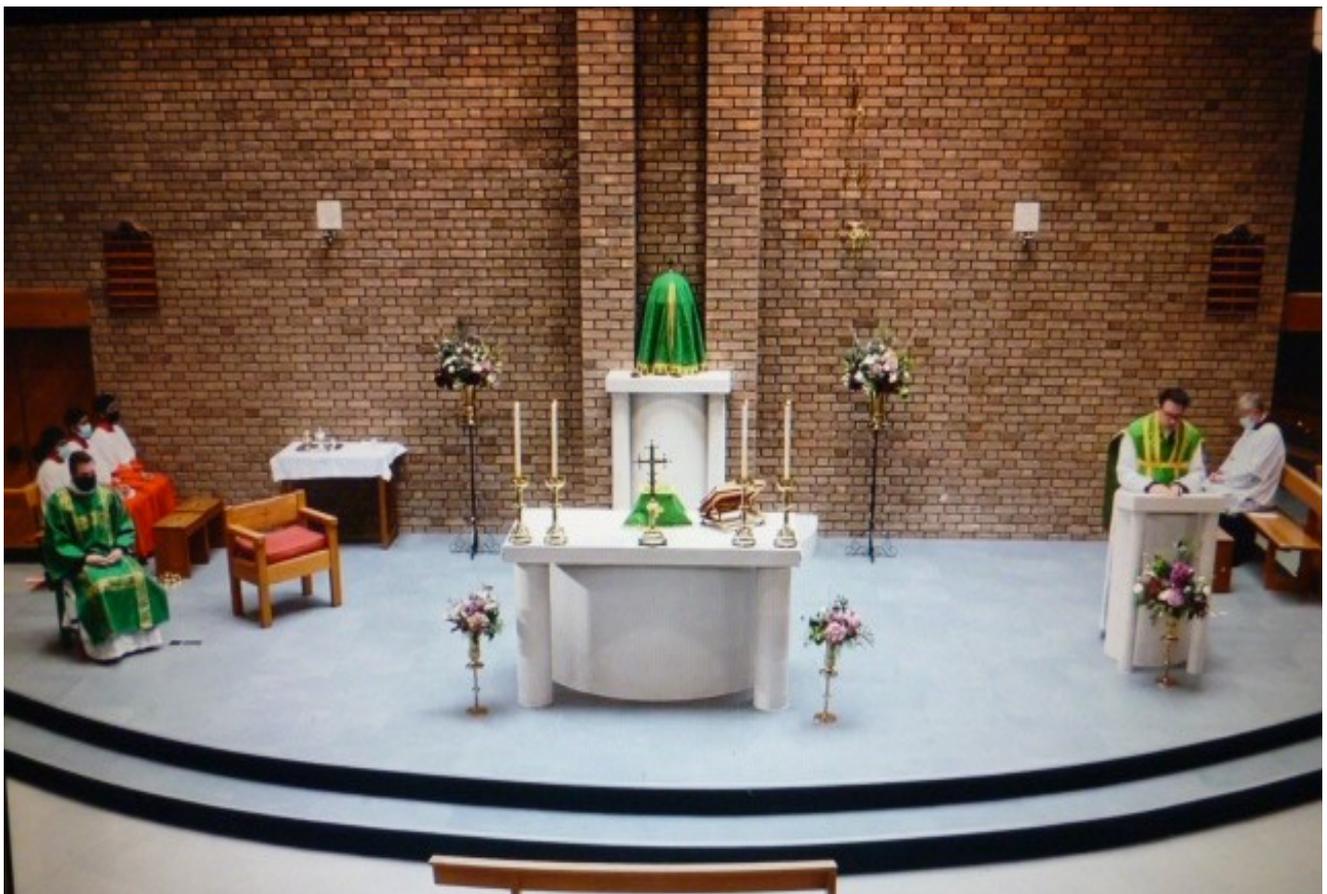


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**The Parish Magazine**

**No. 89**

**£1.00**



**Published by the Parish of St Dunstan and St Jude • Birmingham**



*As this difficult year draws to a close, we want to thank all those who responded so readily to our request for reports and views on the continuation of parish life under lockdown. It is wonderful to see how much can still be done in trying circumstances. Particular thanks to our priests and deacon for their support of the magazine and to Fr Simon for his teasing contribution from the wilds of Stafford. We must also express our gratitude to the teachers from St Dunstan's and Bishop Challoner schools for finding time in their busy and complicated schedules to write for us. The young people who provide us with a Youth Page are to be congratulated on their inspiring resilience and initiative. The periods of quiet prayer before the Blessed Sacrament during the usual mass times have been an effective way of keeping us together in church as a community and Fr Philip and Fr John have enabled us to keep in touch on-line with the celebration of Mass itself. We look forward to a restoration of normality next year and to our first ticketed mass this Christmas. \_\_\_\_\_* **Editors**

**ICON OF OUR LADY OF PERPETUAL SUCCOUR**

After our return to St Dunstan's church following the refurbishment, there was a new feature on the wall – a copy of the icon of Our Lady of Perpetual Succour – a popular image of Our Lady known throughout the Catholic world. Although its home is in the 19<sup>t</sup>-century church of St Alphonsus Ligouri, close to the basilica of St Mary Major on the Esquiline Hill, the icon is actually far more ancient. In fact, its first home was a monastery on the island of Crete, and it was much venerated there as a miraculous icon. When there was a threat of Turkish invasion, and the certain destruction and despoliation of Christian images that would follow, a visiting Italian merchant saved it – some say stole it!

Eventually, the icon ended up in Rome as part of a private collection before being gifted to the Church of St Matthew on the Esquiline Hill at the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century. Here it stayed, venerated by the faithful as a focus of pilgrimage, until a short Frenchman called Napoleon Bonaparte invaded Rome in 1798. The Napoleonic forces sacked many of the churches of Rome and stole their treasures, and one of the casualties was the church of St Matthew. Yet again the holy icon survived destruction, being spirited away for safe keeping to the church of St Mary in Posterula. Over the years memories faded and the icon was sadly forgotten. Providentially, it was rediscovered, and after the Redemptorist Order built a new church in 1866 where the church of St Matthew had once stood, the image of Our Lady of Perpetual Succour was once more displayed for the veneration of the faithful. The Redemptorists encouraged devotion to the icon, and through their missionary work, devotion to Our Lady under this title spread with it. It is from this church that our copy of the icon comes.

Icons, in the eastern tradition, are far more than mere pictures of someone, or items of beautiful art to delight the eyes. Rather, an icon is a window into

heaven. For when a Christian contemplates an icon, they are being transported into the spiritual presence of the one represented.

This icon shows us Our Lady holding her young Son. But there are fascinating features that take us beyond this standard image. For if we look closely, we see that Jesus is holding tightly on to his Mother's hand, and his left sandal is falling off his foot. It's an image that conveys both shock and horror as the young child seems to flinch from something terrible. At the top of the icon, at either corner, are images of the archangels Gabriel and Michael (identified by their initials) who bear the instruments of Christ's passion. It's as if the young child receives his first glimpse of the suffering that lies in the future: the cross, nails, the reed and the sponge and lance. No wonder he flinches!

In this icon, Mary isn't looking towards her son – she looks directly at us. The initials at the top of the icon (in Greek) tell us that Mary is the Mother of God – and yet her eyes are on us for she is our Mother too. Also, on her blue veil is pictured a star, for she is 'stella maris' – the 'star of the sea' who leads us to Jesus – the Mother who both gives the world Christ, the light of the world, and the Mother whose prayers lead us to the safe port of heaven. Our Lady of Perpetual succour (or help) is an image of our heavenly mother who always intercedes for us and helps us in the trials and tribulations that disturb and distress us.

