

# The Oratory Catholic Church of St Aloysius, Oxford

## Parish Priest's Report 2010

### 2010 Statistics

		2008	2009	2010
Baptisms:	Infants –	(47)	(54)	31
	Adults –	(6)	(8)	2
	Total –	(53)	(62)	33
Receptions of Converts:		(5)	(6)	8
First Holy Communions:		(29)	(50)	41
Confirmations:		(28)	(35)	31
Marriages:		(29)	(31)	24
Funerals:		(9)	(9)	10
Average Mass attendance: (On Sundays in October)		(885)	(904)	973
Confessions heard in our church:		(6,844)	(7,539)	<b>7,384</b>

It has been a momentous year for the Church in this country and for the English Oratory, with the first ever State Visit to the United Kingdom by the Vicar of Christ and the beatification of our Cardinal, the Blessed John Henry Newman. Meanwhile, as the above statistics show, the life of our parish has gone on, with all the individual manifestations of God's grace to which these figures point.

Funerals have taken place in our church in 2010 of the Rt Revd & Rt Hon. Mgr Graham Leonard, K.C.V.O., P.C., Suzanne Long, Kevin Mahoney, Giovanni Petrino, Baby Marianna Stevens, Rosemarie Myles, Jean Wakeman, Brian Murphy, Tony Butler and Stanislaw Kuszmar. May they rest in peace.

We began the year with celebration: for Fr Robert's silver jubilee of priesthood, both with a splendid Solemn Mass, which he celebrated, and then a reception at St Benet's Hall. During dinner on the day itself (5<sup>th</sup> January) it started to snow, and the Fathers enjoyed throwing snowballs at each other, and at those attending the meeting in St Giles' Church Hall opposite us! Snow became something of a feature of 2010. There was a trip to the National Gallery in January to see the "Sacred Made Real" exhibition. This had to be postponed twice because of snow, and at the end of the year we had to forgo our usual outing to the London Oratory Carol Service for the same reason. Congratulations to all

those who struggled through the weather to come to Mass on the Sunday before Christmas; it was the first time in twenty years that we had no choir for the High Mass, but Fr Anton valiantly provided plainchant, with some help. The good news is that we are now equipped with a lifetime supply of salt to grit the courtyard!

Our Reaffirmation and Renewal Campaign has now entered a crucial phase, as we have now received planning permission for our building plans. This means that if we can raise sufficient money by the summer, we shall be ready to begin the first stage of the building: the accommodation block and the library. Given that we have potential vocations for this autumn, this work is really vital for the future of our community, otherwise we will reach the stage where we cannot take novices, all the Fathers will grow old together and the Oxford Oratory will not last beyond the present generation. The Fathers have been doing some very intensive work on the Campaign during January, and I hope that we will all do our part in making this scheme a reality. If things go to plan, we would then be ready to finish the restoration of the church next year and move onto the cloister and Newman chapel after that. Several fundraising ventures this year have been enjoyable and encouraging: we held a dinner and promise auction at Chesterton Manor in February, by kindness and generosity of Sterling Stover; and in July there was a whole week of American Events, called "Interdependence Week". Elizabeth Mills and Tessa Caldecott in particular worked extremely hard to organize this. There was a jolly music festival at the Perch, Solemn Mass celebrated by Fr Joel Warden of the Brooklyn Oratory, a concert by the International Baroque Players and the organist Adam Brakel, tours of Oxford by John Whitehead, followed by some magnificent cream teas, a talk by Walter Hooper: "An American remembers C.S. Lewis, and finally another dinner and promise auction at Harris Manchester College. All of these events (which it is tiring only to list!) helped to foster a sense of involvement and to provide social opportunities for our parishioners. During February this year, we will have a team of volunteers approaching people after Mass to try to make sure that everyone is informed and involved in the Campaign – so please be nice to them!

