Children's Mass: a great success

The parish now hosts a Children's Mass each month, usually on the last Sunday of the month, which is always advertised in the Newsletter in the weeks leading up to it. Children in any class in primary school are welcome to attend as activities are tailored to their age. It has gone from strength to strength since it began last March.

The children are led out at the start of the readings and come back in later during the Mass. The children are instructed by a team of lay people who have crèche and teaching experience. Children are brought to a room within the same building where they engage in religious activities related to that Sunday's Gospel while their parents attend the Mass. So please just come along with your child to 10am Sunday Mass on the days advertised.

Leaders of activities at the Children's Mass: Amanda Murray, Serena Yorke, Shona Matthews and Sr. Angela Clarkson

Newsletter Review 2009

January

It was two weeks into January before our newsletter appeared, echoing the shock and dismay of the community at the awful fire that engulfed our beloved St Mel's Cathedral on Christmas morning. Alongside that great loss was a wonderful togetherness, support and care for our priests and Bishop Colm which was a source of strength and comfort to them at this difficult time. Mass was celebrated in the Temperance Hall while St Mel's College Chapel and Sports Hall were being made ready for daily and Sunday masses by the Pastoral Council and an enthusiastic team of talented volunteers. There was sadness too at the news of the death of our former Bishop, Cardinal Cahal Daly. The Church Unity Service was on 21st in St John's Church of Ireland with homily by Bishop Tony Farquhar. It was time to renew your membership of the Cathedral Circle. Parish funerals took place mostly in St Mary's Church in Newtownforbes. Perpetual Adoration resumed in the College Chapel and the monthly Holy Hour there on the 31st united us all in prayer.

February

Favourite feast days brought people to Mass in great numbers; St Brigid, Candlemas, St Blaise and St Mel; where week day Masses were now in the College Chapel while Ash Wednesday saw the Temperance Hall thronged for masses to mark the beginning of Lent.

Longford prayer group met in St Josephs. The Family Centre which had been closed because of the fire was declared safe and re opened for the Rainbows programme. There was a seven minute feature on the Cathedral on RTE television. Parishioners were very generous in their response to the Haiti appeal for help for victims of the terrible earthquake. Saturday 20th we moved for Sunday masses to the beautifully designed Cathedral Centre located in St Mel's College Sports Hall.

Stewards were there to guide motorists in the new parking areas and after Mass willing helpers restored the centre for use by the students during the week.

March

Lenten programmes on the Gospel of St Luke, Cry of the Earth, Christian meditation and Console as well as station masses all continue in our parish. St Patrick's Day celebrations lifted our spirits as we continued to gaze through the railings at the Cathedral now surrounded by scaffolding, storage cabins and 'no entry' signs while tall cranes carry workmen over its roofless walls. A special newsletter was published updating us on the work in progress which can also be followed on our parish website.

The Holy Father, Pope Benedict sent a pastoral letter to the Catholics of Ireland concerning the deeply disturbing abuse of children by some members of the Church. Reminding us of 'the rock from which you were hewn' (Is.51:1) he said that 'historically the Catholics of Ireland have proved a force for good at home and abroad'. (Pg 7) The first children's mass was on 28th at 10am. Good news! As the threat of swine flu eased the suspension of the sign of peace at mass was lifted.

April

We had beautiful ceremonies in St Mel's Cathedral centre for Holy week especially the Good Friday drama of the Lord's Passion. On Easter Sunday the choir lifted our spirits with joyful Alleluias.

The tidy town national clean-up day saw volunteers make a clean sweep of Longford and the citizens information service launched a new 'freefone information line'. It was enrolment time for new pupils in all our national schools. World day of prayer on 25th reminded us to pray for vocations to the priesthood and religious life. There was a progress report on the work at the Cathedral and news of a parish family day in Flancare Park organised by the town football club.

May

All roads led to Flancare Park on the 9th as Longford Town FC hosted a parish family day out in aid of the Cathedral restoration reserve fund. Crowds many in the familiar red and black, attended Mass there at 1pm celebrated by Bishop Colm and afterwards the stand and sidelines rocked to the sounds of country music stars from near and far. Over €12,000 was collected and we thank the organisers and artistes for a great day out. Pilgrimage season again and St Padre Pio group went to Holy Cross Abbey in Tipperary.

There was a one day retreat in Lough Derg and the Bishop led the annual pilgrimage to Lourdes. Pioneer jubilarians received gold and silver awards at a special Mass. On the parish website you could read a presentation by Danny Donohoe OSG about the fire and emergency works at the Cathedral.

Friday Coffee Mornings

On Friday mornings from September to June a dedicated group of parishioners ensure a warm welcome for all who care to chat for a while over a cup of tea and biscuits after the 10am Mass. The venue used to be the Family Centre – now it takes place in the Pastoral Centre at the College which you can get to via the main door at the front of the building. Part of our faith is to support one another so it's a nice touch to come together socially after time spent in prayer. You are most welcome to join us. Sincere thanks to the committee and especially Tony Murphy who ensure the cuppa is ready when we arrive.

