

# Oxford Oratory Fundraising Campaign

## Case Statement

### Background History

The Oxford Oratory was founded in 1990 in the Church of St Aloysius in the centre of Oxford. Initially dependent on the Birmingham Oratory, it became independent in 1993.

The Oratory owes its distinctive character to its founder, St Philip Neri (1515 – 1590) who began the first Oratory in Rome in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century, and to one of his greatest followers, John Henry Cardinal Newman (1801 – 1890). St Philip and his first followers built a large church in the centre of Rome and brought all the attractive power of music, art and literature to their ministry of prayer, preaching and the sacraments. They used beauty to win people for God.

When John Henry Newman became a Catholic in 1845 he had already revitalised the religious practice of Oxford and the country at large by his preaching and writing, as well as by the power of his own attractive personality. St Philip concentrated on individuals, winning them for God by the persuasive power of goodness, beauty and friendship. His followers, in their turn, went on to influence others in the same way. In this Newman recognised a kindred spirit. So it was natural that he should decide on The Oratory as the most fitting way for him to continue his ministry in the Catholic Church with his own followers.

Newman's influence both as an Anglican and as a Catholic was always religious in the broadest sense. He understood that faith should concern itself with matters that are not themselves directly spiritual, for example education, architecture and music. In the university he was a pioneer of the tutorial system, understanding that a college tutor's role is more than instruction but includes concern for the whole person. He saw that it is, in fact, a pastoral role. His own example marked a real change in the practice of the university. He raised the money for the building of two churches in the city. Both are still standing, St Clement's where he served his first curacy, and Littlemore, a village outside Oxford for which he was responsible as Vicar of St Mary's, but which up until his time had no church of its own. In building the church at Littlemore he was able to give visible expression to the Catholic reforms his thought was generating in the Oxford Movement. He even introduced the singing of plainchant. As a Catholic he longed to be able to exercise a similar influence in the city and university. He made two attempts to found an Oratory. Both came to nothing. Today's Oxford Oratory draws much of its inspiration from these same pastoral and aesthetic concerns and aims to fulfil now what Newman was unable to do in his own lifetime.

Two Oratories *were* founded, in Birmingham and in London - but his dream of a house in the city he loved had to wait until exactly a hundred years after his death. The Oxford Oratory was made possible by the

generosity and vision of the Birmingham Oratory who provided three of their own members for the foundation, and of Archbishop Maurice Couve de Murville and the Archdiocese of Birmingham who initially suggested the project and who gave the new community the church and house.

### **The Growth of the Oxford Oratory since 1990**

Since 1990 the community of priests and brothers and the congregation have continued to grow. There are now eight members of the community, frequently augmented by visiting students from other parts of the world who come here to stay, studying at Oxford University and learning the Oratorian way of life. Apart from work in their own church and parish, the priests of the community also undertake chaplaincy and teaching work in schools, hospitals and prisons around Oxford, at the Oratory School near Reading, and in London.

The Sunday Masses are regularly attended by about 900 people. Many smaller groups, both from our parish and from further afield, come here for talks, day retreats and school visits. The church is open all day from 7am to 7pm and many individuals come here throughout that time for quiet prayer, to buy books or cards at the shop, or to chat with one of the priests or with our porters who are there all day from 10.30am until 6pm.

The growth of the community and its works has brought with it a pressing need to restore our existing facilities and to expand them, while ever increasing interest in John Henry Newman brings a growing stream of visitors and pilgrims to Oxford. The expansion of Oxford University on to the Radcliffe Infirmary site, adjacent to the church, will give the Oxford Oratory and its religious, cultural and educational activities, a prominent place in the city.

### **Our Priorities**

We want to build for the future on these traditional strengths. The following are priorities: the redecoration of the church; the development of the liturgical and musical tradition; our Oratorian life and mission through new accommodation for new vocations and visitors; a library; a new chapel and a cloister-garden. In doing all this we would like to bring some harmony to a rather piecemeal site. The city planners have already been informally approached on the basis of outline plans and have indicated their approval. The Historic Churches Committee of the Archdiocese of Birmingham, the statutory planning authority for Catholic Churches, has given consent for the interior decoration of the church. We also wish to include an endowment for the running of these buildings in the future. We envisage that the total amount we need to raise for this, including the endowment, will be five million pounds.

## **The Redecoration of the Church**

The church was built in 1875 for the Jesuits to a design by Joseph Hansom, a well-known church architect who was also responsible for two great churches, Arundel Cathedral and The Holy Name in Manchester. He also designed the Hansom Cab! The Jesuits ran the Oxford mission from the seventeenth century and continued to serve the new church as hard-working and well-loved parish priests until 1981. Among the first Jesuits to serve here was the poet, Gerard Manley Hopkins who was a curate from 1878 - 1879. A number of his poems were written during his stay, *Binsey Poplars*, *Duns Scotus' Oxford* and *The Bugler's First Communion* – the last set in the church. His sermon describing the Church as a cow with seven udders for the seven sacraments was less successful – and anatomically inaccurate! Newman himself preached twice in the church, on the occasion of his visit in 1878 to become Trinity College's first honorary fellow.

