. We are always recruiting more volunteers.

Kelly oversees the HoT Shop which makes food available to people in need everyday. We have again been blessed with great volunteers (most are not parishioners) and amazing donations of food, especially from Greencore. This is a lifesaver to many families (over 150 per week), especially in the current financial crisis.

Two other areas are led by Terry and Kelly. Firstly, there are now dozens of groups in the community centres at both churches looking after mental health, loneliness and isolation, health, abuse, debt, bereavement, dementia, addiction. They all love coming to Sacred Heart and St John's because they know they have a unique atmosphere, facilities and welcome. Terry also works with homeless people. In 2022, he helped many off the streets and into accommodation and work, with substantial support from Tamworth Borough Council.

Kelly and Terry are now supported by Sam and Amelia, two young and vibrant members of the team who bring some up-to-date IT skills alongside enthusiasm and energy.

In October and November, the parish supported this work further with the Vintage Sale and Christmas Fayre raising thousands of pounds. We also installed 50 solar panels which will help reduce bills and lessen our impact in the environment.

Many other things go on to reflect our concern for people who can be forgotten. 28 Eucharistic ministers visit the 90 housebound each week. They bring God to them, not just in the Eucharist, but also in their loving concern and friendship. In all the HoT work we try to bring God to people even if we are not talking about Him.



Evangelisation

Everything we do is an opportunity for people to hear about and meet Jesus, including worship and social concern. It is something that does not come easy to many of us. It is an area that we recognise we could also do better in as a parish.

Alpha is a focal point for us. This year we had some great new chefs. The food was awesome. We just need to invite more people to join us and see that the best nourishment is in the Gospel.

Six Christmas Masses saw just under 1300 people attending. It's always a chance to reach out so we made a big effort with our youth choir and other choirs, homilies and welcome. Many attended numerous masses to help.

Using social media and the Website to promote what is going on is an essential part of Evangelisation. Rebecca and Wojciech are working on this with the support of the Parish Team to ensure that people are continually being 'poked' or invited to hear the Good News.

Youth

Underpinning the Diocesan Pastoral Plan is an emphasis on young people and families. Sometimes people think we spend most of our energies in the parish on young people. But most of our groups and activities and time is spent with people who are older (just look at the newsletter or visit Sacred Heart during the week).

In terms of evangelisation, worship, and formation every age group is a challenge, but young people can be hardest to reach. That's why the Diocese asks us to develop this area of ministry.

While the Summer-scheme is our big annual event for over 90 young people, we are also back to weekly youth groups led by Marie, Clare and Annette and we have appointed Rhiannon to develop our work with teenagers. The summer-scheme is a great annual event, but we need to maintain this positive contact with young people and try to connect them with God and the parish community.



Stewardship

With annual reports a lot of people go straight to the finances. But our work is more important, and our buildings need to be used in the service of the Lord too. A parish can have money in the bank and yet have buildings that need hundreds of thousands of pounds spending on them and are also only used a few hours each week. We have tried to be careful with parish money but also to maintain our buildings and, more importantly, use them in the service of the Gospel.

We invested in solar panels, windows, insulation, and a café garden at Sacred Heart. We did repairs to the roof and re-pointing at St John's. Across all buildings we have more property than most schools have and much of it is maintained by volunteers like Doug or builders doing lots of work but at low rates like Steve and another Steve (P) cutting grass and hedges as a volunteer. By and large our buildings are in good repair, but we need to repaint soffits and the former presbytery at St John's, planned for 2022 but now rescheduled for 2023.

Income increased but most of this increase was due to a bequest from John Solanky. Bequests have reflected people's love for the parish over the years and we are indebted to John and others who have remembered us in their wills.

More people have become regular givers through standing orders and signing gift aid forms. Not everyone can give time due to family commitments or physical strength but are so often generous in their giving to the parish financially. We regularly get donations of money to various causes but also of food for projects. We do thank everyone for the great support you give in so many ways.

Our parish has become an exciting community but also complicated and demanding in the various initiatives we have undertaken. One of the demands is the cost, even when salaries are low. We need to be realistic in our giving if we want to make an impact on a world where the Gospel is sometimes scorned and often not valued.

If we don't value it, who will?





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The parish is a parish within the Archdiocese of Birmingham
Registered Charity No: 234216

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