



HOLY SOULS' CHURCH

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Dear Parishioners,

Father Benedict's absence on holiday provides us not only with an opportunity to prepare our farewells for a few weeks' time, but also to think about the future life of our parish when we once more only have one priest.

It will not be a new situation for us, but rather a return to what we knew before the arrival of Father Benedict, but what makes the situation different from my point of view is that having been in the parish now for nearly four years I feel that I can see more clearly what challenges we will have to face both immediately and in the not too distant future.

What does our parish mean to us, how would we describe it to ourselves or to an outsider?

Pope Francis gives us this definition of a parish:

'The parish is the presence of the Church in a given territory, an environment for hearing God's word, for growth in the Christian life, for dialogue, proclamation, charitable outreach, worship, and celebration. In all its activities the parish encourages and trains its members to be evangelizers. It is a community of communities, a sanctuary where the thirsty come to drink in the midst of their journey, and a centre of constant missionary outreach.'

How does that compare with our experience of Holy Souls?

Hopefully most of us would identify with our parish being somewhere we hear God's word, somewhere we gather to worship God, and somewhere we are nourished and refreshed in our journey of life. These are all of course things that we receive as members of the parish community. But what about some of those other things that Pope Francis speaks about which call for us to give of ourselves; dialogue, proclamation, charitable outreach, and celebration. Are we as ready to give of ourselves as we are to receive?

Rather than going through a list of things we could do differently, I would like to suggest that there are two key ideas for us to take on board, and if we come to terms with these then other things will follow. The first is that we should move in our thinking from maintenance to mission. By maintenance I mean not only the care of our buildings but also the pastoral care we provide for those people who are already committed and active members of our parish. It is of course important that we continue to provide this care (regular Masses, regular times of confession, visits to the sick and housebound, and care of our buildings) and continue to do this well, but we must guard against becoming so caught up in this that we neglect to reach out to those people who are currently on the fringes of our parish life or not even yet involved at all, but perhaps recognise spiritual stirrings present in their lives and seek to discern where God is leading them. This is what Pope Francis has in mind when he speaks of a parish as being a 'centre of constant missionary outreach', and also what the national event 'Proclaim 15' and the Celebrate Conference taking place in Cleethorpes this weekend are about too.

The second key idea for us take on board is that we should move from 'helping Father' to a real sense of shared responsibility for the life and mission of the parish. Many people have very generously said to me

over the years, 'if there is anything I can do to help you Father you only need to ask'. I am very grateful to all those offers but they only help so much and they still leave all the responsibility with me to recognise needs and ask for help. It would be much better if people undertook things in the parish, not out of a desire to help me, but rather out of a desire to serve their fellow parishioners and the wider community. This sense of shared responsibility will only grow if we learn to trust one another and to accept that we are all working for the same end. I am aware that one of the characteristics of our parish is that a lot of people have been part of the parish for a long time. This undoubtedly gives great strength to our community, but it does mean that it can sometimes be more difficult for people who are newer to the parish to feel fully at home and it also means that disagreements which took place many years ago can still today impact negatively on relations between people. If this strikes a chord with your heart then perhaps now is the time to set aside past differences, to make peace, and to commit to working together for the good of all.

In order for these two simple ideas to take hold; 'from maintenance to mission, from helping Father to taking responsibility' we need effective structures in the parish that will have these always at the front of their minds. The most important such structure is the Parish Pastoral Council. Our current Council has reached the end of its three year term of office and at the end of Mass the outgoing Chair / Vice Chair will say a few words hopefully encouraging new people to consider being members for the next three year term which will begin in the autumn. It is important that the PPC leads the parish in making the changes that we need to make, not least by modelling mission and shared responsibility in the way that the members work together among themselves and in the way that they relate to the whole parish.

I also recognise that these ideas are a challenge to me, to reflect on my ways of working, and to make sure that I strike a proper balance between maintenance and mission and that I learn not just to accept help but also to share responsibility. I rely on you all to hold me to that, and to remind me of these words when you think it necessary.

How do we start. The best starting point is prayer. Please pray for the intentions of our parish in a particular way during the summer holiday months. Pray for Father Benedict as he prepares to take up his new appointment, but pray also for us who will remain that we may be able to use this time of change to become more the parish that we are called to be. And in your prayer ask the Lord to guide you as to how best you can contribute to the mission of the parish that He may show you which of your gifts and talents you can put at His service.

After prayer can follow conversation, please share your thoughts with one another in your families and friendship groups. Please also try and talk to parishioners who you may not know so well and so get to hear a different point of view. And please engage in conversation with me, I am around for all the rest of July and for the first half of August, and would be happy to meet with you and to hear your thoughts on what you feel the needs of our parish are. Another means of communication is by new technology, and I hope to set something up on line that can enable us to share ideas in that way. Or even better, and in keeping with what I have said, maybe there is someone out there who is willing to set this up and be responsible for it.

After prayer and conversation must follow action, and hopefully after the summer holidays are over we can move into our new situation with confidence trusting that the Lord is with us as seek to live out our vocation as a parish, to be a community of communities and a centre of missionary outreach to others.

Let us continue to pray for one another, and may God continue to bless us all.

Fr Eddy