Plenty of chat at the weekly Coffee Morning

June

The annual Corpus Christi procession gathered in the shadow of the Cathedral. Accompanied by the pipe band and led by Bishop Colm the Blessed Sacrament was carried under a new canopy through the streets. Many newspapers carried Tiernan Dolan's poignant photo of the procession with the roofless Cathedral in the background. Young people attended the Knock Summer festival of prayer, music and reflection. Fr Nigel led a pilgrimage to Lough Derg. Longford Library organised a beautiful exhibition on St Mel's Cathedral, exploring its early history and reflecting on the tragic fire. The exhibition continued over the summer in the library. Fr Paul Kangkai from Nigeria joined our parish for the summer. At the half way in our year the priests warmly thanked all those who had assisted in the many works necessary since the fire. Thank you also to those who contributed to the tax relief scheme.

July

On Friday the 11th the feast of the Sacred Heart Bishop Colm celebrated a special Mass marking the end of the The Year of the Priest.

At Mass we now have an adapted ciborium with a pyx to hold very low gluten hosts for those who have the coeliac condition. St Vincent de Paul appealed for volunteers to work in their Thrift shop, in St Martin's community centre and with St Mel's visitation conference. There is a lovely walkway to Mass in the college down the tree lined avenue and lights are being installed for extra safety in the late evenings. Photos of the damage to our Cathedral, more visible after the cleanup, were on the website taken by Fr. Padraig Kelliher and Tiernan Dolan Emergency work on the Cathedral continues with the completion of a temporary steel roof which can be seen rising above the town.

August

There's a holiday atmosphere about helped by the good weather. Students received their leaving cert results and college places. Free buses brought parish youth to Clonmacnois to experience the Catholic faith and meet friends. Others went to Medjugorje with Fr. Vincent Connaughton. On Cemetery Sunday families gathered in great numbers in Ballymacormack for the annual Mass and blessing of the graves. In town visitors flocked for the 'fáilte' festival and athletes from home and abroad participated in the 9th annual marathon organised by a very energetic team led by Fr McGovern and Liam Fenelon. On the 29th the people of the parish generously donated €12,780 to the Pakistan flood appeal.

September

Back to school and back to work! The children's mass was hosted again on the 26th with help from teachers and parents. Bishop Colm led the annual diocesan pilgrimage to Our Lady's shrine at Knock. Knock Marriage Bureau reminded us of its introduction service. Busy Fingers Band released a new single The Bells of Old St Mels written by Mel Crowe and James Gorham and featuring children from Stonepark and Drumlish schools. All the proceeds go the restoration reserve fund for the Cathedral. Prayers were offered for the safe rescue of 33 miners trapped underground in Chile. The flower club reminded us of the joy of flower arranging and the VEC commenced courses for parents in child development and homework. Longford Slashers GAA team are county champions. Well done to captain, team and all concerned!

October

The month of the Holy Rosary and there were public Rosaries on the Market Square, on the green in Springlawn and at Lana Aoibhinn. There was a ceilí in the Temperance Hall in aid of Meals on Wheels. We welcomed clerical student Tony Gilhooley from Drumshanbo who will be with us for a pastoral year. Early booking for the Accord preparation for marriage course called – Marriage a Journey not a Destination - was advised. There was an invitation to visit a Catholic Cell group in the parish. On Mission Sunday we were reminded to pray for and support our missionaries. The update on the Cathedral told us that it is hoped to announce the design team to plan the reconstruction very soon. And hearts were lifted by the happy ending to the plight of the 33 miners trapped underground in Chile when all were rescued after 69 days and we, like each of them, gave thanks to God.

November

Masses on 1st and 2nd returned to the Temperance Hall to accommodate the large congregations. There was guided prayer on Thursday evenings after the evening Mass in the college chapel during the month. Station Masses were held in the rural areas of our parish. There is much talk and many are worried about the financial crisis in our country. Special Christmas cards designed by Tiernan Dolan and students from St Mel's College featuring photos of the Cathedral in the winter snow of last year are in such demand that they have gone to a second printing. On Sunday the 28th we had a special bereavement ceremony. And the Bishop announced that the peal of the Cathedral bells would soon be heard ringing out again over the town, a symbol of continuity and hope as we look forward to the restoration of our Cathedral. Members of the Parish Review team are busy writing up and recording the events of the year in our parish.

December

Writing this as we go to print there are a lot of special activities planned in the lead up to Christmas. The Cathedral Folk Group with Fr Brendan are launching a new CD of music and reflection on the 2nd. We have an International Mass – 'Many Nations, One People' – on the 4th and a special youth Mass on the 11th. There will be a Christmas choral celebration with the County Choir on the 12th and a service of Reconciliation on the 18th. The Legion of Mary will sponsor an evening for young people with author John Pridmore. An all-night vigil of prayer for our nation at this time of grave financial crisis is planned for 7th. As we near the great feast of Christmas and the first anniversary of the great fire in our Cathedral it is planned to have a star shine from the spire and to welcome back the sound of the bells of St Mel's while the special committee will announce the design team to plan it restoration. Signs of hope at the end of 2010 an unforgettable year!