

FAITH OF OUR FATHERS II

Our Lady &
St. Patrick's, Oldham

150th

ANNIVERSARY
COMMEMORATIVE
EDITION



“To make the Church *the home and the school of communion*: that is the great challenge facing us in the millennium which is now beginning... But what does this mean in practice?... A spirituality of communion indicates above all the heart’s contemplation of the mystery of the Trinity dwelling in us, and whose light we must also be able to see shining on the face of the brothers and sisters around us... A spirituality of communion implies also the ability to see what is positive in others, to welcome it and prize it as a gift from God... A spirituality of communion means, finally, to know how to “make room” for our brothers and sisters, bearing “each other’s burdens...” (Gal 6:2)

**Pope St. John Paul II in
*Novo Millennio ineunte 2000***

SIX OF THE BEST

The Parish Objectives from our Mission Statement formed by the Parish Team are:

- 1) To make Christ’s Mission alive here and now.
- 2) To build good relationships with the wider community.
- 3) To be inclusive and to build a true ‘community of communities’.
- 4) To practise a fundamental option for the poor.
- 5) To be immersed in the joys and sorrows of God’s people.
- 6) To keep and maintain a ten-year plan for the continued maintenance of the church buildings committed to our charge.

Foreword

As society changes and develops, the Church must change the way it promotes Gospel values and develops its mission in the world. We live with accelerating change and our accustomed ways of living and practising our faith must adapt and mature, if our evangelisation is to thrive. In the industrial northwest, we have seen great changes in the last 200 years where we have moved from a tolerated minority Church to a speedily growing Church through migration, which came, mainly, at first from Ireland but increasingly from all over the world.

The Diocese of Salford quickly became cosmopolitan. Secularism, materialism and consumerism have all had their impact on Church membership and practise of faith, but the Diocese has been enriched by the contributions of so many cultures in demonstrating different customs, traditions and devotions. St Patrick’s 150 years has embraced the change and brought encouragement to several generations as its international community has grown in its diversity. I welcome the publication of this book as a record of so much that has been achieved – not without difficulties and challenges – throughout its history. While looking back with gratitude, the 150th anniversary is also a reason to look forward to see how best, in this constantly changing world, this parish community may fulfil its vocation of missionary discipleship.

Bishop John Arnold
Bishop of Salford



Bishop John Arnold

INTRODUCTION

In the year 2000, 'Faith of our Fathers' chronicled the first 142 years of the life of Our Lady of Mount Carmel and St. Patrick's Parish, Oldham. It was compiled and edited by Vincent Hall. 'Faith of our Fathers II', is intended to continue the story as we approach the 150th anniversary of the opening of the present church.

In May 2001, riots erupted on the streets of Oldham. Images of these riots appeared on television screens nationally and it was clear that Oldham and several other northern towns had a real problem of a lack of community cohesion. There had been a breakdown in relationships between people of the Muslim faith and others, many of whom referred to themselves as Christians, whether they attended church or not. For all the communities based in Oldham, but particularly for faith communities, there had to be a commitment to be part of the healing process for as long as it would take. This was the necessary backdrop that could neither be ignored or denied for the development of any Mission Statement for a church in 2001. The Pope's remarks about a "spirituality of communion" in his Apostolic Letter at the beginning of the Millennium (quoted at the beginning of this booklet) identified the challenge and provided a vision for a way forward.

To show how we have responded to this challenge and fulfilled something of this vision, we present this account, with a personal report by me, as the Parish Priest and a separate account, by John Green, of all the major building work carried out in that period plus individual accounts from members representing some of the varied communities of the Parish.

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Personal Account – Father Phil Sumner

Initial Steps

I arrived in St. Patrick's Parish on 11 September 2001. It was a Tuesday, about 11am, and the Parish Office Manager, Vincent Hall, was there to welcome me. Vincent's greeting, on behalf of the Parish, was generous and genuine and he provided sterling support to me throughout the subsequent years, until he became ill in 2018.

I had been 'high-profile' in terms of the community response to the riots in Moss Side since July 1981, so it was no surprise that the Press were interested in my arrival in Oldham to be part of the community response to the riots here, albeit 20 years later. On that first day in the Parish, I stood beside the church to be interviewed for North West television news; the interview, as far as I know, was never broadcast because shortly after 1pm, I received a phone call from Eileen Hall (Vincent's wife) telling me to turn the television on and to watch the horrendous, unfolding news coming in from New York. The unbelievable images of the collapse of the Twin Towers of the World Trade Centre after a terrorist attack rightly ensured that any other news that day was buried without trace.

My television interview, however, had not gone un-noticed by at least one parishioner, who wrote to the Oldham Chronicle in disgust: "Never has a Parish Priest arrived in such a blaze of publicity as that afforded to this self-proclaimed second Saviour and self-seeking publicist." Perhaps it hadn't helped that on the day of my arrival, the Oldham Chronicle had proclaimed on the front page, 'Fr. Phil arrives in town!' And then the headline to the article on page five of the same paper made me a hostage to fortune: 'Miracle worker' it suggested, 'answers help call'.

Another parishioner was to leap to my defence a day or two later in a letter published in the same newspaper, although perhaps he/she was too incensed on my behalf, suggesting that the "disgruntled" parishioner should remain one of the very "silent majority"! Chris Hilyer, the then Deputy Leader of Oldham Council, had also been reported in the Chronicle as saying, "I think Father Sumner's appointment can only do good for our healing process in Oldham and the Council looks forward to working with him... It is clear that Father Sumner will bring some special qualities to the task ahead of us, not least his communication skills and ability to foster links within communities and various agencies, including local authorities."

I can only hope that his generous remarks of that time have at least partially been realised. Indeed, at the risk

of the disgruntled parishioner being proved right about me being a "self-seeking publicist", some of this account, I hope, will show that Chris Hilyer's remarks were not completely without foundation.

I had been sent to Our Lady of Mount Carmel and St. Patrick's Parish partly because of the riots that had taken place in May 2001. There had been unrest in different parts of the town and there were reports of an attack on the church property. Indeed, I was warned, as I arrived, not to push on a switch to the right-hand side of what was to be my bed unless the building was under attack. This was an alarm system, installed by the police to afford a little peace of mind to the incumbent in view of the perceived threat. Eighteen years later, I can report that I never had to use it!

One of the briefs given to me by Bishop Terence Brain on my appointment was to be part of the community response to these tensions. From the beginning I attended meetings between faith leaders in the Borough. These 'leaders' had been brought together initially by David Ritchie, who was writing a report for Central Government on the causes of the riots. On Thursday 7 March 2002, there was another of these meetings at the Link Centre during which the Oldham Interfaith Forum was formed and I was elected as the first Chair. The story of the Oldham Interfaith Forum is told elsewhere but, for the moment, suffice it to say that I and several members of the Parish have been active in building good relations across the faith communities ever since. Indeed, from 2004, the Forum has been housed in what was the housekeeper's room, next to the kitchen on the ground floor of the Presbytery. The sixth formers from the college next door must have sometimes wondered what was going on as they witnessed various bearded Muslim men and hijab-wearing women entering or leaving the Presbytery for meetings.

From the beginning of my ministry in this Parish, I also had several other responsibilities: one was as a Judge in the Salford Diocesan Matrimonial Tribunal and another was as the Chaplain to the Chinese Catholic Community. The former involved judging two or three cases a month and writing a Judicial Sentence (approximately 10 pages of A4 explaining the reasons for the decision). The latter involved saying Mass once a month at Salford Cathedral, in Cantonese. No, I don't speak Cantonese, but I had learnt to say the Mass phonetically and knew enough to understand what I was saying. At times, it must have sounded dreadful to the genuine Cantonese speakers, but they were always very gracious. I had many a free Chinese banquet for my efforts!

WORKING WITH THE PARISH COMMUNITY

When I arrived in St. Patrick's the congregation was at least 90 per cent white British/Irish and I, at 49 years of age, still felt a youngster. A group of Catholic 'Mothers' was regularly meeting in the Presbytery, and many of these were helping in the church in different ways. They were ably led by Pat Williamson, whom I can still picture doggedly clearing up the leaves and weeds from outside the Presbytery in all weathers or carefully arranging flowers on the sanctuary. Even back then, there was a most interesting newsletter, written and run off each week by Peter Hilton, who also looked after the repository (once mistakenly referred to by a parishioner as the 'suppository') of religious items for sale. The ever-faithful and very capable Steve Owen played the organ at the 10am

"The St. Patrick's African Choir was formed, closely followed by the St. Patrick's Filipino Choir and then, sometime later, the St. Patrick's Indian Choir."

Mass and the Folk choir (then a group of five) often sang at the evening Mass. However, things were just beginning to change.

The local hospital was recruiting for nurses from India and the Philippines and many of those who responded to the adverts were Catholics. At the same time, people were arriving from several African countries, with a large proportion of them seeking asylum because of the political situations back home. Each of these groups was becoming more established in the worshipping community at St. Patrick's.

During Christmas 2001, I happened to suggest to Alexis Douniama, who'd arrived from Congo Brazzaville, that perhaps he could organise for a couple of songs to be sung at the Mass in his own language. Little did I know, then, how accomplished a musician he was. The St. Patrick's African Choir was formed, closely followed by the St. Patrick's Filipino Choir and then, sometime later, the St. Patrick's Indian Choir. On March 9, 2004, an almost full-page spread in the Oldham Evening Chronicle featured the African choir, with the headline, 'The Freedom to Sing!'