This extraordinary icon captures not only the incarnation of the eternal Word born of Mary, and the passion and death that he will endure. For we also see that the figures of Jesus and Mary are surrounded by gold – which communicates the glory of Easter – Christ's triumph over sin and death. Within this 43cm by 53cm icon is pictured the essence of the gospel of salvation. \_\_\_\_\_

*Fr Philip*



## Getting on with it

Most of my life I have been waiting for something bad to happen. Often this fear has been about something trivial such as I might fail my exams (I didn't) or I might fail my driving test (I did, twice). But it has been such a pervading anxiety that my children have suggested that living my life must be like being in a perpetual disaster movie. The strange thing is, now something disastrous has happened, I don't feel anxious at all. I am no longer expecting the bad thing, I am just living through it. Maybe this is how people felt during the war: they just got on with it.

So, how have we got on with it in our house. We have gone for lots of walks and discovered that South Birmingham is very green with woods and parks on our doorstep. Haunch Brook Pathways at the bottom of Billesley Common is very woody and secluded. The river walk at Sarehole Mill is so rural—stepping stones to cross the Cole—it is a great surprise to emerge onto the Stratford Road. Moseley Bog, beloved of Tolkien, is a natural wetland where one can easily get lost, while Moseley Private Park is a hidden delight with its lake and gated houses. King's Heath Park is so familiar to all of us that we always bump into parishioners there. Even our own back garden has been lovely to watch, the squirrels and birds so busy about their own lives and so blissfully unaware of any pandemic.

In the house, like others, we have been tidying out drawers and cupboards and have found things lost or forgotten for years. A food mixer (never been used) was discovered and made quite a passable sponge for Eve's Pudding, certainly better than spending ten min-

utes beating stuff by hand. Ray has spent a lot of time tidying out the cellar. I am sure it is now very tidy but I haven't been down to look, preferring to play the piano which is my great pleasure during lockdown. Is it a coincidence that he is in the cellar when I am playing?

I have been learning to play for over a year and now have lessons using my phone camera on Whatsapp. It is not as good as being with my teacher on her grand piano but it is working quite well. I'm having to make more effort to learn the notes as she is no longer able to press my fingers down (Ow!) on the right keys. A friend in London, who is a good pianist, is sceptical about the progress I could make at my age. However, my teacher sends me clips of her playing the pieces I am to learn where only her hands and the piano can be seen... Yes, you are ahead of me: what is to stop me sending these clips to said pianist friend, passing them off as my own?

To return to reality, like all other parishioners, we are truly grateful for the efforts being made by Father Philip, Father Simon and now Father John to keep the church open as much as possible and to celebrate Holy Mass online. Hearing Father Philip and Father Simon singing 'Godhead Hid in Hiding' together, unaccompanied, was a special moment. We miss seeing everyone at St Dunstan's, both the people we know well and those we just know by sight, whose faithful presence at Mass is always uplifting and comforting. May we all stay safe and be back together in our own parish church before long. \_\_\_\_\_ Nuala Bielby



### **'The Bugs in Church'** **A Reflection on Stewarding**

The 'big bad bug' as our grandchildren call it has made it necessary for stewarding in church to ensure that the Government mantra 'Hands, Face, Space' is observed by us all during mass, exposition and funerals. What's it like observing all of this from the vantage of stewarding? Suddenly you see things differently. You discover something beautiful. Something that has always been there but now you see it. Your observing slows down and you watch the gathering of people. You notice the regular faces who faithfully turn up to simply 'be with Him'. You observe their constancy, their gentle devoutness. You observe the people who hold in their hands treasured items to help them pray or those who come early and simply kneel in the silence. And then there are those who light candles to keep vigil for those they love. You see others linger at the Lady chapel and you know from this frequent gesture that there is a profound relationship there. I found bunches of roses simply placed in their wrapping at Our Lady's altar. When I discovered who had left them, the parishioner explained, 'They were for Our Lady.'

As people gather you catch a moment when someone notices a friend or parishioner they have been pre-

vented from seeing because of Covid. Then there is the obvious delight of non-verbal exchanges and muted laughter. The simple human exchange and pleasure of reconnection lights up eyes and you see a spark despite the camouflage of the mask. I am reminded of what Mother Teresa said: *'Let us always meet each other with a smile, for the smile is the beginning of love.'* I have noticed a lot of smiling since I have been a steward. As the church starts to fill, I see those who find a close but safe distance with a friend or a companion they want to sit by and the notion that *'we are His body'* emerges again and again. It is a lovely thought that this sacred space brings us together. Pope Francis put it another way: *'I cannot live without people. I need to live my life with others.'*

Then there is the 'hidden' heart of our church that I see far more than I have ever noticed since stewarding. It is not only the beauty in the faithfulness and free gift of our priests. It is in the army of people who serve us: the person who ensures the candles are there; the faithful lady who *'isn't a Catholic'* but comes to *'do her (Paschal) candle'*. The team of cleaners and *'the doers'* who *live* out the *'call to serve'*. These quite simply remind me in part that the miracle of *Church* and mass is not only in the miracle of the Eucharist but *'that we simply come.'* We come to a place where we feel we belong and are accepted *whatever* our faith journey. The place where *'we can break the bread of our lives together'*. It was Jesus who said *'Do you have eyes and fail to see?'* It is in stewarding that my eyes have been opened a little. Sometimes *'bad bugs'* can do us good. \_\_\_\_\_ *Bernard O'Connell*



### THE COVID CHRISTMAS

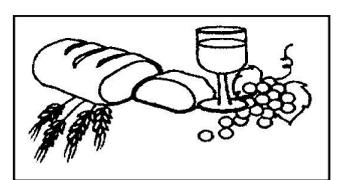
What a strange, sad and frightening year it's been! Although, mercifully, the virus has not proved as lethal as earlier pandemics – the Black Death, the Great Plague and the 1918 influenza were infinitely more deadly – it's still had a profound effect on us. Worst, of course, has been the early deaths and dreadful illness suffered by so many. Almost as bad – in some ways and for some people perhaps even worse – has been the terrible, cruel isolation. Most particularly those heartbreaking cases where loving wives and husbands sons and daughters, grandsons and granddaughters are parted for months from their spouse, parent or grandparent who is, more often than not, frail and suffering from dementia. To a lesser extent there've been the frustrations and boredom of being stuck in the house for months, the disappointment of cancelled holidays, the inability to – legally – go out somewhere spontaneously. And for us Catholics, of course, there's been the gap in our lives where Sunday Mass used to be.

And now Christmas is coming. We all hope, I'm sure, that the restrictions will be relaxed so that we can share the festive season with our wider families and friends; so that businesses can re-open and recover some of their losses. So that there can be carol singing & Lions International collections again, and Christmas lights in our shopping centres. Some of us may even hope that office parties will be possible. (Then again, many more may say a prayer of gratitude that

they might not!) And we will, of course, pray that we may once again celebrate Our Lord's birth with Midnight Mass, the Mass at Dawn, Mass in the Day and a trip to the crib with the children.

Will this come to pass this year? Who knows? But perhaps the current unpleasantness – as I've heard Covid called – may just oblige us to focus away from the lights, presents, tinsel and turkey and towards what is really important about Christmas. As John Betjeman put it, some years ago:

And is it true? For if it is,  
 No loving fingers tying strings  
 Around those tissued fripperies,  
 The sweet and silly Christmas things,  
 Bath salts and inexpensive scent  
 And hideous tie so kindly meant,  
 No love that in a family dwells,  
 No carolling in frosty air,  
 Nor all the steeple-shaking bells  
 Can with this single Truth compare –  
 That God was man in Palestine  
 And lives today in Bread and Wine.