Once again, the Wednesday morning over 60s group has been sallying forth: to Woburn Abbey, to Chichester to see an exhibition of surrealist art and to the National Gallery. Trips further afield this year have included a visit to County Durham in February for some of our young people, to Lourdes in Easter week, a retreat at Minster Abbey, again for the youth of the parish, exploring sacred drama and of course the visit to Birmingham for our Cardinal's beatification. Fr Daniel and six others walked 340 km from Leon to Compostela in August, and the Women's Oratory did a fine job of drumming up sponsors for the Campaign, to a total of £5,462. The budding thespians hope to manifest something of their talent in Easter week this year, when there will be a production of "The Quality of Mercy", inspired by John Paul II and drawing on the journey to Emmaus.

We were privileged to have His Grace the Archbishop make official visits to our church twice: once during Eastertide and again when we had a Mass of Thanksgiving after our Cardinal's beatification. The Archbishop has also kindly agreed to become a patron of our Campaign.

Mr Tom Walker became Head Teacher of St Aloysius' Primary School in January 2010. Building work is currently going on at school – to cover over the central courtyard, thus providing a new indoor space which will be able to be used in a variety of different ways. Sadly the Notre Dame Convent closed in September and so we have lost the use of its chapel for class Masses. In the long run, it is hoped to convert the Old Laundry into a school chapel, but budgetary constraints mean that this is not an immediate possibility. The governors and staff have been working on a new mission statement for the school, drawing on the Holy Father's words to school children at Twickenham: "A good school provides a rounded education for the whole person. And a good Catholic school, over and above this, should help all its students to become saints." Watch this space too for a new school motto!

Juliet Ball has been an efficient and gracious chairman of our Parish Advisory Group for the past ten years. She is now stepping down, to be replaced by Mark Millward. My warm thanks go to Juliet for all her help and support, and to all those who quietly contribute so much to the life and mission of our parish by their different activities.

The Holy Father's visit was of course the highlight of 2010, and it is now up to us to make spiritual capital out of the "Benedict Bounce". Like many others, the Fathers were somewhat anxious about the success of the visit before it happened, but the reality exceeded all expectations. This demonstrated the religious thirst, often unconscious, that lies beneath our increasingly secular public life, the appealing and profound character of the Holy Father himself, and also the value of the preparations that were made for the visit. Some of the Oxford and Birmingham Fathers were given a media training course, facilitated by Jack Valero, Press Spokesman for the Beatification, and Robin Aitken, a former B.B.C. journalist (and one of our own parishioners). The 'media strategy' was based on the principle that we do not need to be afraid of the Press, because we have good news to share with others, and that we should be bold in confronting difficult issues so that the Church is not seen to be always responding, but rather initiating news. Part of this strategy was to get difficult subjects out of the way before the Holy Father arrived, so as to let the British people listen to him directly. This worked, and Jack Valero kindly came to give a talk about the media and the visit in November. Lord Patten, who was the able organizer of the visit, will be coming to talk here on 16<sup>th</sup> March, which will give us a further insight into the story behind the public events.

It was a significant and moving moment, while the events were being screened in the Parish Centre, to see the Holy Father being received at Holyrood by Her Majesty the Queen, and probably the first time that a British monarch mentioned Cardinal Newman in a speech. The beatification, three days later was the crowning moment of the Pope's pilgrimage to Great Britain. Eight 'buses, organized by Pax Travel, took pilgrims from our parish to Cofton Park, and although there was great uncertainty about the arrangements until very shortly beforehand, everything went smoothly on the day. (The Parish Priest was alarmed to hear on the 'phone at three o'clock in the morning, in his hotel room in Birmingham that one of the 'buses had broken down, but it soon started up again!) Thank you to all those who took care of individual 'buses and to Lucy Nash, who ensured that everyone departed and returned safely. Ten of our parishioners had the privilege of receiving Holy Communion from the Pope. Some of our number spent the whole weekend in Birmingham, attending the spectacular performance of the 'Dream of Gerontius' in the Town Hall, the Civic Banquet at the Council House, the Solemn Vespers at the Oratory, at which over fifty bishops knelt at the altar rails to venerate our Cardinal's relic, and the Mass of Thanksgiving on the Monday. We have since had a parish trip to the shrine, which Fr Richard has prepared beautifully, and I hope that such a trip will become an annual event. We had our own Mass of Thanksgiving on Tuesday 21<sup>st</sup> September, at which His Grace the Archbishop preached and blessed the new shrine to our Cardinal, and there was a further Mass at the London Oratory the following day. One feature of the beatification was the large number of Oratorians present from all over the world, and so the reminder of the continuing vitality of St Philip's congregation. I don't know what the other diners at 'Cielo' in Birmingham made of the arrival of fifty Oratorians for lunch on 20<sup>th</sup> September!

