

## ST EDMUND'S PARISH, BUNGAY AND HARLESTON, A.G.M.

25th ANNUAL PARISH PRIEST'S REPORT – 8 July 2018

This year (2017/18) five children were in preparation for their First Holy Communion which they received on 10<sup>th</sup> June and I take this opportunity of expressing particular thanks to Rebecca Clarke for undertaking the instruction of this group each Sunday morning. In October, I stood in for the Bishop who was unwell and Confirmed 15 young people, a record for our parish post-war, I also confirmed another three in the course of adult baptisms or receptions. In this parish we normally have Confirmations every 3 years, so we would expect to form a group for the summer or autumn of 2020.

There are three weddings this year, one here at St Edmund's, one at which I preached and gave the blessing at a church in Dorset and one due to take place in Blythburgh.

During the last year, we lost only five parishioners through death of which one, Joe Duckett, would be particularly well known to most of you. May they rest in peace. Three babies were baptised, which is below average, and two received into the church. The census in October 2017 showed an increase of 5 in our average Sunday congregations (all Masses combined) to 131 which is an improvement on the decrease of 15 in 2015. This is not a matter for either complacency or alarm but reflects the fact that we are the 7<sup>th</sup> smallest parish out of the 50 in our diocese and just one family moving in or out can make a noticeable difference.

Financially we continue on the usual knife-edge with income and expenditure finely balanced through the use of a carefully watched budget – for which prudence I am as always particularly grateful to our Treasurer, Carole Hunt. A number of maintenance projects have taken place at Bungay, such as the renovation of the hall passage which suffers from dry rot, and at Harleston, where the external timber has been painted and the kitchen has been renewed to the required standard including new ventilation and a new cooker. There has also been renovation of some tarmac at that site.

In the course of the year, the fundraising scheme for the Diocese, called *Alive in Faith* was concluded. This can only be described spectacularly successful – contrary to my own predictions – for having been set a low target of £25,000 we actually raised well over £90,000. This triggered a “kick-back” reward of some £30,000 (payable over five years) for “parish projects” subject to diocesan approval. The first of these, a scheme to place over 20 PV panels on the Bungay hall roof, is scheduled to begin later this month (July 2018). Our appeal was 360% over the target and had one of the highest participation rates at 55%, so it was not just the fruit of a few large donations (welcome though these were). I take this opportunity of thanking you very much for your generous support which, apart from its practical benefits, has been widely publicised and praised across the diocese. Our Parish Pastoral Council has been discussing projects which might be an appropriate and beneficial use of our share of the cash-back windfall as it trickles through over the years.

As always I think we should renew our gratitude to those who give generously of their time in carrying out the essential offices both in Bungay and Harleston. It is always dangerous to thank by name for fear of missing someone out, but you all know who they are, whether on the Parish Council, the Finance Committee, The Pastoral Support Network, the Choir and instrumentalists, the management of our two halls, of the chapel at Harleston, the rotas for Eucharistic ministry, Children's Liturgy, reading, serving, welcoming, flower arranging, altar preparation, linen-washing, coffee-making, cash-counting, red-boxing, maintenance, gardening, management of the website or liaison with our chosen charities.

I am grateful to Andy Parris for his work as Communications Officer; unlike many parishes, our parish website is routinely updated each weekend with the Newsletter and other items of interest. Thanks also to those who have set-up a fundraising CAFOD stall at Fressingfield which raises cash for the 3<sup>rd</sup> World. I am especially grateful to Helen Kirby, our Chair of PPC who is

stepping down after many years and likewise to Sue Altarelli, Peter Harvey and Helen Kemp who step down from the PPC after four years of service. I am grateful also to those who have allowed their names to go forward to replace them.

In addition to CAFOD and its overseas aid, we are now in our seventh year of actively supporting a home charity, the Waveney Foodbank which helps those in need of emergency assistance in the area. This scheme continues to attract a great deal of interest nationally, to the embarrassment of the government (who should themselves be providing a safety net). Thank you to those who, by rota, staff the Foodbank distribution centre. More volunteers are needed so please give some thought to that.

Our Chapel at St Thomas More, Harleston, continues as a fairly distinct geographical congregation with a strong sense of community. Owing to the regular hiring-out of its premises, it is largely self-supporting but the wear and tear on the premises can be quite heavy. A huge thanks to Peter Williams who has been looking after it for many more years than I have been here.

Our Primary School (St Edmund's) is now federated with St Benet's Beccles as part of The Catholic Multi-Academy Trust of St John the Baptist which runs all eight Catholic schools in Norfolk and North Suffolk under the leadership of Notre Dame High School, Norwich. Our Headteacher, Veronica Short, has been able to announce a significant improvement of results in every subject to above national expectation. She is now retiring and I would like to express our gratitude for all that she has achieved. Last year I expressed a worry about intake numbers (and hence finance) but under her guidance to a notably dedicated staff, this has been reversed and we now have a much-improved reception intake for September 2018.

Last year's Parish Outing to Walberswick was a great success. This year we plan to go to Hoxne which has a particular interest to us as the (albeit controversial) site of the capture and martyrdom of our patron, St Edmund, King and Martyr.

At Downside Abbey, our sponsor and trustee, Prior Administrator Dom Leo Maidlow Davis will be stepping down at the end of August. It was unfortunate that his two attempts at visiting our parish in 2018 were thwarted, first by the snow and later by a motor accident. A new prior for the final two years of the period of administration is due to be appointed this summer. The number of priests in the Community at Downside is critically low but I am hopeful though not 100% confident that a simple replacement will be found for me when I finally retire back to the abbey – which is likely to be in the course of 2019 or, more probably 2020 – but this will be in the hands of the new superior. As I have warned before, this may trigger the need for a generous response and increased input from our parishioners.

Last month I celebrated the twelfth anniversary of my arrival in the parish on a ten-year assignment and I am now in my 78<sup>th</sup> year, so by Canon Law, I am now on annual renewal of my appointment as your parish priest. During the year there were three separate celebrations of my Golden Jubilee of Ordination – by the School, the Diocese and the Parish (who made a most generous gift of a bicycle). I am most grateful and encouraged by the scale of this generous but unexpected show of support.

As a former abbot, I was required to give evidence at the national inquiry into the mishandling of abuse cases known as IICSA. Like several others, I am fully expecting a degree of criticism in their interim report which may attract significant press attention when it comes out, probably in the autumn.

So, as always, I would like to express my thanks for being the sort of parish you are, one that I will be very sad to leave when the time comes. May God bless and keep our parish in his love for many decades to come.

Fr Charles 7.7.18