Happy Christmas! \_\_\_\_\_ *Andy Gudge*

## Abe et Vale

### Farewell to Mr Kenny

Tony Kenny, the long-serving and much loved head teacher of St Dunstan's Catholic Primary School retired on 31<sup>st</sup> October 2020 following eighteen years of dedicated service to the school and parish. This highly respected lead in Birmingham Catholic education has left a positive legacy in the lives of thousands of children, parents and staff across the city, but most especially here at St Dunstan's.

His retirement from St Dunstan's was marked by a Holy Mass celebrated by Fr Philip and Mr Kenny was delighted to be joined (socially distanced as was the allowance at the time) by family, local head teachers, his current and past staff members and the many colleagues who were lucky enough to have worked with him over an illustrious 35-year career. It was a career which saw him become the youngest head teacher in the city when taking over at The Abbey School and saw him retire as one of the longest serving heads.

One could not fail to be touched by the outpouring of goodwill and happy memories shared with Tony during the final days of his time with us at St Dunstan's. But the words 'compassion', 'unity' and 'family' were never far from conversations when speaking of his leadership style.

Tony Kenny will be greatly missed by all at St Dunstan's, but we hope and pray that he, and his wife Dawn, who also retired that same day, can enjoy years of health and happiness together at home, abroad and on the golf course! \_\_\_\_\_  
*Mark McLoughlin*  
\_\_\_\_\_  
*(Deputy Head Teacher)*

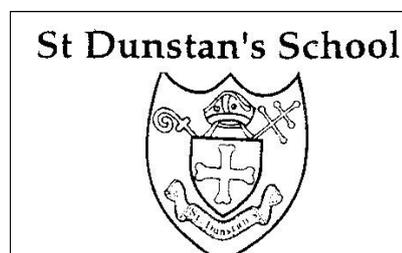


### Welcome to Mr Tehan

It was with great pride that I started as the new head teacher of St Dunstan's School on the 2<sup>nd</sup> November. Taking on the role of leading any school is always an honour but it is made all the more special when it's a school with which you have so much connection. My three children, Niamh, Aedan and Mairead, have fairly recent happy memories of attending St Dunstan's before going on to Bishop Challoner, fully prepared for the next stage of their faith and education journey. As a family, we have worshipped here at the church for the best part of twenty years, and I pray for many more.

I knew before I started that St Dunstan's school is a community full of dedicated staff, parents and governors, who strive to provide the best spiritual, pastoral and academic support they can. Following someone who cared for the school like Mr Kenny is a daunting task (and they're very big shoes to fill) but I'm determined to serve the families of the school to the same high quality that I have always experienced.

Please keep us in your prayers as we begin our journey together. \_\_\_\_\_  
*Matt Tehan*



### The Changing of the Guard

This autumn, we said goodbye to Fr Simon Baker, who moved to his new post as assistant priest in the parish of St Austin's in Stafford in September. Fr John Waters, who has slipped into his shoes in our parish, had already been in residence for a few weeks, picking up a few tips from Fr Simon before he left. We wish them both well in their new parishes.

Also pictured next to Fr Philip on the right of the photograph is Deacon Michael Barwick, who will be with us from time to time during his last year at Oscott. We wish him a warm welcome.

\_\_\_\_\_  
*Editors*

## THE NEW BOY ON THE BLOCK

Hopefully most of us have had the chance to get to know one another a little bit since my arrival, but for those who haven't, hi! I'm Fr John and I'm the new Curate here at St Dunstan's and St Jude's.

I was born in Coventry and lived there till I was eighteen. I read International Relations at the University of Hull, took part in a Military Gap Year scheme with the Army reserves and finally worked for the Imperial War Museum in London. But in 2011 I found I couldn't run away from God any longer. Having wrestled with the idea of a vocation since I was seventeen, I spent about a year in serious discernment, culminating in applying to train in a Seminary.

I imagined I'd be turned away, being told 'You're too young and not holy enough!' So imagine my surprise when Archbishop Bernard told me he wished to accept me and to send me to the Royal English College in Valladolid, Spain. The Seminary in Spain is dedicated to St Alban, the Patron of one of our Primary schools here in Kings Heath! At the end of the year in Spain, I expected to be sent back to Birmingham to finish my training. Again, imagine my surprise at being told, 'The Archbishop wants to send you to the Venerable English College in Rome!'

I enjoyed my time abroad but was always mindful that the time should be spent with a view to coming home and serving you good people of the local church in Birmingham. When Archbishop Bernard 'phoned me in August to congratulate me on qualifying as a Canon Lawyer and tell me that he had appointed me as curate here at St Dunstan's and St Jude's, I recall being just as excited as when he sent me abroad for the start of my training.

It's a funny time to be starting full time ministry, with Covid 19 and all that brings with it, but I'm very grateful to all of you for making my start here so happy and for your constant checking in, asking me 'How're you settling in Fr?'

You might spot me out running from time to time (it helps me not burst out of my vestments!), reading books or magazines about steam trains and visiting the occasional theatre. Once this Covid business is finally behind us, I look forward to getting to know everyone properly, hopefully over a Real Ale, with a cheeky glass of scotch nearby!

*Fr John Waters*

## Birds observed in the garden during lockdown

The sleek crow sipping tadpoles from the pond,  
And blue-tits all a-flutter on the fence;  
The dunnock far too shy to make a stand,  
The waddling pigeon far too fat to dance.

The woodpecker known only by his din,  
The robin with cocked head and beady eye;  
The upturned tail and loud voice of a wren,  
And gulls recalling wave-tops far away.

The quick swifts glimpsed in acrobatic flight,  
The frolic of the great tits in their bush;  
The pausing scuttle of a blackbird's mate,  
One visit from what might have been a thrush.

Young magpies just beginning to take wing:  
And over all the blackbird's evening song.

*Bob Wilcher*

## Just for Fun

### Genuine Quotes from Motor Insurance Claims

'I started to slow down but the traffic was more stationary than I thought.'

'I didn't think the speed limit applied after midnight.'

'An invisible car came out of nowhere, struck my car and vanished.'

'The pedestrian ran for the pavement but I got him.'

'I collided with a stationary truck coming the other way.'

'The car in front hit the pedestrian but he got up so I hit him again.'

'I knew the dog was possessive about the car but I would not have asked her to drive if I had thought there was any risk.'

'I started to turn and it was at this point that I noticed a camel and an elephant tethered at the verge. This distraction caused me to lose concentration and hit a bollard.'

'I thought my window was down but I found it was up when I put my head through it.'



**Keeping in Touch** As best as possible, we have tried to keep in touch with isolated parishioners and those in care homes, to let them know we are thinking of them. Eucharistic Ministers have made regular phone calls to those they normally visit, many making prayer part of their conversation. The Parish Newsletter has been delivered, e-mails sent, and "WINDOW" distributed. A special thank you to those pupils of our parish primary schools who sent letters or cards to some of our care home residents; their words were so kind and heart-warming. \_\_\_Deacon David

## PREPARING FOR ADVENT AT HOME

At our house this year, as the second lockdown eases only slightly into Tier 3, we are approaching Advent with enthusiasm. Knowing that this season will be unlike any other Advent we've had before and that Christmas may well be celebrated without our Grandparents and wider family, we are going to prepare for the birth of our Saviour in a special way.

Each year, we do a Jesse Tree. This is a Bible story a day in Advent, tracing the story of God's promise of our salvation from Genesis right through to the birth of Jesus. Each day we hang up a little picture to represent the story. We might also make a collection of verses and drawings to form a little booklet of the whole story of Salvation History up to Bethlehem. This simple routine delights the children and reminds us why we're waiting for Christmas day. While we're still filling up the Jesse Tree during Advent, we won't put up any other decorations or display cards because this isn't yet Christmas, this is still waiting time. Traditionally this was a time of penance, a Little Lent, and so we can hold fire a little while on Christmas goodies and savour the anticipation just that bit more!