Left: The African Choir
Photo Credit:
The Oldham Chronicle

PASTORAL CHALLENGE

A few weeks after I arrived at St. Patrick's, I received a phone call from Sister Eileen O'Doherty IBVM to see if I would be interested in her coming to help pastorally in the Parish. She and Sister Consiglio Kerr had worked with Fr. Bob Morrow and me in St. Wilfrid's, Hulme, albeit several years earlier, and she was looking for a new pastoral challenge. She liked the idea of working to build better relations between people of different faiths. Sister Eileen moved in to 5 College Road (next door to Des and Helen McMahon on one side, and the Appleton sisters on the other) and was joined by Sister Trisha Charlton. Eileen's office in the Parish was on the ground floor, immediately to the left of the main door to the Presbytery. It's still referred to as Eileen's office today, even though, in 2013, she had to leave her ministry here to care for her sick brother back in Donegal.

After Eileen's arrival, a Parish team of approximately nine people was formed. Eileen and I served as ex officio members and the others were elected. Later, Vincent Hall (the office manager) was co-opted as an ex officio member and we also brought on representation from the Filipino and African communities. This team, which first met in October 2001, has made the decisions on most Parish matters ever since, albeit with a change of some of the personnel in line with the constitution.

After the departure of Sister Eileen, the responsibility for the sacramental programme in the Parish reverted to me. Initially, this was not very onerous, with only approximately 14 children on the programme.

However, with the growth of the Parish and the addition of the children from Holy Rosary, the number of children on the programme in 2018 was 47.

There were two or three other teams formed for St. Patrick's – one a finance committee, another a visioning committee (this group came up with the Annual International Music Festival amongst other things) and a third a building work committee (the work of this committee is reported on by John Green in his input to Faith of our Fathers II).

In December 2002, the whole Parish community was rocked by news of the murder of one of the Filipino nurses. Debbie Remorozo, a coronary care nurse, was stabbed to death in her own home; she was only 26 years old. Her killer was never found.

At the end of 2002, St. Patrick's Primary School was inspected by Ofsted and I was proud that, in the report, it was praised specifically for doing its bit to promote racial equality in Oldham. The inspectors wrote: "Staff promote racial equality. Pupils are encouraged to have respect for the beliefs of others and are well prepared to take their place in a multi-cultural society." This remark, besides being covered in an article in the Oldham Chronicle on 4 February 2003, was also commented upon favourably in an editorial in the same paper the following day. It's noticeable that the same commitment to cohesion has continued over the years, with the 2016 Ofsted inspection also commenting on the harmonious and diverse nature of the school.



Left: Saying it with flowers, Eileen's final day

PRAISING AND WORKING TOGETHER

In 2005, Fr. Peter Sheehan retired from St. Mary's, Oldham and the Parish was amalgamated with Our Lady of Mount Carmel and St. Patrick's. The new entity was to be called St. Mary's with St. Patrick's Parish, Oldham, and I was to be its Parish Priest. Mass was to be offered in St. Mary's on Mondays, Wednesdays and Sundays. St. Patrick's was to have Mass on the other days and, of course, on Sundays. A separate team was elected for the St. Mary's side of the Parish but, as time went on, this team stopped meeting. Soon after the formation of the new Parish, we set up a website (www.smwsp.org.uk). Steve Owen has managed this website from the beginning and has done a fantastic job of keeping it interesting, informative and up-to-date.

I used to hear confessions in St. Mary's just once a month, on a Saturday morning, but there were very few penitents seeking to be shriven. On one occasion, I had taken my iPad with me so that I could work on my sermon while I waited. As someone entered for confession, I tried, quickly, to turn the iPad off but, in my fervour, I pressed too forcefully on the 'off' button, so engaging Siri. The penitent began and Siri responded, "I'm sorry, I didn't understand that."

Two thousand and five was also the year that Pope John Paul II died. I was approached by several Muslim and Hindu faith leaders from the town who wanted to express their respect for him and their solidarity

with us at that time. Approximately 20 of these gathered in St. Patrick's to light candles and to pray in their own way for the Pope. St. Patrick's is on a dangerous corner (John Street and Union Street) and many cars have crashed into the boundary wall of the church over the years (a substantial crash barrier was only constructed there a couple of years ago). As these Muslims and Hindus left the church and stood chatting on that corner, they perhaps didn't realise the extra danger they were causing, simply because of the strangeness of the sight. Thankfully, no drivers were sufficiently distracted to cause another incident. And once again, the Editor of the Oldham Chronicle thought the tribute paid by members of other faiths on this occasion was worth a comment in his editorial on 11 April.



Left: Interfaith solidarity – Qari Abdul Shakoore, Chair of the Oldham Mosques' Council, at St Patrick's to mark the Pope's passing

WORKING FOR INCLUSION AND COHESION

The number of asylum seekers arriving in the Parish continued to increase. Their housing situation, especially if they had been refused asylum at the first hurdle, was often inappropriate or non-existent. Many of these were finally given permission to stay in the country on appeal. Basel, a medical doctor and a Christian from Palestine, had been housed in inappropriate circumstances and arrived in the church to look for Divine help. Sister Eileen spotted him and could see that he was distressed. She asked me if there was anything we could do. Basel moved into the Presbytery on a temporary basis and was to be the first of several. The then empty Presbytery at St. Mary's gave the opportunity to house even more asylum seekers. At one time there were perhaps seven living in St. Mary's Presbytery and two or three at St. Patrick's.

In February 2006, Oldham's Race Equality Partnership organised its first and only 'Diversity and Equality

Awards' for the Borough. By this time, the Parish had given a home to several asylum seekers, I was heavily involved in Interfaith work, and we were seen to have enabled people from many backgrounds successfully to integrate into the life of the Parish. And I, therefore, won the 'Individual' and 'Overall' Diversity and equality awards. This accolade was followed, in September of the same year, by the Independent Newspaper (then the National Newspaper of the Year) naming me among its 'Good list' (a list of 50 'campaigners, thinkers and givers from across the UK, transforming our world').

In that same year, I was asked to be the Mayor's Chaplain. The Mayor was Bernard Judge, a councillor from the Royton area. To be honest, the duties were not very onerous; I had to say prayers at several full-council meetings over the year and attend one or two other functions. However, this began a mini series of requests to be the Mayor's Chaplain. In 2008, Councillor Shoab

OLDHAM EVENING CHRONICLE, WEDNESDAY, MAY 25, 2011 13



UNITED . . . Oldham's leaders came together as Professor Ted Cante revealed his 2006 report

Left: Professor Ted Cante reports to the Oldham Partnership with Fr. Phil, Chair of the Community Cohesion Advisory Group in Oldham.
Press Cutting:
The Oldham Chronicle

Ahktar asked me to share the Mayor's chaplaincy with a Muslim cleric. And, in 2009, Councillor Jim McCardle became Mayor and asked me to be his Chaplain. In 2018, another Muslim Mayor asked me to say the prayers at a full-council meeting. Councillor Javid Iqbal wanted to acknowledge that Councillor Tony Larkin should have been Mayor that year instead of him. Sadly, Tony had succumbed to cancer and died. I had served with Tony on the governors of Our Lady's Royton Catholic High School for several years and his wife had wanted me to lead the prayers in his memory.

It was also in 2006 that I was elected as Chair of Oldham's Community Cohesion Advisory Group. Five years on from the riots, Professor Ted Cante (regarded as the 'founding father' of community cohesion, following the publication of the Cante Report into the UK race riots of 2001) was asked to report on the progress Oldham had made. He concluded that while there was still much to be done, Oldham had achieved more than most towns in similar situations. Indeed, while Oldham had seen the largest British National Party (BNP) vote in the 2001 General Election (16 per cent in Oldham West), that vote was to fall to 7.1 per cent in the 2010 General Election and to 4 per cent in the Bi-election in 2011.

The work of the Oldham Interfaith Forum was becoming more well known nationally and internationally. In December 2006, I was asked by

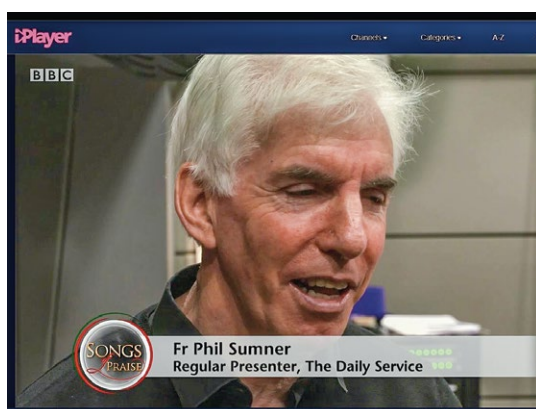
UNESCO (Catalonia) to speak at a conference in Barcelona on the work we had done. The following year, I was also asked to speak on a similar subject at the World Conference on the Development of Cities (organised by UNESCO and others) in Porto Alegre, Brazil. Both were great opportunities but, at the first, I was privileged to meet Marguerite Barankitse from Burundi, who was the main invited speaker. She was an amazing, strong and outspoken woman who had taken in and cared for so many children orphaned by the dreadful violence that had swept through her country in 1993.