Celebrations in honour of our Cardinal were not confined to the weekend of the beatification. There was a study day here and at St Giles' church at the beginning of September on the 'Dream of Gerontius', followed by a performance at Dorchester Abbey in October. On 8<sup>th</sup> October, the annual Night Walk to Littlemore took place, commemorating Newman's reception into the church in 1845 by Blessed Dominic Barberi. The next day was the first feast day of the new beatus. There was a Mass at Littlemore, and then in the evening a good crowd came to the University Church of St Mary the Virgin, to hear Newman's sermon "The Cross of Christ the Measure of the World" delivered by an actor from the same pulpit from which it was first preached. Our thanks go to Canon Brian Mountford, the vicar, and Trinity and Oriel Colleges, for making this possible. On Sunday 10<sup>th</sup> October, there were more celebrations here, with Bishop John Arnold celebrating the Solemn Mass. (And this may partly account for the rise in average Mass attendance, since the tally is taken on the first four Sundays of October!)

It has been noticeable that the number of groups interested in our Cardinal visiting our church has greatly increased. We have received in the past year visits, from the United States, Poland, Austria, France, Italy, Germany, Belarus, Canada, Japan, South Africa, Ireland, Spain and Argentina, amongst others, as well as several school and university parties from this country and such diverse groups as the Poetry School from London and the members of "Communion and Liberation".

Alongside all these exciting activities, we have also had the usual events that make up the life of our parish: the feasts and seasons of the Church's year, Benediction in the Crib of Epiphany, Mass for the sick, our Corpus Christi Procession, the May Procession, weddings, baptisms, First Communions and Confirmations, our Forty Hours' devotion, the Rorate Mass in Advent, novenas for St Philip and the Immaculate Conception, exposition of the Blessed Sacrament twice a week and on Saturdays during Lent, the various parish groups who meet through the year: the 9.30 Mass music group, the Oratory choir, the Legion of Mary, Brothers of the Oratory, Young Oratory, the Wednesday Morning Group, the Parent and Toddlers group Little Oratory and the Society of St Vincent de Paul; the weekly cleaning of the church, and, most importantly, the daily celebration of Mass and hearing of confessions in our church. Although we don't have the great events such as the visits of St Thérèse or the beatification of our Cardinal to look forward to in 2011, there will still be plenty to occupy us. Fr Robert is taking a well-earned sabbatical at the Philadelphia Oratory and there will be a party to wish him *bon voyage* on 20<sup>th</sup> February. Br Nicholas will be ordained deacon on 18<sup>th</sup> March. There is the performance of "The Quality of Mercy" in April, and parties to celebrate the Royal Wedding and Pope John Paul II's beatification in the same month. A good number of our young people will be going on pilgrimage to World Youth Day in Spain in August, visiting Barcelona, Madrid and Avila. They have various plans to raise funds, including concerts, cake sales and a walk from the Oxford Oratory to the Birmingham Oratory. The Women's Oratory has a dastardly plan to raise money for the Campaign in July with an Oratory "Grand Prix", go-carting at the greyhound track. There will be a "Day with Mary" in our church in September. The new translation of the Roman Missal will begin to be introduced in September, and we will all need catechesis to be ready for this. Finally, God willing, we hope that it will be possible to begin our building work this year.

May Our Lady, St Philip, St Aloysius and Blessed John Henry Newman bring all our endeavours for the glory of God to fruition and keep us in their care during the coming year.

Fr Daniel Seward, Cong. Orat.  
Parish Priest  
31<sup>st</sup> January 2011