We will read a few good books as we wait. This year will be *Winter Holiday*, by Arthur Ransome in the mornings. In the evenings, we will start our annual reading of Tolkien's *Lord of The Rings* trilogy that will take us all the way through Lent to Easter (15 minutes or so a day). The children enjoy all their treasured Advent and Christmas books that only come out in Advent and go away again after the Christmas season with the decorations. Each year I find a new book and they get it on the feast of St. Nicholas (6 Dec) and it is added to the basket.

Each Advent, we make a wreath for the table and one for the front door. We go to the park and



collect foliage to make a ring and place candles in it – the same colours as the ones in church. Each evening at supper we light the candles, one more each week; and after we've eat-

en, we will sing an Advent hymn in the candle light. The hymns only get Christmasy by Christmas Eve. Singing carols as a family is a good way to lift the spirits and might be worth a try while we're mostly at home. All the more so with gusto because we won't be able to sing in church.

We will make some special Christmas presents for our family this year, in case we can't see them. Our craft activities are usually focused on making something we can give away so the work has to be presentable. This can take up a good chunk of Advent waiting time! We will also make our Christmas cards. Our cards are usually recycled cards from last year that the children like to cut up and reform into new ones. I think this year we will be making more cards as we will see so few people.

As you may have guessed, our tree goes up on Christmas Eve, together with any cards we have received. We revamp the Advent wreath with fresh greenery and put more holly and ivy around the place. We have a set of little magi and a couple of camels, knitted by an elderly friend, who set off now around the house on their journey to Bethlehem in time for the Epiphany.

I'd love to encourage other families to try one new Advent tradition this year. It doesn't have to be full on and time-consuming but it will stick in our children's memories. You never know, this could be one of their favourite Christmas memories and they might ask to do it again next year. \_\_\_\_\_ *Liz Sudlow*

### CAFOD 'Live Simply Award'

St Ignatius of Loyola insisted that one of the keys to spiritual wellness is detachment from the things and worries of this world that might distract us from pursuing our ultimate purpose in life, which is to deepen our relationship with God. As a community, our parish, St Alban's and St Dunstan's primary schools, and Bishop Challoner Catholic College are planning ways of working together in support of a more sustainable and simple future in solidarity with the poor. Pope Francis reminded us all in *Fratelli Tutti* to be considerate of all *brothers and sisters* and we invite you to be present in your continued consciousness of this principle.

CAFOD has accepted our proposal to be recognised as a 'Live Simply Parish', dedicated to doing our very best to establish a more sustainable and simple way of living over the next few years.

During the coming months, when the pandemic permits, we shall give details of various initiatives in the hope that we can all share anew in Jesus' passion and commitment to others. \_\_\_\_\_ *Kayla Brown*  
\_\_\_\_\_(On behalf of the Live Simply Award steering group)

**DR DENNIS MENEZES**  
**16 OCTOBER 1929–1 AUGUST 2020**  
**R.I.P.**

Today, the Church throughout the world celebrates the memory of St Monica, the mother of Augustine of Hippo, whose feast day is tomorrow. The story of St Monica's death is beautiful and it is very much connected with the choice of this day for Dad's funeral. The scene is set in Rome, with Monica's two sons at her bedside, and the suggestion is made that they should try to return her to her homeland before her death. And in words that have a simplicity and a purpose about them, Monica says:

*Lay this body anywhere, and take no trouble over it.*

*One thing only do I ask of you,*

*that you remember me at the altar of the Lord wherever you may be.*

As Christians, we believe in the Resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and from our baptism and throughout our lives we are taught to set our eyes on the Kingdom of Heaven. And we are most united with those we know and love who are with God whenever we gather around the altar of God, wherever we may be.

The journey of Dad's life was:

Born in Seremban in Malaysia – although, if ever asked, he attributed his roots to Goa in India, from where his parents went to Malaysia. As a young boy, he lived under Japanese occupation in Malaysia. He didn't speak about it much, but it was an occasional reference point. In order to pursue a career in dentistry, he travelled first to Bombay and then came over to Edinburgh before moving down to Birmingham where, in the choir at the English Martyrs Church in Sparkhill, he met Mum. They married at the English Martyrs. Dad did not always have the easiest time in 1960s Birmingham given his heritage but he always remained proud of what he achieved.

Dad taught Dentistry at the University of Birmingham and worked at the Dental Hospital, which was then in the centre of Birmingham. He eventually set up in practice in Orthodontics in Edgbaston where he worked for many years. In the early years of their marriage, Mum and Dad spent a year in Burma, with Anthony, and Dad carried out much work towards his doctorate on the dental implications of children born with a cleft palate. In his work in Orthodontics in Birmingham in the late 70s and early 80s, Orthodontics was often seen as more cosmetic than for the good of health and wellbeing. Many people have since testified to the impact that it had on their confidence and their outlook on life as young people and into adult life. Music also played a huge part in Dad's life. From his family's music shop in Malaysia where all of his family learned to play several instruments, he played the piano, accordion and saxophone. Possibly the two questions most often asked of us about Dad over all the years have been, 'Is your Dad the dentist?' and 'Is your Dad the organist at St Dunstan's?' and it is very much in that role as Choirmaster and Organist over some 40 years that he would have been known to generations of people in this parish.

This Parish of St Dunstan's is where Mum and Dad have made their life; made many friendships, lived their life of faith, supported all of the priests who have ministered here. And this Church has been like a second home to us. Choir practice on Friday evenings and Mass on Sunday mornings – pillars of the week. I don't know that Dad ever quite grasped the fact that for the serious business of choir practice, it was also the end of the working week for most of the choir, and it was not so unreasonable to want a catch-up and a chat as well as paying attention to the detail of the music.

Dad gave such a lot of his life to the Church's liturgy and worship and he really believed that the praise of God through sacred music helped people's prayer. We pray that he may enjoy the praise of God in his presence which our worship here is called to mirror.

Perhaps the thing that so many people who know Dad will remember about him is the ease with which he fell asleep: in any social setting, in meetings, while playing the piano or at the dinner table. He often got a hard time for it, but finally, he can sleep in peace with none of us, discreetly or otherwise, nudging him to wake up.

For Dad's life, for God's life given to him and given to us, and for the blessings that we have known through Dad, as we pray for him today, may our prayer be: Thanks be to God!

[We are grateful to Monsignor Timothy Menezes for permission to print extracts from the homily he preached at his father's funeral in St Dunstan's Church on 27 August 2020. Editors]

## St Dunstan's Music Maestro

### The Music Man

Music was a huge part of Dennis' life from early childhood and when he arrived in Edinburgh in the late 'Fifties, he was already an accomplished pianist. At that time the Jim Bakie dance band was very well known across central Scotland. One evening, Bakie overheard Dennis playing a medley of popular tunes. Within half an hour he signed up Dennis as the band piano player – a financial and social godsend for a young man from a far off land who was studying for a postgraduate Dental degree.