At the end of 2017, I had a phone call from London inviting me to become a Trustee of the Catholic Association for Racial Justice (CARJ). This meant that I would have to travel to London for meetings. I soon suggested that CARJ should hold a conference on the theme of 'How we enable people from different backgrounds to belong in our churches.' I argued that we should invite the Bishops to send four delegates from their dioceses (with at least one of these delegates being involved strategically in his/her home diocese). My suggestions were accepted, and I was given the task of leading on and speaking at the Conference and of gaining the Bishops' support for it. That support was generously and wholeheartedly given, and the Conference took place in October 2019 in Birmingham.

"We were seen to have enabled people from many backgrounds successfully to integrate into the life of the Parish."

Spreading the word

In April 2004, I was approached by Simon Vivian from the BBC to join a team of presenters on the Daily Service on BBC Radio 4 (Longwave). In May of that year, I presented my first broadcast Daily Service and have been presenting approximately one service a month for the BBC ever since. On 6 January 2018, the Daily Service was celebrating 90 years of broadcasting and was featured on BBC television's Songs of Praise. I was privileged to be the presenter chosen for the feature.



Also, in 2004, I was asked to join a team of writers on 'the Christian Viewpoint', which was published in the weekend edition of the Oldham Chronicle. As with the presenters for the BBC, this team was interdenominational. We would share out themes for possible viewpoints, but there was an agreement only to use our initials rather than our full names at the end of our 300-word pieces. The subjects I wrote about included, Immigration, Holocaust Memorial Day, Performance-enhancing drugs, British values, Homelessness, and many more. My last Viewpoint was published in 2010. After that, the team was disbanded.

It was in 2004 that a book was published by Charles Nevin called, 'Lancashire, where women die of love.' I'd been interviewed by the author the previous year but had forgotten about it. Our organist, Steve Owen, happened to read the book shortly after its publication and contacted me to say that I was referred to in it. My curiosity meant that I had to buy the book myself.

There I read:

"Fr. Phil was a New Catholic priest, not like the Old Catholic priests I grew up with; the Old Catholic priests were men of culture and wit, supporters essentially, of the established order, who enjoyed their relaxation time, usually involving strong drink and lively conversation, with the Catholic middle classes. 'Could you put another shepherd in the pie?' was the way one of my childhood favourites used to broach a pastoral visit. New Catholic priests like Father Phil are men who see injustice and work for change and are at ease with the talk of accessing and identity and alienation and cohesion, and usually have rather more pressing things to do than exercise their culture and wit on the middle classes. Which is a great gain for everybody else, but a sadness for us."

On 9 September 2007, the BBC broadcast its Sunday Service for Racial Justice Sunday from St. Patrick's. Both our African and Filipino choirs were featured along with the Oldham Choir. Margaret Ann Fiskin, who was then the Chair of the Catholic Association for Racial Justice, preached and I presented the service.

Left: Songs of Praise – 90 Years of the Daily Service

Below: BBC Radio 4 'Sunday Worship' from St. Patrick's



"In May of that year, I presented my first broadcast Daily Service and have been presenting approximately one service a month for the BBC ever since."

Our African and Filipino choirs have also taken part in many Diocesan services to mark Racial Justice Sunday since then. This was, more often than not, at

Salford Cathedral and, as the Racial Justice Sunday service has morphed into the Diocesan International Mass, the tradition continues.



Left:
The Filipino and
African Choirs in
Salford Cathedral

The Moral Maze

Sometimes, the very diversity of our Parish and the way that people can be different, and yet belong, brings us to the notice of others. Twice, in recent times, I have been asked to be a witness on the BBC Radio 4 programme, the Moral Maze. Once was in 2011, when multiculturalism had been criticised by David Cameron, the then Prime Minister, and the second occasion was in February 2019. The topic, on this occasion, was the decolonisation of the curricula in universities; there had been a call for such an approach in an academic article published the previous week.

The format for the programme is a combative one: each witness is grilled by two panellists who hold what often seem like diametrically opposed opinions to the witness. Then, after the witnesses have left the studio, a general discussion is held by the panellists. In the 2019 programme, I thought I had made a cogent argument and returned home to listen to the rest of it on the iPlayer. It was then that I heard one of the panellists, Melanie Philips, who was a journalist from the Daily Mail, saying that one of my suggestions had been patronising, fatuous and insulting. My hackles immediately rose. I then realised that her criticism was for something I had not said anyway. I was so pleased, the following day, to receive an e-mail from

“So it was left to the historian Tim Stanley and Fr Phil Sumner to talk about liturgy, Catholic universalism, and truth.”

someone in London who had been inspired by how I had described the inclusivity of our Parish. The Anglican Newspaper, the Church Times, published a review of the programme, as follows:

“THE most insightful religious discussion of the week came in an entirely unexpected context. The Moral Maze... does do religion from time to time but, last week, it was supposed to be talking about the ‘decolonisation’ of the curriculum... But of the intended scrap there was nothing to see, not least because nobody really believes that the situation is as bad as all that... So it was left to the historian Tim Stanley and Fr Phil Sumner to talk about liturgy, Catholic universalism, and truth; and, later, for Canon Giles Fraser and Tom Holland to discuss the subversive nature of Christian history. Fast-forward over the first 20 minutes, and the programme actually becomes quite good.”

Parish events to build community, and to celebrate or provide support

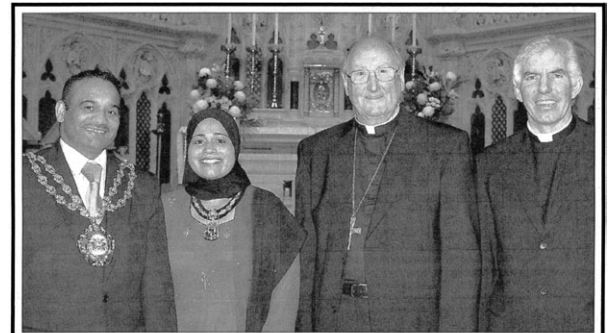
In the summer of 2008, we had a Parish barbeque in the garden beside the Presbytery. The pictures speak for themselves.



Right: Colin Riley
and Vincent Hall



Then in October 2008 the Parish celebrated its 150th anniversary with a Mass celebrated by Bishop Terence Brain, followed by a Parish Ball in the Queen Elizabeth Hall in the Civic Centre. Tuxedos and kilts were worn by some, while others made and wore traditional dress from their own countries. The Mayor and the Oldham Chronicle commented on the diversity of people in the church.



CELEBRATIONS ... the Mayor of Oldham Shoab Akhtar and mayoress Shafeena Kausar with Right Rev Bishop Terence Brain and Father Phil Sumner

Proud day in the history of St Pats

ST PATRICK'S Church, Oldham, celebrated its 150th anniversary at the weekend with VIP guests and a special mass. The congregation included the Bishop of Salford Terence Brain, the Mayor of Oldham, Shoab Akhtar and mayoress Shafeena Kausar. An African choir, a Phillipino choir and a church folk group helped celebrate the mass before refreshments at Oldham Sixth Form College. Father Phil Sumner said: "There are over 30 different nationalities worshipping at the church on Sundays. This shows the church has been able to diversify and welcome new communities into its congregation. The mayor also recognised the importance of diversity and highlighted the work of the Interfaith Forum."



Top left: Dr. Basel and Dr. Charles at the Parish Ball

Left: The Filipino dance group at the Parish Ball

Top: Press Cutting: The Oldham Chronicle

Above: The African Choir at the Parish Ball

On 2 November 2008, Stephen Patterson SJ, originally from St. Mary's side of the Parish, celebrated his first Mass in St. Mary's Church (the day after he was ordained in St. Francis Xavier Church in Liverpool by Archbishop Patrick Kelly). His Uncle, Ernie Fleming, can be seen behind the camera (on the extreme left-hand side of the picture) in this next photograph, waiting to assist as a Eucharistic minister. Another stalwart of St. Mary's, Tommy Lally, can be seen on the sanctuary steps on the other side. Sadly, both Ernie and Tommy have since died.



M.E.N. SATURDAY MARCH 24, 2012

NEWS 11

Final goodbye to hostage in rescue tragedy

Man 'who touched many lives' is laid to rest

He was murdered by kidnappers in Nigeria

JESSICA BECKETT

HUNDREDS of mourners said farewell to murdered hostage Chris McManus. Friends, family and political and religious leaders of all faiths stood together at an emotional funeral service at St. Patrick's Church in Oldham town centre. They included Chris's parents Laura and Mike, brother and sister Benet and Justice and girlfriend Katy Bailey. Justice told the congregation: "Chris saw the positives others could not. His sense of adven-

ture sent him to some magnificent places and friendships. "When I was younger Chris would always make me walk in front of him so he could keep his eye on me. "I will make sure everything I do in life will make him proud." Speaking alongside Benet, she added: "Chris, we are the people we are today because of you." Chris, from Royton, was killed on March 10 in Nigeria after a 10-month kidnap ordeal. He had been working in the country building a bank and was captured with Italian colleague Franco Lapolinara by armed raiders in May last year. British special forces and the Nigerian military tried to rescue the men but they were murdered by their captors. Father Phil Sumner, who led the service yesterday, said: "It's so



POREMANENT Chris's coffin leaves St Patrick's Church in Oldham after an emotional funeral service. Inset: Chris, his girlfriend Katy and parents Laura and Mike. Photographs: Ian Caveney/PA

"Chris would not have wanted any message of hate to come out of his funeral but rather one of love."

