

# OXFORD ORATORY PARISH CHURCH OF ST ALOYSIUS GONZAGA

## Parish Priest's Report for 2012

Unusually for the Parish Priest's Report, I wish to begin at the very end of 2012. Thursday, 11<sup>th</sup> October, 2012 saw the beginning of the Year of Faith; that date's being the fiftieth anniversary of the opening of the Second Vatican Council, and the twentieth of the publication of the Catechism of the Catholic Church. Our Parish witnessed a great Act of Faith on 1<sup>st</sup> January, 2013 when eleven sisters from the Community of St Mary the Virgin, Wantage, were received into Full Communion with the Catholic Church by Monsignor Newton of the Personal Ordinariate of Our lady Walsingham. With their future location still undecided, it truly was a great act of Faith. A sign of God's providence was that this should have taken place in an Oratory Church: this Anglican Order of Sisters was founded on the same date as Blessed John Henry Newman began the English Oratory in Birmingham.

The Sisters are temporarily residing with the Benedictine Sisters of St Cecelia's Abbey, Ryde. This now brings our recollections of 2012 back a whole year earlier when on 6<sup>th</sup> January five of our Fathers visited the same Abbey to celebrate the Solemn Profession of Sr Elizabeth Burgess who was once a parishioner here, where she first learnt how to play the organ to accompany Gregorian Chant. She assures our Parish of her continued prayers, and we keep her in ours.

In our own Community of Fathers and Brothers we had no new members in 2012. The Community had its Canonical Visitation by Fr Felix Selden of the Vienna Oratory on 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> May. A news post on our Parish website at the time mentioned that Fr Felix has long been a friend of our house. Nevertheless, his visitation was thorough and unbiased, and the Parish will be pleased to know that he was happy with what he saw. Fr Daniel and Fr Dominic were in Rome in September for the *Congresso* which saw Fr Felix reelected as the Visitor, representing the Holy Father in conducting visitations to all the Oratories in the world.

An honour for the Oratory worldwide in 2012 was the Holy Father's appointing our former Procurator General, Fr Eouardo Cerrato, as Bishop of Ivrea. Less exalted but significant for our House in Oxford was Fr Robert's beginning his new job last January as National Ecumenical Officer and Secretary to the Bishops of England and Wales' Department of Dialogue and Unity.

On the subject of Ecumenism we hosted a concert of Romanian Orthodox music early last year. Our Parish has also seen continued and increased work with our Anglican brethren across the road at St Giles. With the move of the Gatehouse from St Michael's Street to St Giles, more of our parishioners have become involved with working for/with those who visit there for help and encouragement. The Gatehouse became our Lent project last year.

But it is not all about work. After a beautiful Solemn High Mass on Sunday, 3<sup>rd</sup> June to mark the Queen's Diamond Jubilee, we had a joint jubilee party with the Parishioners of St Giles in their Church Hall. A number of our people came in 1950's attire as part of the celebrations. Fr Richard was even seen to sport Jesuit wings!

A joint party at St Giles' was occasioned by the unavailability of our Parish Centre throughout the whole of 2012 owing to our new building project. Sunday 11<sup>th</sup> March saw the Fathers swap their birettas for hard hats for the blessing after Solemn Mass of the beginning of the new building work. Cardinal Pell, Archbishop of Sydney, became a patron of our Fundraising Campaign in April, and a new website was also launched. Despite the lack of space, we are grateful to our Parishioners for their ongoing enthusiasm and financial generosity towards this project. The Women's Oratory, in particular, continued in 2012 to organize some successful fundraising activities. Most notable were the sponsored sleep-out at the very beginning of the year, and the Sponsor-a-Brick Campaign during the summer, which raised thousands of pounds. In the autumn a number of our younger parishioners walked all the way from Bicester to Oxford to raise money. What we raise in these ventures if, of course, very important, but so is the warm enthusiastic spirit in which our parishioners have acted both individually and as groups.