The band covered all kinds of music from Scottish Country dances to swing and rock'n'roll and jazz. This period was to be the grounding of Dennis' amazing ability as an entertainer. He developed an astonishing repertoire, which enabled him to play from memory music of almost every genre for the rest of his life. To those who knew him well, he was quite simply the 'Music Man'

Not only was he the church organist and choir-master. He played all the music at the annual church pantomime for the 'handicapped club' as they were then known. He entertained at Christmas festivities and functions whenever he was asked. If he was a guest at any house with a piano, a long night of song was a guarantee. Just three years ago, he suffered from an almost fatal pneumonia and was sent to convalesce in a Care Home in West Heath. The patients were all elderly and frail and many had dementia. Despite the efforts of the staff, it could not be described as a happy place. One day, my wife remarked to a staff member that Dennis was a very talented piano player. The next day, the Manager brought a keyboard in to the lounge and

invited Dennis to play. Over the next hour, he regaled everyone with a medley of golden oldies covering many decades. The large lounge rapidly filled with patients and staff from all over the home. As he wove his musical magic, old sad faces lit up, hands began to clap and feet began to tap and long silent voices started to sing. It was an unforgettable experience.

### Making them smile

In his professional life he was equally talented, well respected and enormously popular with his colleagues. For many years, he ran one of the most prestigious Orthodontic practices in the Midlands and restored even and gleaming smiles to thousands of children. Unlike many of his peers, his strong social conscience led him to treating children from all backgrounds under the NHS. Rich or poor, everyone received equal treatment.

Despite his extraordinary ability, Dennis remained a very modest man. He was utterly devoted to his family, his faith and his church. He had a generous spirit and saw only the good in others. Despite often being the target of racist abuse, he never bad mouthed anyone, nor did he hold any grudges. He was, quite simply, one of the best of men.

One of my abiding memories of Dennis is his mischievous sense of humour. He was the organist at the wedding of my eldest daughter. Several of us were wearing kilts. At the end of the ceremony, we exited slowly to his splendid rendition of Widor's Toccata. Just before we reached the church door, the melody suddenly changed to the strains of "Donald, where's your trousers".

\_\_\_\_\_  
*George Macleod*

### No words will do

I cannot find words that express my gratitude to have known Dennis and his beautiful family. I just wish that my written words could jump out and give everyone a big hug. For as long as I can remember I have had Dennis and his family in my life from my wedding, baptisms of my children to sadly funerals. Dennis was such a character, a strong intelligent man, a man of faith and ahead of his time. He was gentle, loving and a kind family man who was always ready to help. A man who I had the honour to call my friend.

I remember Friday night choir practice, where I must have driven the poor man around the bend by my chatting, being late and my spiked up hair. He would say, 'Marianne stop talking', and Kath Conley would jump in to defend me. I remember fondly the wonderful Christmas parties, happy times! The feeling of being so grown up to be invited to the party: the Menezes' house decked in Christmas decorations, full of people singing and laughing, especially Mary, Linda, Anna, Jess, Thomasin and I. There were yearly choir trips to such places as Woodstock and Matlock Baths, with lots of singing in the coach, especially from John Porter with his strong bass voice; and Dennis playing at the Christmas pantomime, with my darling sister Cathy always in a leading part. I felt so proud to watch her.

I also cast my mind back to another happy time on the 30th of May 1982. St Dunstan's choir formed part of the mass choir for Pope John Paul II's visit in Coventry. Dennis was so proud and what a day of celebration it was.

Dennis greatly influenced me through his choir. He helped me to embody the values of community and my Catholic faith through the power of music and his personality. I am very thankful.

May he rest in peace. Amen.



\_\_\_\_\_  
*Marianne Halton*

## The View from the Rest of the Choir

### Friday night was choir night

Dennis was very good at holding every one's attention at our Friday night choir practice, which used to start at 7.00pm but was delayed to 7.30 or even 8.45pm when Fr Chris changed the evening Mass time from 8.00pm to 7.00pm. I knew I could not plan anything else for a Friday night as I would not dare to miss choir practice.

I learned so much from Dennis at our weekly practice, with a variety of Latin or English motets as well as hymns. He had an ear for perfection, making sure that we kept at it until we got all the notes and all the words right.

It was worth it, however, because even if we were tired after a long week at work and sometimes had to drag ourselves to the church to sing, by the time we left we felt much better! \_\_\_\_\_ *Danuta Scott*

### Motets and Psalms

Dennis inveigled my wife and I into the church choir soon after we moved into Kings Heath in 1972. Unfortunately, neither of us are sopranos, so we found ourselves expected to sing the alto and tenor parts in motets and hymns. For some years, I had a competent tenor or two to lean upon. Eventually, when I was the only tenor left standing, Dennis drafted my middle daughter in from the sopranos to 'keep me in tune'. He even got me to sing the Psalm from time to time, when it was an easy setting.

These days, with dwindling numbers of anything other than soprano voices in the choir, we still manage the occasional *Ave Verum* or *Sacrum Convivium* in four-part harmony. I have graduated to singing the Psalm much more regularly and one of the pleasures of a Sunday morning was a chuckle with Dennis over my mistakes and wrong notes, which he never failed to notice. I shall miss him greatly. \_\_\_\_\_ *Bob Wilcher*



[Dennis with some of St Dunstan's Church Choir 1986]

### Motets and Party Pieces

We were members of St Dunstan's in the 1980s and 1990s, during the time when Dennis was organist and choirmaster. He took the role very seriously; rehearsals, held every Friday evening without fail, gave us the opportunity to learn many new anthems and motets – and revise familiar ones, too – to sing at the 10.30am Mass on Sundays as well as at the major feasts, ordinations and other Parish events. We remember them fondly.

The highlight of every year was undoubtedly the Christmas or New Year party, genially hosted at their home by Dennis and Cathy. We were all required to 'sing for our supper' by performing a 'party piece': a recitation, instrumental item or song appropriately adapted for the occasion. (One year I was persuaded to bring my violin out of the loft to give a rendition of Monti's "Czardas" – a virtuoso piece until I got my hands on it.) Dennis would finally lead us into a sing-song at the piano: a superb improviser, mischievously jumping from key to key, he had us all in stitches! A fine musician, a generous host and as warm and kind a man as you could possibly imagine!

\_\_\_\_\_ *Tom and Margaret Dance*



[Dennis and his piano accordion with Canon O'Sullivan]

### Carols at Christmas

Dennis was a man of many talents. At St Dunstan's we were mostly aware of his musical skills. He was a respected organist, pianist and choir master, but some of my favourite memories are of the way, just before Christmas every year, he hauled his heavy piano accordion round the homes at Monyhull to accompany members of the choir as we sang carols for the residents. It was for many years part of our traditional build-up to Christmas and he was greeted as an old friend by many elderly residents. He could play anything they requested and brought much seasonal pleasure to all participants. \_\_\_\_\_ *Mary Dingle*

## The Cross of Sacrifice and Silent Power of Remembrance

Social distancing restrictions meant it was not possible to hold the normal Remembrance Day service at Brandwood End Cemetery. Organised by the Friends of Brandwood Cemetery, in accordance with British Legion guidelines, it is a service to honour those who gave their life in armed conflict. Although not physically together, those who normally attend were still bound by a spirit of respect for the fallen as they paid their own private tributes.



Wreaths were still laid by the usual representatives, such as local councillors, Police, British Legion (at different times throughout the day) at the Cross of Sacrifice, located on the main drive past the twin chapels. The Cross was erected by the Imperial War Graves Commission in memory of 103 soldiers, buried in the cemetery, who died during the First World War; this year marked the 90th anniversary of the monument's dedication.

Nothing, however, prevented the nation observing a two-minute silence for those who made the ultimate sacrifice; a silence repeated on Armistice Day later in the week. The tribute originated in Cape Town South Africa, where a two-minute silence was initiated by the daily firing of the noon day gun on Signal Hill. The ceremony was instituted in 1918 by the Mayor, Sir Harry Hands, following news of the death of his son in The Great War. Originally, one minute was thanksgiving for those who had returned alive, the second minute was to remember the fallen.