At the end of 2008, another of our parishioners, who has since died, hit the headlines. He would probably not thank me for mentioning him here (he was so unassuming), but he did feature in a television docudrama called 'Special Forces Heroes' on Channel Five. Austin Hussey had been in the SAS and, in July 1972, he found himself among a group of nine SAS in Oman against 250 Adoo guerrilla troops. The battle was recreated for Channel Five and Austin spoke to camera about his involvement. In his later years, Austin enjoyed a less exciting life and he and John Kitto formed the 'Tuesday club', who turned up almost every week to do the odd jobs that needed doing around the church.

March 2012 brought the shocking news that Chris McManus, a young man from Royton, had been killed in a failed rescue attempt in Nigeria. Chris had been taken hostage 10 months before and some time during his captivity, a Muslim cleric, who tried to intervene on Chris' behalf, was also killed for his efforts. When Chris' body was repatriated, his family came to St. Patrick's for the funeral. They were clear that Chris would not have wanted any message of hate to come out of his funeral but rather one of love.

While the annual Christmas Fayre has been a feature of Parish life long before my arrival, we developed a few other traditions – some of which have lasted, and some have not, such as the Christmas meals put on, for a while, for the older members of the Parish.

We have also held annual Masses in St. Patrick's School, in July, for the sick and housebound. The young people

"We owe a debt of gratitude to John Green for organising these events."

from the school have taken an active part in welcoming the sick and housebound on these occasions and have learnt much from them. We owe a debt of gratitude to John Green for organising these events. He also organises the Mass, each November, for those who have died over the previous twelve months.

The Walsingham Association predated my arrival in the Parish and continues to this day, meeting for Mass in St. Patrick's on the first Tuesday of every month. Margaret Chadwick ably presided over this group for many years but sadly died in 2013, so David Booth has taken over from her. The group organises pilgrimages to Walsingham each year and other 'one day' pilgrimages to more local shrines. For a few years they also organised a Walsingham Festival in the Parish in October. A charismatic prayer group has met in the Church almost every Friday evening for several years. We've also had many functions to mark different occasions at which the various communities (Filipino, Indian, Pakistani, African, Caribbean and indigenous) have provided food.

Above: Funeral for Chris McManus
Press Cutting:
The Oldham Chronicle

Below: A Christmas meal for the slightly older members of the Parish





“We’ve had many functions to mark different occasions at which the various communities (Filipino, Indian, Pakistani, African, Caribbean and indigenous) have provided food.”



The latest two developments have been the Summer Family Fun Days in July and the International Music Festival at the end of November – the latter began in 2014.

Left: Tug of war at the Family Fun Day

Below: Barbeque at the Family Fun Day



THE INTERNATIONAL MUSIC FESTIVAL



Above: Maria sings a solo at the 2018 Festival



Top right: The African Choir at the International Music Festival



Right: Junior Mixed Community Choir at the Festival



Above: Indian Choir



Above right: The Iranian Group



Left: Nostro Coro



Right: The Folk Group at the International Music Festival 2018

Reorganisation of the Parishes in the Deanery

In the summer of 2015, I was driving along the M60 motorway to pick up one of my godchildren to take him out for a meal. My hands-free phone rang, and I heard the words, "Hello Phil, this is John." I didn't recognise the voice and said, "John who?" It was the Bishop! He had phoned to ask me if I would agree to take on the role of Dean of the Oldham and Ashton Deanery. What could I say? Of course, I accepted. The priests, in consultation with the people of the Deanery, had the unenviable task, with the Bishop, of re-ordering the parishes of the area during this time. This would necessarily involve the closure of some churches and the amalgamation of several parishes, a painful procedure for perhaps all concerned, although especially for all those who would lose their churches.

Since then, we've seen the closure of St. Mary's, Oldham, Holy Rosary, Fitton Hill, Sacred Heart, Derker and of St. Michael's, Abbey Hills. However, a decision has since been made to re-open St. Michael's and to close St. Anne's Greenacres; it was discovered that very costly building works would have to be carried out on St. Anne's and that this might place too much

of a financial burden on the Catholic people of that area. Parishioners from the churches that closed have, of course, chosen different churches to attend but a small number from each have become valued members of this Parish. After St Edward's Lees stopped its Sunday evening Masses, we were happy to pick up a few parishioners from there as well.

It was in 2018 that both Holy Rosary Church and St. Mary's Church closed. On Easter Sunday, the last Mass was said in Holy Rosary Church and, on the Feast of Corpus Christi (3 June 2018), the last Mass was said in St. Mary's.

The Bishop was the principal celebrant at the Mass in St. Mary's and had been the principal celebrant at a Lenten Station Mass in Holy Rosary Church only a few weeks before the final Mass there. The former territory of Holy Rosary Parish was eventually joined to the already amalgamated Parishes of St. Mary's, Oldham, and Our Lady of Mount Carmel and St. Patrick's to form the new Parish of Our Lady and St. Patrick's, Oldham.



Left: Last Mass in St. Mary's, Oldham

Below: The final exit – last Mass in St. Mary's, Oldham

"This would necessarily involve the closure of some churches and the amalgamation of several parishes."



Celebrating 40 years of priesthood

I was blessed to be able to celebrate 40 years of priesthood in June 2016. We held the celebration in St. Patrick's Church followed by a shared meal in the Parish Centre. Brendan Marley (a reader and Eucharistic Minister from the Parish Evening Mass and a Catholic headteacher) spoke at the end of the Mass on behalf of the parishioners and Mufti Helal Mahmood spoke on behalf of the Oldham Interfaith Forum. This was something in itself, to see a Mufti speaking in a Catholic church to more than 400 people, and the congregation gave him a standing ovation.



Left: Mufti Helal gives a vote of thanks to Fr. Phil in St. Patrick's

The Filipino Community

It was in June 2016 that the Filipino community had the stained glass window representing two of their saints installed and blessed in the church. The Press coverage of my 40th anniversary and of the installation of the stained glass window appeared in the Oldham Chronicle on the same day and on the same page.

The Filipino community in Oldham were given the privilege of leading the Oldham Carnival parade in 2014 and it was one of our own parishioners who was featured on the front page of the Oldham Chronicle. He led the colourful parade through Alexandra Park as crowds flocked to the event in glorious sunshine. Some of the other members of the community appeared in a photograph inside the same newspaper.



Above: The Filipino Window. Photo Credit: The Oldham Chronicle

Top left: Carnival of Colour. Photo Credit: The Oldham Chronicle

Left: Oldham's Filipino Community in glorious display at Oldham Carnival, 2014



Left: The Filipino Choir singing for the Maggie's Culture Walk
Below: The young Filipino Choir singing for the Maggie's Culture Walk

“The Filipino Choir were asked to put on a bit of a show for those involved in the walk and what a show they provided.”



In July 2018, we heard that one of our young parishioners from the Filipino community, Cathy Gayle Fernando, had been appointed head girl at Newman College (the Catholic Secondary school for most of Oldham). Congratulations!

In September of that same year, St. Patrick's Church was invited to host a stage in the Maggie's Culture Walk. Maggie's is a charity that supports people suffering from cancer and also helps those who care for them. The Filipino Choir were asked to put on a bit of a show for those involved in the walk and what a show they provided. The response the following day from the event organiser on behalf of Maggie's was:

“Wow, just wow! I'm actually a little lost for words – you absolutely blew us all away on Friday with your stunning church and your magnificent and moving performances.

“I really can't thank you enough for your generosity of giving up your evenings to support our event, providing such a delicious spread, and for just being so incredibly welcoming.

“I have to tell you that our visit to St Patricks was by far a crowd favourite. It also went down very well on Facebook. We took a live video whilst you were performing, and it's been seen by 2,500 people and has received a lot of love. I think everyone can't believe that you're right on their doorsteps and yet they have never stepped inside and seen the beauty of the church or heard the glorious sounds of your choir.”

In December 2018, the Filipino choirs from St. Patrick's were also asked to sing at the Oldham Interfaith Forum's Festival of Light and I was asked to present the Christian story. The Mayor of Oldham, Councillor Javid Iqbal, said that it had been a truly inspirational event and one student from Bluecoat School tweeted that it had been magical. The Oldham Chronicle (Online) published an article about the event and used the following two pictures.



Left: The Junior Filipino Choir
Below: Community cohesion in practice at the Festival of Light 2018



The celebration of 150 years

It was also in 2018 that the Parish team decided we should mark the 150th anniversary of St. Patrick's Church with the addition of another stained glass window. To recognise the coming together of the three Parishes, it was agreed that the window should celebrate something of our different and shared histories. Discussions took place with Design Lights, the company who had created and installed the Filipino stained glass window. They eventually came up with a design that people seemed to be happy with. I was asked by the Historic Churches Committee to write an explanation for the design, which I include here:

One of the principal reasons for the proposed new stained glass window for St. Patrick's, Oldham is presented by the closure of two churches and the coming together of three worshipping communities into one. The window therefore takes elements that were important to people from among the artworks of the previous churches and includes them as part of the story celebrated within. The aspiration is to make the stories of our past part of our now shared story.

Therefore, at the top of the left panel of the window there is an image of an icon of the crucifixion by the Hungarian artist Mayer Marton. This icon stood proud behind the main altar of Holy Rosary Church, which is now closed. At the top of the right panel of the window there is an image of the Pieta, which was a major feature in St. Mary's Church, which is now closed. There are also images of the three churches – St. Mary's and Holy Rosary, named above them, and the remaining church (St. Patrick's) named below.

The rest of the window takes elements from our shared history in the town of Oldham. Cotton played a major part, as did coal mining. These industries are portrayed in the left-hand panel at the bottom. However, many people came from Ireland to nurse in the Oldham hospital and this provides a link with the present when many of our Indian and Filipino Catholic community came to Oldham for the same reason. Nursing is portrayed just below the image of Holy Rosary Church in the right-hand panel of the window.