We plan to restore the original decorative scheme to the church, exposing the marble, stonework and Victorian stencilling on the ceiling and the walls of the body of the church and of the side chapels. All this is presently painted over. There are plans to restore the floor and to increase the space in the sanctuary for the liturgical functions. At the same time as this work is being done it is proposed to install a top of the range lighting and sound system and to flood-light the façade. Presently the building lets us down. A restored church would provide a worthy and beautiful space for our worship and for the many families whose weddings, baptisms and funerals are held here.

## **Development of the Liturgical and Musical Tradition**

Many people come to the Oxford Oratory precisely because of the liturgy and music. Some come from many miles away. The redecoration of the church, especially the restoration of the sanctuary, will greatly enhance the liturgical aspect of our work. Ensuring the future of our music is essential to the liturgy. We have already acquired a large and fine new organ with a good reputation among organists. Now we would like to provide a place for the choir to practice and to store our large library of liturgical music and a capital fund to ensure the continuation of our musical tradition.

## **Oratorian Life and Mission**

If our community is to survive we need to be able to take new members. We plan to build as many new rooms for the community as we can find space for. If people are inspired by the numbers who come and by their generous support, they are still more inspired by the sight of young men who are attracted to dedicate themselves to this life. We need to make space to accommodate those who want to make their lives here and those who come from abroad to learn the Oratorian life with us.

Intellectual life has always been important in the Oratory both for the community and for those who frequent it. Since 1990 we have acquired a library of approximately 10,000 volumes, some of them unique even in Oxford. They are presently scattered in different sections all over the site. It is proposed to convert the upper hall into a large library to accommodate all these volumes in one place, together with our archives and manuscript collection. Many of our papers and parish records predate the Oxford Oratory and include unique autograph letters of saints and other significant figures from the sixteenth century onwards. A number of people have already bequeathed their collections to us. We anticipate the need for continued expansion in this area including the facilities for the safe and environmentally controlled storage of papers and the provision of internet access. If we are able to achieve this it will be possible to make our books and papers accessible to researchers and students. We will also use the library for public exhibitions, lectures and seminars.

### **New Chapel and Garden**

We have long felt the need for a chapel for Masses and other services for smaller groups. This need is particularly pressing for baptisms, which currently take place in a constricted side chapel. We propose to solve this problem by returning to Hansom's original plan for the church. This would involve building a new chapel to the left of the main entrance, extending back by two bays, parallel with the church. With a font at the back, visible through the opened up blind arch, and the main altar at the far end, we would have both baptistery and chapel. Should Newman be beatified and canonised, we would propose to dedicate this chapel to him. Since his whole life was spent in bringing people into the church, this dual role for baptism and the Mass seems particularly apt. The chapel would be accessible from the church. It would also have independent access, enabling us to use both areas at the same time, and to use the smaller chapel at times when the main church might be closed. With all this building we would like to include some green space for the use both of the community and our visitors. A small garden or cloister would greatly enhance the atmosphere of all these large public spaces, the church library and house.

Other Oratories, both in England and abroad, are renowned for the magnificence of their churches and the services celebrated there. The Oratory in London is among the most famous church in the city, drawing crowds with its fine choir and the magnificence of its liturgy. Our mother house in Birmingham, whose church is also a memorial to Newman, likewise maintains a good choir and liturgical tradition. Its decoration is a masterpiece in Roman marble and mosaic. The Chiesa Nuova, our church in Rome, was decorated by the finest artists of the time, Rubens, Guido Reni, Pietro da Cortona and Cavalier d'Arpino. More important than all this, each is continually open as a place of prayer and peace, in the middle of the busy city as St Philip wished. Our church in Oxford will always be on a smaller scale. But by completing these projects we aim to place ourselves firmly in the same tradition. This work will bring many tangible benefits through an increase in the space and beauty of our church and other buildings. Less tangibly, but more importantly, they will enable us to provide that place of prayer and peace in the city which has always been central to our tradition. The value of that cannot be measured.

## **Funding**

We propose to finance these plans by means of a major fundraising campaign, targeting individuals (in the first instance those of high net worth, but subsequently widening to encompass the whole community), approaching trusts other organizations, as well as attracting charitable contributions and sponsorship from business. We will also hold special fundraising events and collections. We would also include a legacy campaign to ensure a capital fund for the continuation of our work. The money raised will be held in a designated high interest campaign account within the books of the existing charitable trust, and tax efficient giving will be encouraged.

R.D.

28.11.2008