The idea of this act of remembrance became more widely adopted, and was eventually brought to the attention of King George V in

October 1919; he subsequently sought its adoption throughout the Commonwealth, and in time for the first anniversary of the armistice, released this statement:

*"I believe that my people in every part of the Empire fervently wish to perpetuate the memory of that great deliverance and of those who laid down their lives to achieve it. To afford an opportunity for the universal expression of this feeling it is my desire and hope that at the hour when the Armistice came into force, the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month, there may be for the brief space of two minutes a complete suspension of all our normal activities. During that time, except in the rare cases where this may be impracticable, all work, all sound, and all locomotion should cease, so that, in perfect stillness, the thoughts of everyone may be concentrated on reverent remembrance of the glorious dead. At a given signal, which could easily be arranged to suit the circumstances of each locality, I believe that we shall all gladly interrupt our business and pleasure, whatever it may be, and unite in this simple service of silence and remembrance."* George V.

A phrase often quoted is that *"silence speaks volumes"*. The two-minute silence of Remembrance Sunday and Armistice Day marks our gratitude for the sacrifice of the fallen; the extent of that gratitude, its "volume", can only be measured by how well our lives honour the legacy of those who died. We must ensure their sacrifice was not in vain. May we truly honour them, every day, by committing ourselves to peace and upholding the freedom they fought for.

*"Put on then as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassion, kindness, lowliness, meekness, and patience, forbearing one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you must also forgive. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts."* (Colossians 3: 12-13, 15)

Deacon David

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[Details of the work of Friends of Brandwood End Cemetery and additional history of the Cross of Sacrifice can be found on their Facebook pages.]

## Remembrance Project 2020

At Bishop Challoner Catholic College, the Art Department has commemorated Armistice Day each year for the past six years. Over this time, the exhibition we install has grown, and this year's is the largest yet. We want to champion local heroes and their stories, putting names to the facts that we all hear about in school but don't always know what to do with.

For the centenary of the end of World War One two years ago, we created life-size silhouettes of soldiers to commemorate the Fallen, especially the four men that lived on Institute Road. This was accompanied by a sea of small sculptures of silhouetted soldiers standing amongst the grass, each with the names and dates of men from Kings Heath and the surrounding areas who had fallen during WW1. The year before that, we created a giant poppy mural made out of around 500 hand-formed acrylic poppies, that has graced the outside of the school every year for the first weeks of November. Last year, we grew the size of the installation further, building and installing three large acrylic and steel poppy sculptures on the lawn in front of the Sports Centre, each featuring a stanza from John McCrae's 'In Flanders Field' poem. Their red petals glow in the sunlight and can be seen from Kings Heath High Street as you walk onto Institute Road.

This year, the exhibition has hit new heights, with the addition of 10 metal plaques across the school railings and two additional large scale poppies featuring a poem called 'Perhaps' by Vera Brittain. Eight of the plaques are portraits of local women – many who are related to members of the Challoner community – who all had a part to play in the Second World War. The final two are photo collages of women working for the war effort, all scanned from local history books.

Each woman's photograph has been restored, printed and displayed on the metal sheets using sublimation processes. Next to each portrait is a plaque

featuring information about them, including their role during the war and further stories about their lives before, during and since. Each was researched by myself after reaching out to the local community to submit their ancestors' stories. I am so very proud to have had the honour to have worked on such stories and almost feel like I knew each of them alike.

I have always believed that it is so important to commemorate those that went before us, and all that they did to live honest, full and humble lives. I think it can be quite easy to forget how people of the past were real – with real stories of love and loss. During such a year that we've all had, where our daily lives have changed, it's easy to lose perspective on what people have had to endure in the past, and the fact that they not only survived, but thrived too. Without highlighting the details and faces of these people, I worry that these stories will be lost to time and forgotten, as opposed to learning about and from them. What legacies these women have left behind! (And what others are we yet to uncover?)

The full exhibition can be viewed from outside of Bishop Challoner Catholic College's Sports Centre in the centre of Institute Road, Kings Heath, B14 7EG. It will be around until the end of November. On Armistice Day itself, there was a recording of the school choir singing 'We'll meet again'.

All sculptural and installed work has been created by our Senior Art & DT Technician, Remea Crawford, alongside myself and the Head of Department, Jo Baptiste. Additional support has been provided by Liz Dane, Lydia Parkes and Carmela Hodgson. A massive 'Thank you' goes to the relatives and local people who submitted stories for this year's display. It really has been wonderful to work on such a project and we hope we have created something that you can reflect upon and enjoy. \_\_\_\_\_ *Hannah Swingler*



# Youth Page

## Christmas Carols

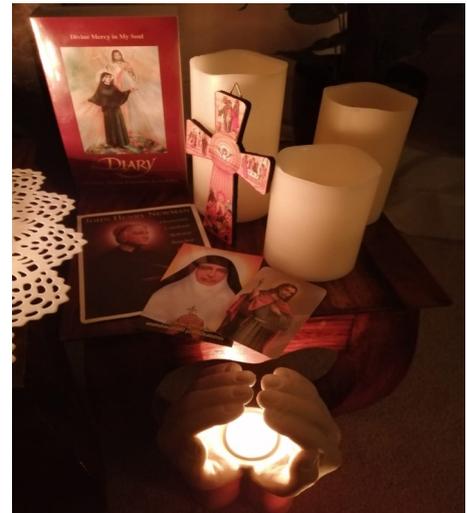
By Harry Williams

One of the things I miss most at Mass is singing hymns. I really love the Christmas Masses with the Christmas carols. I think more people join in with singing at Christmas because everyone knows some carols and knows they are telling us the good news of the birth of Jesus. With Coronavirus we may not be able to sing carols in Church this year but I will definitely have my own candlelit carol service at home with my favourite carols. My top three favourite carols are:

1. Away in a manger. I love this carol because I have grown up with it. My mom taught me this carol before I had even started nursery.
2. Silent Night. This carol really slows us down, so we are calm and peaceful. I think it's like singing a prayer.
3. O' Come all ye faithful. This carol is powerful and joyous. We get to celebrate Jesus in our life with so much singing passion in our hearts.



I hope everyone gets the chance to sing or hear some Christmas carols this year.



## All Saints Day:

This Year we weren't able to celebrate All Saints Day. This is the day we celebrate all the different saints and what they have done.

We would dress up as different saints and then Fr Phillip would judge these costumes.



## Advent Wordscramble

- |                 |       |
|-----------------|-------|
| HEOP            | _____ |
| OJY             | _____ |
| CEEPA           | _____ |
| LVOE            | _____ |
| TEDANV NDEECARL | _____ |
| RTSM SHICA      | _____ |
| TBLSEA          | _____ |
| LASGNE          | _____ |
| AORCSL          | _____ |
| HISATCMRS TERE  | _____ |
| TASR OF WODNRE  | _____ |

## Bishop Challoner's Virtual Youth Group:

Over the last few weeks Bishop Challoner's Chaplaincy team have set up a virtual youth group in place of the real life one.

We have spoken about how lockdown has had different effects on our faith. We have also had fun doing icebreakers like scavenger hunts and quizzes.

This has been great because I have been able to socialise with other likeminded young people.

Youth Group is on Wednesdays 6.30 – 7.10pm via Zoom. Contact [staff-chaplains@bishopchalloner.bham.sch.uk](mailto:staff-chaplains@bishopchalloner.bham.sch.uk) for more information and to register your interest.