Catholic schools have also been very important in our shared history and the Mercy nuns served in the school from 1971 to 1991. An image of the foundress of the Mercy nuns, Venerable Mother M. McAuley, appears in the right-hand panel (on the bottom left side – just below Holy Rosary Church).

Two other elements from the window similarly tell something of our shared history. One of those is of the two World Wars. The war-memorial, from outside St. Patrick's Church (a Celtic cross), is portrayed at the bottom of the right-hand panel. The second is to be found between the images of the churches of Holy Rosary and St. Mary's, portraying the Whit walks, a proud memory for so many Oldham Catholics.

Finally, in the middle of the left-hand panel of the window is an image of the modern community of the now new Parish of Our Lady and St. Patrick's. This depicts people from many different backgrounds, representing the more than 50 different nationalities that worship in the church on Sundays.

Below:
The design provided for our decision



Work in schools and colleges

INTERFAITH WORK

Over the years, Mufti Helal Mahmood and I have developed four different Interfaith workshops that we deliver to more than 30 schools and colleges across Oldham. The aim of these workshops is to demonstrate the many similarities that we find between Islam and Christianity and to acknowledge and show respect for the differences. It's also about modelling our own relationship. On one occasion, we were delivering a workshop during an Ofsted inspection in Greenacres Primary School. In his report on the school, the inspector referred specifically to our workshop. "During the inspection, an outstanding example was observed when a Muslim imam and a Catholic priest from the local community came together to talk about their respective faiths with the Year 6 pupils. The occasion was handled with great good humour and insight, modelling

community cohesion for the pupils" (Alan Brine, HMI for Ofsted). We do similar workshops for Oldham College students and provide a panel of religious leaders from four different faiths for 'Any Questions on Faith' events in the Sixth Form College, in high schools and in the local communities.

On several occasions, I have been invited to speak about Christianity in Mosques and Madrasas across Oldham, and in November 2017, Mufti Helal and I were invited by Jim McMahon, the MP for Oldham West, to address the British and American Project (BAP: a transatlantic fellowship of more than 1,200 leaders and opinion formers from a broad spectrum of occupations, backgrounds and political views) when the latter visited Oldham. We spoke about Interfaith work for building cohesion and received a standing ovation after our presentation.



Far left: Interfaith assembly at Coppice Primary School

Left: 'Any Questions on Faith' at Oldham Sixth Form College

Below left: Jim McMahon, MP, introduces Mufti Helal and Fr. Phil to the BAP

Below right: Fr. Phil speaking in a Madrasa about Christianity



RECOGNITION OF SUCCESS (ST. PATRICK'S PRIMARY SCHOOL)

It was also in February of 2019 that the then Head of St. Patrick's School, Mrs. Helen Halliwell, received a letter of congratulations from the Secretary of State for Education and the Minister of State for Standards. According to the results published in December of the previous year, the school had achieved 'Progress Scores' of 4.7 in English, 5.6 in reading and 4.9 in

Mathematics, putting the school into the top 3 per cent of schools in England in terms of the progress that the pupils made from the beginning of Key stage 1 to the end of Key stage 2. The headteacher, the staff and the pupils all deserve our thanks. Sadly, this news coincided with the Head's decision to retire, in September of 2019.

To practise a fundamental option for the poor

Parishioners have always been generous in response to CAFOD appeals or in donating to Cornerstone or the Oldham Foodbank, but it was in January 2014 that I was able to send a cheque for £4,130.67 to CAFOD in response to one appeal. This was an amazing amount reflecting a truly fundamental option for the poor.

It was as I arrived back from my holidays at the beginning of September 2019 that I noticed a tent had been erected amongst the trees, on the grass beside the church car park. On further investigation, a failed asylum seeker and his friend had decided to prevail on our hospitality. Within a few days, there were two more tents with their own occupants and

a couple of dogs. I mentioned, at the end of Mass, that I had no intention of asking the occupants to move on and I sought the patience of parishioners in this regard. There seemed to be a general agreement for this response, although some were a little concerned about the dogs. However, the decision was soon taken out of our hands when I received an e-mail from an officer of the Local Authority stating that if the tents, and their occupants, were there for more than 28 days, the Parish would have to seek planning permission and a licence for a campsite. That licence would not be granted unless there was running water and onsite toilets. There was a limit to our 'Option for the poor'.

Just saying... Father Phil Sumner

The story, for both our primary schools (St. Patrick's and Holy Rosary) and for the whole Parish, continues, but it is a story in which I have been truly blessed to play a part. I believe that the Parish is vibrant and that we are privileged to have such diversity. At the count in 2018, we had slightly more than 50 nationalities represented at the weekly Mass and they all seem to work and worship well together, while being proud of their own identities.

There's a hymn called 'Immortal Love, Forever Full' in which there's the line, 'we touch Him in life's throng and press, and we are whole again'.

It's in the warp and weft of the ongoing story that we see God's promise of wholeness coming to fulfilment. It's in how we relate to the different, changing stories weaving through the constant threads (or the warp) of proclaiming the Gospel and carrying out the rituals associated with it, that we touch God, feel carried, forgiven, and find wholeness.

Thank you for the wholeness I have found here.
Fr. Phil Sumner, 2019



Left: The countries represented in St. Mary's with St. Patrick's Parish in May 2018

"I believe that the Parish is vibrant and that we are privileged to have such diversity."

A tapestry of happy memories from Parishioners

Eileen O'Doherty IBVM – The way it was

I came to St. Patrick's Parish a few weeks after Fr. Phil. Oldham was new to me, although I had contact with Oldham girls coming to Loreto Grammar school in Moss Side, Manchester. As a Loreto Sister I was on the staff there for a time and also worked in St. Wilfrid's Hulme, where I shared a little in Fr. Phil's ministry in that area. Inspired by his vision of the Church and aware of the social unrest in Oldham following the riots of May 2001, I asked to join Fr. Phil for pastoral ministry, first staying in the Presbytery and then in College Road, where I was joined by Sr. Trisha Charlton for a few years. She taught in a predominantly Muslim school in the Coppice, while my ministry base was at St. Patrick's. We were immersed in the two dominant cultures in the town and shared the conviction that women's ministry in church makes an enriching difference. From the outset Fr. Phil expressed his conviction that it was beneficial to have a woman actively engaged in all aspects of Parish life and I was soon multi-tasking and stretching the boundaries a little.

Our neighbours on College Road, the McMahons and the Appletons, who were long-standing, devout parishioners, welcomed us warmly and kept a kindly watchful eye out for us. I first visited the Parish for Sunday Mass in the large beautiful church, holding a less-than-full congregation of very welcoming people who were ageing a little but creating a quiet, reverent, prayerful atmosphere. The first to welcome me was the Office Manager, Vincent Hall, who enveloped me in his embrace. I soon valued his fun-loving disposition, his wisdom, his insight into Oldham life at all levels, and we became good friends. He modelled a lay person's dedication to his church, working tirelessly so that it might flourish in the changing circumstances of those years. He had a listening ear and was very approachable, handling suggestions, complaints and disaffection sensitively and with positive outcomes. We worked so well together with Fr. Phil and the team, who made such valuable contributions to many facets of Parish life.

The welcoming parishioners of those early days remained a firm support in whatever Parish ministry evolved for me. They welcomed the children preparing for First Communion and families not familiar with

church practice, putting them at ease and encouraging them to feel they belonged. It was also a privilege to liaise with the school for Sacramental preparation. Sadly, however, the numbers dropped in line with the cultural changes in the area and this was highlighted when I did the Ash Wednesday 'ashes service' for all the children and had to adapt it to suit the different faiths represented in the school community, mainly Christian, Muslim and none. The service reflected the respect for the genuine beliefs of others, which was so much part of the ethos of the school.

Baptisms increased as Fr. Phil's reputation to 'Baptise anyone who moved' spread well beyond the Parish boundaries and created a buzz at Sunday Mass. Usually, I coped with 'African time' and other anomalies to create a happy celebratory atmosphere for the families and the congregation. Adults, in smaller numbers, came, asking to belong in our faith community and made our Easter Liturgy more meaningful, with all choirs involved to enhance the solemnity of the celebration. Easter songs of praise, in many languages, joyfully expressed a vibrant faith community.

Amalgamation with St. Mary's happened as numbers there declined and early into this union, we joyfully welcomed Stephen Patterson for his first Mass, following his ordination to the priesthood as a Jesuit. Working with his artistic mother, Ann, and our excellent Folk Group, to prepare a Liturgy worthy of the occasion was special, and celebrating in a packed church of parishioners, family, friends and Jesuit colleagues was a joy.

Serving two churches gave me a new slot in the Parish schedule. On weekdays, when Fr. Phil celebrated Mass in St. Mary's, I led a Liturgy of the Word with Communion in St. Patrick's. Stations of the Cross in Lent and Advent services offered alternative

"The service reflected the respect for the genuine beliefs of others, which was so much part of the ethos of the school."

experiences, and it was an amazing privilege to lead the Good Friday Liturgy in St. Patrick's (while Fr. Phil celebrated it in St. Mary's), and feel that the parishioners were so accepting of a woman taking on that role. Having no musical ability, I enormously appreciated the willing participation of our accomplished Folk Group (Katrina, Debbie and Janet), whose rendering of the Good Friday Reproaches created a solemn, prayerful Liturgy. Faith was palpable as lay men (David or Alexis) carried the Cross forward for veneration. Somehow it spoke of ways forward as clerical numbers declined and demonstrated the talent in the congregation, willing to serve. The Folk Group were a happy necessity for me, gifting us with reverent music to uplift hearts in prayer. From the many groups centred in St. Patrick's – the team, the office staff (Vincent, Colin, Peter and Marie), musicians, care of church environment groups, mothers, Walsingham Association, sacristans, hospitality groups, and the school staff – came help, goodwill and the sense of the complementarity of gifts for our common mission.