It is unnatural only to have good news. The morning of Thursday, 25<sup>th</sup> October saw the aftermath of a break-in from the Sacred Heart Chapel. The lovely stained glass window of St John the Evangelist was completely smashed. We managed to gather up all the bits and are hoping to have the window restored.

It is very important to pray for the Parish and its work of witness to the Faith. The Women's Oratory went on a pilgrimage to Rome in October and on the last day had Mass at St Aloysius' shrine at the Church of St Ignatius to pray for our Parish. Fr Richard also led a pilgrimage to Rome in the previous month, and Fr Daniel led a joint pilgrimage to the Holy Land with the Parish of St Anthony of Padua in Headington.

There have also been pilgrimages to our Parish. On Sunday, 8<sup>th</sup> July, ten French bishops led by the Archbishop of Rennes celebrated the 11am Mass in our Church as part of their visit to venerate Blessed John Henry Newman. In October, the girls of St Leonard's School, Mayfield, came to sing at the 9:30 Sunday Mass. In November, fifty-five members of the Filipino Community Prayer Crusade of West London came one Saturday to venerate Our Lady of Oxford.

The Parish has received other distinguished guests in 2012. On 18<sup>th</sup> July, the Prefect of the Vatican Library, Monsignor Cesare Pasini said Mass in our church. In 1914, the then Prefect of the Vatican Library, Monsignor Achille Rati, stayed in our house after having had a minor accident at the railway station. Eight years later he was elected Pope. We watch Monsignor Pasini's future progress with interest!

In February we were visited by the Grand Master of the Order of Malta, His Most Eminent Highness Fra' Matthew Festing. He came for breakfast. Monsignor Marcus Stock, General Secretary of the Bishops' Conference of England and Wales came for St Philip's Day. Fr Michael Holman, SJ, preached for us on St Aloysius' Day, and Bishop Hendricks, Auxiliary in Southwark, preached and celebrated the Immaculate Conception for us. The actor, Robert Hardy visited us in May to take part in a new performance by Julien Chilcott- Monk's of Newman's Dream of Gerontius.

In July we welcomed Bishop Doyle of Northampton who came to celebrate Mass for the Catholic Women's League. It was the one hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the birth of the League's Foundress, Margaret Fletcher. She lived in our Parish and founded the League here. The Church was packed with women from all over the country for that great celebration in her honour and for the repose of her soul.

Thinking in terms of Parish history, 2012 saw the taking of a Parish Census. Four hundred and forty forms were filled in, containing details between them of seven hundred and ninety-six people. That would be about eighty per cent of our regular Sunday Mass attendance. The census was therefore a success. An ongoing record will be kept of new parishioners, initially using the same forms, so that they are welcomed to the Parish, can find out information about groups or activities in which they might like to be involved, and can be contacted and visited if they fall ill. So it still is important, if you have even now not filled in a form, to do so, even if you think one or more of the Fathers may already have your details. Forms continue to be available at the back of the church.

The subject of the Census brings us on to the ordinary Parish statistics for 2012. We saw sixty-two Baptisms, which is joint highest with 2009, the ordinary average being about forty-five, or so. We also saw a higher number of funerals: seventeen; we normally have about ten each year. Those seventeen are the following: Michael and Ann Dummett, Valerie McNicol, Marco Pezzini, David Whitaker, Eileen Hanrahan, Sr Carolyn Green SHCJ, Martin McCusker, Gloria Slesoritis, Joan Toma, Kathleen Garner, Daniel Harris, Geoffrey Harrold, Simon Pawlak, Peter Masterson, Theresa Card, Denis Brannan. Other statistics remain similar to previous years. There were twenty-seven marriages in our church, and around seven thousand five hundred confessions.

Finally, I, Fr Anton, became the new Parish Priest in September to enable Fr Daniel to focus his energies on the Fundraising Campaign and leading our Community. Fr Daniel enjoyed being Parish Priest and I know the parishioners are grateful to him for all his work for them. I am also thankful for his ongoing advice and guidance as I settle in to my new role.