By Alice Stewart

## ST ALBAN'S PRIMARY SCHOOL: A GOVERNOR'S PERSPECTIVE

I have been asked to write a few words about life at St Alban's at this time of global pandemic. First to say is that, due to the restrictions in place to ensure prioritisation of health and safety, I have unfortunately not been able to visit the school as I would normally do on a regular basis. Communication has moved to other channels. Governors' meetings all still going ahead but at present these are via Zoom. The staff and children have all been amazing as they have coped so well with the adjusted ways of working and school continues to be a place where our mission statement is fulfilled: "Following in the Footsteps of Jesus, we love, live and learn together". Rather than write more myself I would like to share an extract from a recent school newsletter, which to me beautifully illustrates the ethos of the school:

"On Wednesday 11th November at 11.00am, we held a two minute silence as a school community and remembered those who have given their lives in service. Anyone can be involved in prayers for remembering, whether in church or at home. All you need for this simple prayer is a poppy each. Look at your poppy. Poppies are bright and cheerful flowers: give thanks to God for the lives of those who have died in war, remembering all the joy they brought to families and friends, and all the good things they did for their home and their country. Then look at the red petals: red reminds us of danger and harm. Ask God to be close to those who are still facing danger each day, to give courage to the armed forces, and compassion to all who help others. Place your whole hand over the poppy: poppies are also fragile and need to be handled gently. God cares for all those who are hurting and those who are sad. Ask God to comfort all who are grieving the loss of someone they love. Finally place a finger on the centre of the poppy: ask God to help you play your part in working for peace in the world. Lord God, we pray you give us peace. Help us to lift our eyes above the torment of this broken world, and grant us the grace to pray for those who wish us harm. As we honour the past, may we put our faith in your future; for you are the source of life and hope, now and forever. Amen."

*Sue Allen*

And Mary said: 'My soul doth magnify the Lord. And my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour. Because he hath regarded the humility of his handmaid; for behold from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed.' (Luke 1: 46-48)



## SVP UPDATE

As ever, I have to start with thanks to our priests, Deacon David and to you, the people of our parish, for the support we, in the SVP, unfailingly enjoy. And of course, many thanks and a fond farewell to Fr Simon and a warm welcome to Fr John.

It's obviously been a funny old year, to say the least. We have not been able to visit our 'regulars' – particularly our friends in Pineapple Place Care Home – because of the lockdown restrictions. And thanks to the Corona Virus, we've had to ensure social distancing when dealing with people who've come to us for help. And rather than gathering around the table in fellowship in the Conference Room, we've had to make do with Zoom meetings.

Nonetheless we persevere. We keep up contact, though remotely, with our friends in the care homes and have been able to respond to requests for help, supplying for example a new washing machine to a lady – in poor health and on benefits – with five children, and providing bags of food for people who've found themselves with none, and no money to buy more. We hope, working with Karen Tehan, to provide 'Christmas Dinner in a bag' to needy families in the parish; at the time of writing (mid November) that may be as many as a hundred families!

Despite being unable to do lectern appeals this year – thanks to the wretched virus! – we've been blessed with donations from a few kind individuals. One I found particularly touching. A gentleman we've helped in the past – a lovely, gentle soul but not what you might call an effective money-manager – met me by chance near Village Square. We had a brief chat in the course of which he told me he'd found a £10 note on the pavement the other day. 'That was lucky', I said. 'Yes', he replied. 'I took it to the church and put it in the SVP box.' That's not a hint by the way . . . but if anyone *would* like to help us out with a donation, that'd be most welcome.

And by the same token, if you want to contact the SVP for whatever reason, please feel free to do so, either by contacting me directly (07855 824434 or [andygudge@blueyonder.co.uk](mailto:andygudge@blueyonder.co.uk)) or by going through the priests or Deacon David.

Have a happy and blessed Christmas *Andy Gudge*

*(President, St Dunstan's & St Jude's SVP)*

The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we saw his glory, the glory as it were of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth. (John 1: 14)



**Renee Kingston**  
**31 March 1918 - 23 August 2020**  
**R.I.P.**

Renée was born Irene Frances Machin at 97, Talbot Street, Winson Green, Birmingham, on Sunday 31 March 1918. She was the second of three children born to Bertram (Bertie) Staples Machin and Elsie Frances Waters. Why the name change? Renée said she was told that one of her aunts had married a Frenchman and thought Renée sounded better than Irene – and the name stuck, so much so that she could not remember ever being called Irene.

Renée had a sister, Zita Angela, who was two years older than her and a brother, Desmond Edward, who was six years younger. Their mother, Elsie, had trained as a pawnbroker, ran her own business, and passed on her skills to her daughters. Renée was extremely able and both loved and excelled at school. She also learned to play the piano and the dextrous skills she gained helped her in later life.

Having left school at the age of sixteen, Renée met Arthur Edward Hickerton and they courted for several years. Arthur, who was almost four years older than Renée, was the youngest of three brothers. In the late 1930s, Arthur joined the Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve (RAFVR) and trained as a navigator. As a reservist, he continued to live and work in Birmingham, whilst carrying out his duties with the RAFVR at weekends and in the evenings. His parents ran a 'Wholesale Tobacconist & News Agents'. During this time, Renée learned short-hand and taught herself to touch type, an accomplishment she felt was helped by her early experience with the piano. In the 1939 census, she was recorded as a Short Hand Typist in an Accounts Office, and was living at 56, Mary Street with her family.

Renée and Zita both married in the spring of 1940 (possibly a double wedding). Her marriage to Arthur certainly took place at the Oratory Church, Hagley Road, Edgbaston. In April 1940, Arthur enlisted with the R.A.F. in Cardington, Bedfordshire. He served with 624 Squadron and was promoted to Flight Sergeant. Towards the end of 1943, his squadron was operating in the eastern Mediterranean, where he was tragically killed in action on 1 December, aged just twenty-nine. He is buried in the Phaleron War Cemetery in Athens. This must have been especially devastating for Renée as she was expecting at the time and their son, John, was born early the following year. Reminiscing about this time in her life, Renée said she always felt he was sent to replace her late husband. Given the situation, Renée returned to her family home for support.

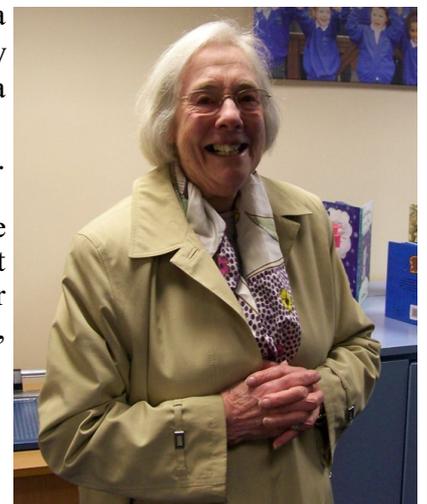
She was not one for moping around, however, and had a passion for amateur dramatics and ice-skating. It was whilst ice-skating that she was introduced to Alexander Kingston, who was ten years older than Renée and had been married before. His wife, Thora, had died in Selly Oak in 1956. Alexander and Thora had two sons, Michael and David. Renée married Alexander and they settled in Kings Heath, not far from her sister Zita, who had married Phillip Smallwood.

Alexander died in 1982 and it was some time after this that my wife and I got to know Renée, who attended St. Dunstan's Church, where we would meet up after Mass over a cup of tea. She was not only a reader for many years, but also organised the rotas and helped with the flower arranging. She only took a step back from her parish commitments when she reached the age of ninety-five. We kept in touch and would often visit her for a chat and a cuppa. On one of these occasions, she mentioned that she had taught short-hand and typing at my old school, Harborne Hill, and we realised that she had taught my sister-in-law Sandra, who now lives in Australia. The following year, when Sandra and my brother were over from Oz, we paid her a visit. Renée was really touched to be shown an autograph book with her signature in it. Sandra remembered her as 'a great teacher and a kind gentle person'.

Renée died on 23 August 2020 at the age of one hundred and two. Her funeral was in St Dunstan's Church on 15 September 2020.