Stories of previous large congregations drawing on Irish immigrants were told with pride and we were soon blessed by a new influx of immigrants: delightful young nurses mainly from India and the Philippines seeking to belong in a faith community. They brought a strong sense of family, with children central in all aspects of life, including worship. The sounds in church subtly changed as children felt at ease to claim a voice, sometimes challenging Fr. Phil's vocals. A new vitality pulsated through the congregation, and young people of faith, well-formed in their native churches, enriched and transformed us with the freshness of youth. They had come to a new land and a culture often at odds with their home values. The back of church was the place to be on a Sunday morning, interacting with newcomers, listening, valuing their way of life, encouraging involvement and supporting them in challenging circumstances.

Refreshments after Mass was an integrating time, hearing personal stories and inviting involvement. My allotted room was inside the front door of the Presbytery and the ministry of welcome continued there because I was often the first person to meet those presenting themselves. I was also a sitting-duck for every 'chancer' who came, and welcoming was not always the appropriate response. Hospitality was, however, a genuine characteristic of St. Patrick's.

Oldham town, at this time, had agreed to take refugees, resulting in an influx to the Parish of young men and women mainly from war-torn African countries who were escaping the threat of persecution and hoping for a better life. The front door got busier

as the church became widely known as a welcoming place: listening to personal stories, helping with phone calls to agencies when language was a problem, directing to centres of support for refugees and much more. Francis Gondwe from Rwanda is a vivid memory, arriving at the front door with his two sons, each wearing a Rosary round their neck, and with a heart-rending story of his missing wife, Rose, and younger children, separated as they fled from the camps in Malawi. The headteacher, Brendan McKeown, welcomed the boys to his school as Francis continued to search for his missing family. Driving him to the Red Cross centre at Liverpool proved a blessing. He was treated with great dignity and sensitivity and was assured of help, which, after a short time, had positive results and the family were eventually reunited.

The struggle to be accepted went on for years of hardship and deep disappointment, during which faith stayed strong and Scripture mirrored the painful journey, inspiring hope. Other nationalities came in smaller numbers, opening our eyes and ears to situations of unbearable struggle. Among them was Basel Houshieh, from Bethlehem, who was always passionate about the Palestinian cause and keenly feeling his separation from family and life in Romania, where he studied to be a doctor. It took years for him to get refugee status. He wasn't allowed to work and had to appear before courts in Bradford, Liverpool and London to appeal for permission to stay. Accompanying him to these 'sittings', I learnt how the determination of the Immigration Service appeared to be simply to find a loophole in his story that could justify a refusal. He was one of the first to avail of the open-house policy at St. Patrick's and is a friend forever.

Involvement with asylum seekers was shared with many voluntary groups in the town, with other churches, faith groups and agencies. A new openness created a sense of being in a church in the world, with responsibilities far beyond Parish boundaries, and interdenominational links strengthened the witness of the Gospel message and mission. Annually, on the Sunday of Church Unity week, I did a homily at St. Thomas's, the local Church of England, and the vicar from there crossed the bridge to speak at Mass in St. Patrick's. Close by, a well-organised voluntary group, based at the Baptist church, became a real lifeline for many: a place where practical and free professional help was generously given to any asylum seeker. Working together created friendly, co-operative relationships.

Along the corridor from my room, a new initiative was housed – an Interfaith Forum was established

“Rich in diversity and in challenging new realities, my time at St. Patrick’s was made life-giving.”

and given an office in the Presbytery. Fazal Rahim, a committed Muslim of Pakistani roots, was appointed full-time worker and was earnest to embrace the challenge of building bridges between the faith/ethnic groups in the town and beyond. He was later joined by Mufti Helal, of Bangladeshi background, and, for a time, by Rahima as secretary. In daily interaction with them, I learned about life as a Muslim and the protocols related to women, in particular. Living in close proximity, our differences were accepted, each respecting the faith/culture of the other. It highlighted the value of mixing at the ordinary level where we are more aware of our common humanity and our different paths in a common search for meaning in life’s journey.

For a time, a specific effort was made to involve young Muslim women. A group of talented and committed young women, who were well-formed in their religion, met at the Presbytery. The aim was to get to know each other and to explore how our faith was lived out. I learned how prescriptive Islam is and that by embracing its rules for every minute detail of living, these young women felt freedom, wellbeing and

security. Visits to mosques and churches, to homes and centres etc. was part of the agenda. The group continued for a time, always losing young participants to early, arranged marriages and to family demands. It was a worthwhile enterprise that sadly ended.

Rich in diversity and in challenging new realities, my time at St. Patrick’s was made life-giving. At a lovely Mass to say farewell to me, Fr. Phil spoke warmly of some aspects of my time there and, unexpectedly, he asked if I would like to make a response. Caught off guard, what came to me to say was that if I had done some good it was because he, as a good leader, had given me the scope to use my strengths, trusting my ability to respond to challenges, and that I had been accompanied by many good supportive friends.

To all at St. Patrick’s, my thanks for the best of times with you. I get to visit annually, and it is a joy to meet friends again and to see how the Parish is flourishing, enhanced by the influx from the amalgamation of neighbouring parishes. May it continue to serve the diverse community that makes it so unique.

Eileen O’Doherty IBVM, April 2019

The Filipino Choir

The cold winter weather of the UK may not be a familiar domain for people from tropical countries such as the Philippines but, over the course of 2001, an influx of Filipino nurses, along with a few other skilled workers, joined a minority of British-Filipino families already in residence in Oldham.

For most Filipinos, church is a second home and finding one was not difficult for the new arrivals. Standing prominently in a central location in Oldham is St. Patrick’s, a church already attended by a few Filipino expats. And, by word-of-mouth recommendations, it has since become the Parish for the majority of Filipinos in Oldham and neighbouring boroughs.

In September 2001, the group first sang as a community following a church invitation for the fond farewell of the then Parish Priest, Fr. Waterworth, and then, shortly afterwards, to give a warm welcome to the new priest, Fr. Phil Sumner. Following that, the group performed occasionally at events and after other invitations. It was a few years later, however, that Fr. Phil encouraged each ethnic community in

the Parish to organise a choir and hence, the St. Patrick’s Filipino Choir was born.

Members of the group hail from regions across the archipelagic Philippines but regional differences have been put aside, aiming to sing as one voice. Many members have come and gone but, ultimately, the choir improved cumulatively over time, the product of the perseverance of like-minded individuals.

The bulk of the hymns sung by the group are in Tagalog, the national language. Tagalog liturgical hymns are similar to western melodies in harmony and structure but are sung with much more glee and expression to help people appreciate the Liturgical service all the more. Although English translations are provided in the Mass sheets, some Tagalog words are so profound that it’s not possible to provide a direct translation. The more exact meaning of the song may be distorted but the group can only hope that the melodies still inspire the parishioners to lift their hearts in praise to God our Father.

Cora Fernando, 2019

The African Choir

After my arrival in Oldham in September 2001 as an asylum seeker, I was accommodated in Werneth. I asked the staff from the National Asylum Support Service (NASS), who were responsible for providing us with accommodation, if there was a Catholic church in the area. They told me that there was, but the one they knew was near the centre of Oldham. I suspect these NASS staff members had some contact with Sister Eileen because, several days later, she came to visit us in our home. After her visit, she drove us to see where the church was and shortly after this I met Fr. Phil who, a couple of months earlier in that same year (2001), had also just arrived in the Parish.

It was during my meeting with Fr. Phil that I spoke to him about my spiritual journey and the reasons for requesting asylum. I also told him how I had directed a choir in my country of origin (Congo Brazzaville). Fr. Phil asked me if it would be possible for some of us to sing something in one of our own languages at the First Mass of Christmas that year. I accepted his request and mobilised several Africans who were around at that time (Eli, Roger, Sylvestre) and we sang at our first Mass in this country. This had a great impact because it was the first time that there had been an African choir, with drums, in the church.

Everything began from that. While directing a choir in my own country I had never played the drums, either in a church or anywhere else. It was only here that I learnt to play the drums and it was by the grace of God and much experimentation that I began to play them reasonably well. By the beginning of 2002, other Africans began to join the choir (Neige, Edwige, Monique, Sylvie, Eric, Valery, Djo Ganda, Emmanuella, Innocent, Arnaud, Dinis, Jousuph, Brice, Robert and Capata). This group comprised people

“It was really from 2003 to 2004 that the African community here began to grow.”

from four different African countries (Congo Brazzaville, Democratic Republic of Congo, Cameroon and Angola). There was also Win, a member of the Parish from this country, who joined the African choir just after it was formed.

It was really from 2003 to 2004 that the African community here began to grow. We began to receive requests to sing from different organisations including Oldham Library, the Oldham Interfaith Forum at the Festival of Light, several schools and some other churches. We also became associated with the annual Mass for Racial Justice at Salford Cathedral where we joined in leading the music.