From a personal point of view, I will greatly miss Renée as I'm sure many will, not only parishioners, but her friends and neighbours too. It has been an absolute pleasure to have met and known her and enjoyed her company. I loved her humour, her smile, her zest for life and of course, being a Sunday's child, she was full of grace.

Renée, Rest in Peace. \_\_\_\_\_ *Roger Browning*



## FORTY YEARS OF "WINDOW"

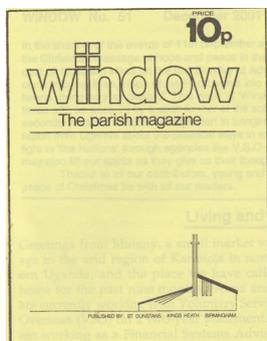
### How it Started

Canon O'Sullivan had long wanted a magazine that would reflect the life of the parish and help to build a sense of community. When he organised the parish into Area Groups in 1980, with the idea that each group would have its own project, those of us who lived in the area bounded by Alcester Road South, Tenbury Road, Grove Road and Vicarage Road decided that we could muster the talents to fulfil his dream. Chief among us was the late Harry Siviter, who was an artist and designer (and wicked cartoonist) and who agreed to put together a magazine if the rest of us could round up enough articles and type them for him to lay out and illustrate, which he did literally with scissors and paste. We had a meeting with the Canon, who came up with the title of "WINDOW". We managed to assemble enough material for a trial run, which came out in October 1980. In December, we dared to put a date on the first page in the expectation there would be further issues. Little did we think that "WINDOW" would still be going 40 years later. At first, we produced a magazine four times a year, but this was too time-consuming, so we decided to publish in December and July.

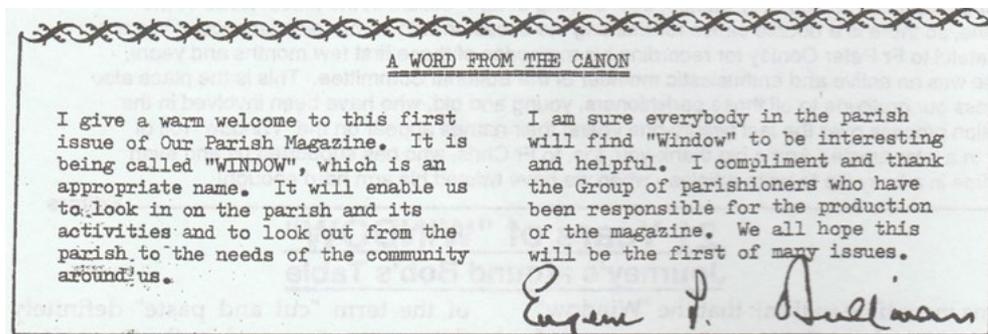
For many years, Harry designed the covers and brightened the pages of print with drawings. We have been astonished that there has never been a shortage of material or of parishioners to write about it. Highlights have been the papal visits of Pope John Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI, various ordinations, the Silver Jubilee of our church building in 1993, the centenary of the parish in 1996, the Beatification and Canonisation of St John Henry Newman. In April 1985, we first included a page of rather grainy black-and-white photographs. When Harry sadly passed away in 1991, we did not expect to be able to carry on, but several young people stepped into the breach over the next few years with drawings and imaginative cover designs, and the scissors and paste passed into our less competent hands. Eventually technology came to the rescue, when we mastered Publisher and colour photographs replaced line drawings.

We are grateful to all the parishioners and priests who have contributed reports and views and poems, sometimes with an encouraging twist of the arm, over the past forty years to keep the magazine afloat and Canon O'Sullivan's dream alive.

*Editors*



The cover of the first issue.



Canon O'Sullivan's welcome to the first issue of "WINDOW".



The editors with Doug Crampton and Harry Siviter in 1986.

### A Curate's Diary

**17 October 2017** A sad day in the presbytery. Words cannot express the sadness at the loss that has occurred in the chicken run. House curtains drawn and black to be worn.

**28 August 2018** I assumed the SatNav on my i-phone was switched off. I realised it wasn't when I stood at the graveside and from my pocket an electronic voice declared: 'You have reached your destination.'

**9 September 2019** Today is 'National buy your priest a pint day'. I wonder if we should introduce a 'National buy your priest a gin day?'

[A few reminders of this much-loved column by Fr Simon.]

Fr Simon writes facetiously to suggest that when we reach No. 100 of "WINDOW", we might consider publishing the full text of the diary under the title *Happy Days: the Comings and Goings of a Curate*. As always, he missed the deadline for submitting material! Happy days! \_\_\_\_\_ *Editors*

## Completing the Maryvale Certificate

Maryvale lies at the centre of the ancient settlement of Oscott, about five miles from Birmingham City Centre. It has been the aim of the Maryvale Institute from its inception to provide opportunities for lay people, clergy and religious to achieve a deeper understanding of the faith and to appreciate more clearly its joyful message for the lives of individuals and communities. Maryvale stands within the Catholic theological tradition, whose riches it seeks to explore, and draws from that tradition an insistence not only on the foundational importance of faith for theological reasoning but also on the place of reason in the response of faith. In pursuance of this, the Institute provides opportunities for Catholic formation and education through courses across a wide range of subjects and levels.

I chose to undertake the MCC (Maryvale Certificate in Catechesis) course, open to any adult who would like to deepen their knowledge and understanding of their faith so that they can confidently hand it on to others, either formally as catechists or informally as parishioners. I commenced the course in the Autumn of 2018 and in October this year was awarded my qualification with merit. This is a two-year, part-time, distance-learning course, although it can be done at a pace that you are comfortable with and many take longer to complete. The course starts at Maryvale each autumn and draws from the Scriptures, the Catechism of the Catholic Church, and selected documents of the Second Vatican Council as key reference texts, offering a balance of theology, spirituality, and catechetical skills. Assessment is through a written assignment submitted for each module, comprising an essay and an outline plan for a catechesis session.

At times, I must be honest, I have found distance-learning difficult, particularly as this year (because of Covid) the two study days and the retreat day were cancelled. Anyone that knows me realises that I love discussing and developing thinking and ideas in person...

However, I do really feel that this has been time well spent and full of blessings. I trust that it has helped me to acquire the relevant knowledge, attitude and skills to support me in being better able to share and live out my faith. It has certainly made me aware of a much greater treasure trove of scripture, papal writings and the works of our many saints that will provide me with a lifelong source of continued joy and learning!

*Sue Allen*

## Musings during Covid-19

Thursday 15 October 2020

Sitting in my hotel room listening to songs on my tablet from the late 'sixties:

'Blowing in the Wind': how man has changed how he talks about the environment and how many years it takes mountains to melt into the sea.

'Where have all the flowers gone': the death and destruction that war brings.

'Morning has broken': the night gone and earth waking as morning light comes over everything. So peaceful as I hear the waves lashing against the sand, which has been there for a thousand years. Another day has begun.

### Watching a year pass

An English country garden through the seasons.

Spring, where plants are starting to grow again. Trees with their green leaves and birds making their nests in them.

Summer, flowers with their lovely colours, reds, blues and greens, with the bees getting nectar to make their honey.

Autumn comes and plants begin to die. Leaves wither and fall to the ground and as they do, we see more changes as they turn from green to beautiful reds and auburns and browns.

Winter brings the snow, but we know Spring will come and everything start again.

After war and destruction, to see the beauty of the earth. I can now see it from both sides.

*Kate Edwards*

*A joyful and  
blessed  
Christmas and  
a peaceful  
New Year to  
all our readers.*



Fr John takes his turn on camera for one of the lockdown on-line Masses from the side chapel in St Dunstan's Church.



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