During 2005 and thereafter, the choir, or the African community, continued to grow even more despite some members leaving England and some leaving to join evangelical churches. Now, we have an assortment of members from many African countries including Congo Brazzaville, Democratic Republic of Congo, Angola, Cameroon, Zambia, Uganda, Zimbabwe, South Africa, Burundi, Botswana, Rwanda, Nigeria, Guinea Bisau, St Thomas e Principe, Ivory Coast, Kenya, Ghana, Sierra Leone, Nigeria, Tanzania, Malawi, and Liberia.

The aim of the African choir and the wider African community in this Parish is to hold on to and value our African identity while living here in Great Britain, always respecting our Christian faith within the Catholic Church.

Alexis Douniama, 2019

“The aim of the African choir and the wider African community in this Parish is to hold on to and value our African identity while living here in Great Britain.”

Thoughts from the Holy Rosary side of the Parish

As a parishioner from the Holy Rosary side of the Parish, I have been asked to write a personal piece on my experiences over the last 18 months concerning the amalgamation of Holy Rosary into the new Parish of Our Lady and St Patrick.

What I can say is that, after some deliberation as to where I would like to continue worshipping, the choice I made has been enriching. The welcome given by Fr. Sumner was heartfelt and I soon settled into the way that Mass is celebrated, particularly the way in which each of the different (African, Indian, Filipino and English) communities are encouraged to participate through singing.

The church is vibrant on a Sunday morning and there is also the choice of attending Mass at six in the evening, where the hymns are led by Fr. Sumner.

After a short period of time, I was invited to join the Parish team and it is a privilege to be a representative from one of the two smaller former Parishes. One area of discussion has been the commissioning of a new stained glass window that will depict the history of the three churches that have come together into a new Parish. I am looking forward to the completion of this work, for, as a child, I worshipped at St Marys.

Terence Cavanagh, 2019

Coming home to St. Patrick's

I returned to Oldham in 1998 after living in Spain for several years. It has always been my practice to attend Mass daily, when possible, and it wasn't long before I settled on St. Patrick's service as the most convenient time and place for me. For Sunday Mass, my partner and I went to Corpus Christi Basilica, Miles Platting, together with an old friend and fellow former Anglican, Ken Livesey (onetime Vicar of Royton).

Fr. Dermot Heakin was the Parish Priest at St. Patrick's when I first arrived and he allowed me to read the Scriptures at some of the daily Masses (subject to the approval of a rather grumpy, or so I thought, old sacristan – the lovely, quiet and generous Alf Egan). Fr. Heakin was renowned for the speed at which he could offer the Mass, but it didn't suit me much, so I continued to worship in Miles Platting on Sunday.

It was not long before Fr. Heakin moved on and Fr. Waterworth arrived.

The first Sunday Mass I attended during Fr. Waterworth's incumbency was on Pentecost Sunday but, unfortunately, I was still not tempted to cease my usual Sunday attendance in Miles Platting, where my 'Anglo-Catholic' needs were met.

Shortly after this, I was told by one of the clergy at Corpus Christi Basilica that a new chap had been appointed at St. Patrick's and that I would not like him. I was told he was a bit of 'a radical, liberal lefty' who had a 'reputation' in Moss Side where he had worked previously. 'Oh dear' I thought. So, with fear and trepidation, I turned up for my first Sunday Mass at St. Patrick's.

It was quite a surprise when Fr. Phil turned out to be quite normal. The Liturgy of the Mass was simple, but well executed, the music was unexceptional but the hymns were at least relevant to the Scripture readings, and, best of all, this renegade priest could preach. I think it would be fair to say that it was the best sermon I had heard in a Parish church since I became a Catholic more than 20 years earlier.

The congregation at St Patrick's was quite elderly and predominantly white, unlike today. They were a friendly lot, however, and I was made very welcome. I knew some of them from the daily Masses so I had my feet halfway under the table.

The church itself was a little dowdy, in need of decoration, and the sanctuary had at sometime been re-ordered for post Vatican 2 Liturgy 'on a budget'. I thought this was a shame, so I wrote to the Parish team expressing my opinions. The existence of a Parish team was a novelty for me because I had not known of one anywhere I had worshipped before. I didn't get a reply to my letter but, over the years, all but one of my ideas has been implemented.

It was not long before I met Sr. Eileen, who was working as a pastoral assistant in the Parish, and she became a special friend at church. She was very kind to me but much more so to my partner, whose health was quickly deteriorating. My dearest memory of Sr. Eileen is when she was guiding Robert to Holy Communion – keeping him on the straight and narrow. When Robert died a couple of weeks later,

I cannot overstress the support and genuine sympathy I received from the good people of St. Patrick's.

It was a few weeks after this that John Crosby, a long-time servant of St Patrick's, died, and the then office manager, Vincent Hall, invited me to take on John's work as Gift Aid Organiser. This I did, and as the Parish team elections were going on at that time, I was also elected to the team.

By now the Filipino and African groups had pretty well established themselves and the Indian Community was not far behind.

The Sunday Liturgy had also begun to change. First, the African and Filipino communities developed choirs, followed later by the Indian community and a re-established indigenous choir, which for some strange reason decided to call themselves by an Italian name – Nostro Coro. These choirs now lead the singing of the ordinary parts of the Mass on specific Sundays of the month.

Initially, the singing in different languages and styles did cause some grumblings, but now it is a joy to see little old English ladies – and men – joining in singing, 'Bwana utuhurumie' in Swahili, or 'Kordero Ng dios' in Tagalog. The multisyllabic words of Malayalam are rather more challenging.

At one of my early Parish team meetings, I suggested that we draw up a ten-year plan for redevelopment, which we did. This, of course, prioritised our work and led to some of the great decoration and redevelopment that has gone on in the Parish since. However, it all began with me being challenged to raise £4,000 from the Lottery because I had said that I had had some experiences, in my Anglican days, of raising money this way. I don't know where the figure came from, but I think we thought that it would be enough to get the church bell ringing again. It was of course nowhere near enough. Anyhow, I did get the ball rolling but, because of other personal pressures at that time, I was unable to continue so it fell to John Green to take over the job of getting grants for the work to be done. He did an exceptionally good job of it, raising, altogether, much more than £100,000.

The work that has been done in the Parish over the last 10 years or so is a credit to everyone in the Parish. It has been a magnificent joint effort, led by Fr. Phil and the Parish team, but supported by all those who, by their prayers and support, have come forward with ideas and given their money by way of donations or legacies. The response to the 'little white box' appeal for the decoration and restoration work has been amazing. Each community has played its part, working together yet retaining its own individuality.

“It very much represents the Christian community in Oldham, with each member retaining their own Catholic identity.”

The Christmas and Summer Fayres have changed beyond recognition since I arrived in the Parish. They are no longer simply fundraising events. The Summer Fayre, in particular, has changed the most; indeed, it is now called the Summer Fun Day. It has become an event where parishioners of all ages can meet, eat and have fun together. The Christmas Fayre retains the fundraising aspect, but here, too, the different communities have worked to make it an entertainment for all.

In recent times, since I became the Parish office manager, the amalgamation of the former Parishes of St Mary and Holy Rosary with St Patricks has taken place. It has been a sad, traumatic, time for some of those from the parishes that have closed but it has been good to see how these people have been welcomed into our already very mixed community. Indeed, Terence Cavanagh, formally of Holy Rosary, has joined the Parish team and will no doubt be an active member working for the good of the Parish community.

Others too, from other churches that have regrettably closed during the recent realignment of parishes, have joined us and have been, of course, most welcome. All in all, St Patrick's is indeed a thriving Parish, with an average Sunday Mass attendance of approximately 400 people, with representatives from more than 50 different countries around the world. The Parish has changed very much from when I first joined some 20 years ago, but only for the better. Now, it very much represents the Christian community in Oldham, with each member retaining their own Catholic identity.

We now look forward to our 2020 Jubilee, celebrating 150 years since the first Holy Mass was celebrated in our church.

Sempre avante.

Colin Riley – Office Manager, 2019

THE BUILDINGS REPORT

Listed

On 8 March 1993, St Patrick's Church became a Historic England Grade II listed building.

Whilst being a listed building carries with it an element of pride and prestige, it also imposes strict responsibilities on those who have to maintain the building in its original style, and to do all possible to prevent deterioration of the fabric of the structure.

Before any work is carried out on a listed church, a Faculty has to be obtained from the Historic Churches Committee, which can require changes to the work or even reject the proposal; quite often, before reaching a decision, representatives of the Committee will visit the church.

All of the major works described later in this book were subject to the approval of the Committee. Details of the major works are given in the following pages; the numerous minor works are not specifically mentioned.

“Before any work is carried out on a listed church, a Faculty has to be obtained from the Historic Churches Committee.”



11 September 2001

The eleventh of September 2001 saw the appointment of the Rev Philip T Sumner or, as he prefers to be called Fr. Phil, as the Parish Priest of St Patrick's. His arrival heralded the start of 20 years of major projects for the improvement of the church and to make it a more environmentally and aesthetically pleasant building in which to worship.



August 2002 – Central Heating

The existing central heating system was originally designed to be heated by a coal-fired boiler pumping hot water through large pipes to the radiators. Although the boiler had been changed to a gas fired one it was incapable of pumping sufficient water through the large pipes.

Two alternative forms of heating were considered – a hot air system and the more conventional hot water radiator type.

For a listed building the age of St Patrick's Church, consideration has to be given to protecting the fabric of the building to avoid such things as condensation and extreme changes in temperature. Having considered the two options, it was decided that the most suitable was a conventional hot water radiator system.

Following consultations with various experts, it was agreed that the minimum temperature in the building should be limited to 9°C and that this should be controlled automatically.

We had discussions with the church heating specialists, Christopher Dunphy Ecclesiastical Ltd, who were able to offer an automatic programmable control system that sets the minimum temperature to 9°C and a temperature for services of 18°C. The system is constantly monitoring the ambient temperature and detects when to increase the temperature to meet the church temperature for Mass.

Following the tendering process, a contract was placed with Christopher Dunphy Ecclesiastical Ltd for the new system, which now provides a much more pleasant environment.

2003 to 2005

THE ALTAR

Resulting from the Second Vatican Council Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy (December 1963), the priest saying Mass whilst facing the High Altar and with his back to the congregation was changed so that he now has his back to the High Altar and faces the congregation. This change meant that a new altar had to be provided towards the front of the Sanctuary; initially this was little more than an old wooden table that was not compatible with our vision for the future. The decision was made to commission

an architect, Joseph Burke of Greenhalgh Williams, to advise on a suitable design for a replacement altar in keeping with the design of the High Altar; he was also to include for the design of a new lectern. Both items were manufactured from Italian marble and pictures of the new altar and lectern are shown below.

Having received the approval of the designs by the Historic Churches Committee, it was then decided to extend the scope of work to include the relocation of the Baptistry and the construction of a Servery.

Below left:
The new lectern

Below:
The new altar



THE BAPTISTRY

Traditionally, the baptismal font was close to the entrance to the church but with an increasing number of baptisms taking place during Mass, it was more logical to move the font into the main body of the church. After considering various options, it was decided to move it from the Narthex and to site it close to Our Lady's Altar.

In addition to moving the font, the two stained glass windows that were behind the font in the Narthex were moved to the side wall behind the relocated font.



THE SERVERY

Moving the baptismal font left space in the Narthex in which the present Servery was built. This provides the facility to serve light refreshments after Mass and other functions. Importantly, it promotes a social atmosphere and encourages parishioners to mix.



2008 – The Polish Window

The relationship between St Patrick’s Church and the Polish Community is very strong and goes back to the end of the Second World War, so when we were approached about installing a stained glass window we were pleased to give it our support. The design of the window, like everything that we do, had to be approved by the Historic Churches Committee, which was pleased to give its approval. The Committee was particularly impressed with the theme of the window, which summarises Pope John Paul II’s progress from Cracow to Rome.

The window was manufactured in Poland and brought over and installed by Polish engineers. The following photographs show the installation in progress and the finished window.

“The Committee was particularly impressed with the theme of the window, which summarises Pope John Paul II’s progress from Cracow to Rome.”



2011 – The Church Bell: English Heritage 1

The church bell had not rung for at least 30 years owing to the state of the bell cote, which had been declared structurally unsafe. This meant that ringing the bell could result in both the bell and bell cote falling to the ground with potentially fatal consequences.

In addition to the bell problem, a quinquennial (recurring every five years) inspection had stated that the rainwater goods, which were made of plastic, should be repaired. Bearing in mind that the church is a listed building, all gutters and drainpipes must be manufactured from cast iron in keeping with the original structure.

To help finance the cost of the work together with any other unexpected defects, an application was submitted to English Heritage for funding from the English Heritage Lottery Fund. The application was successful, but it came with the stipulation that the work must be supervised by a conservation accredited architect. Three suitable firms were interviewed, following which the Bernard Taylor Partnership was



Left:
The bell cast in
Dublin in 1858

appointed and subsequently approved by English Heritage. Obtaining funding from English Heritage ‘opened the door’ for us to apply for grants from other charities, which were quite successful. These grants, plus generous donations from the parishioners, allowed us to complete the work and remain financially solvent.

Whilst the bell cote was being repaired, the bell was sent to a bell founder for modifying to electrical operation. With this method, instead of the bell moving, the clapper swings and strikes the bell. The frequency of tolling is adjustable to suit the occasion such as funerals where the tolling is slower, or weddings where it is faster. The Angelus is also pre-set into the control system.

Other work carried out under this contract included the repair of the kneelers (architectural structures at the base of the roof) and parapet sets, and the ridge tiles on the church were inspected and re-set.

On 29 November 2012, a concert was held in the church at which the bell was rung for the first time in more than 30 years.



Left:
The bell cote

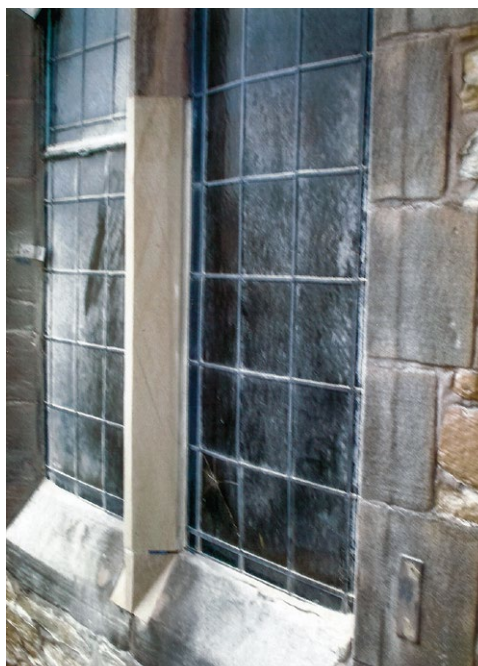
2013 – Windows and Link Bridge: English Heritage 2

For this phase of the works we obtained a grant from the English Heritage Lottery Fund, plus grants from other charities and generous donations from the Parishioners.

Several of the window surrounds, which are manufactured from sandstone, had quite severe erosion and the worst sections were cut out and replaced with new. The vertical bars were removed at the request of the Historic Churches Committee; the windows were protected by polycarbonate sheets

which were, under this contract, replaced with stainless steel mesh. Under the contract, all of the ground floor windows were fitted with stainless steel guards.

“Several of the window surrounds, which are manufactured from sandstone, had quite severe erosion.”



Left and above:
Repaired windows
and new sections of
stone ready for fitting

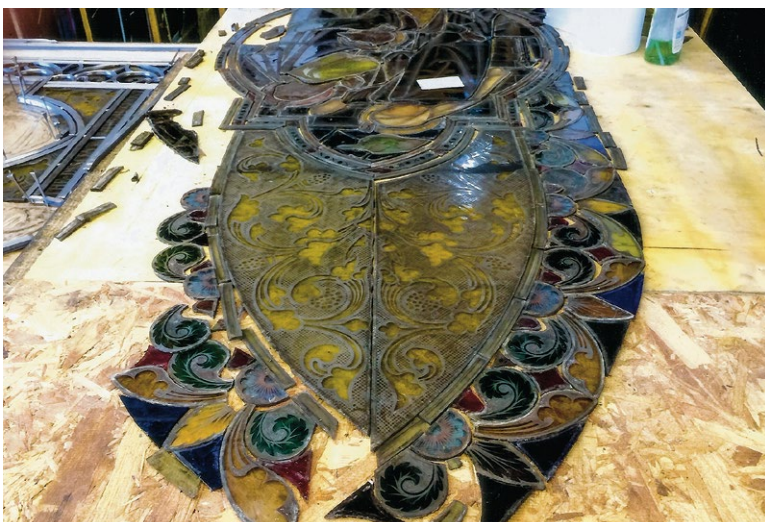
STAINED GLASS WINDOWS

The stained glass windows at the rear of the Sanctuary were, in places, distorted and sections had to be removed and sent for repair to a specialist company. The windows to the left of the High Altar, when viewed from the lectern side, were in the worst condition and had to be completely removed for restoration; the windows behind the altar had missing sections, which were replaced in-situ. The windows to the right of the altar were in the best condition and it was only necessary to remove and repair the top panels. Whilst the window was away for repair, the window surround was protected by boarding and plastic sheeting.



Left: Finished panel ready for fitting
Far left: Dressing the window frame
Insert below: Supporting the upper section
Below: A panel being repaired

“The stained glass windows at the rear of the Sanctuary were, in places, distorted and sections had to be removed and sent for repair to a specialist company.”



Temporary protection

The link bridge connects the Church to the Presbytery and was built in the early 1940s. It is supported on steel beams, which had, over the years, corroded quite badly and sections had to be replaced; the glass and brick structure on top of the beams was also repaired. A section of the roof over the bridge had to be re-slatted. This was done using Pembrokeshire slate in keeping with the rest of the Church roof.



2015 – The Filipino Window

It is intended to install more stained glass windows in the church. These will represent the cultures of the various communities that worship in St. Patrick's. The Filipino window, which continues this theme, is next to the Polish window; the basic window design was suggested by the Filipinos and realised, manufactured and installed by British specialists in stained glass windows.

The left panel is a figure of San Pedro Calonsor, el Visayo, Sacristan and Missionary Catechist. Along with the Spanish Jesuit Missionary, Diego Luis de San Vitores, he suffered religious persecution and martyrdom in Guam in 1672. He was canonised by Pope Benedict XVI in St Peter's Basilica in 2012.

The second panel is a figure of San Lorenzo Ruiz de Manila who professed his faith by martyrdom. In 1637 he suffered severe torture in Japan where feudalism was pursuing Christian persecution, and along with 14 companions he was murdered. He was beatified by Pope John Paul II in Manila and later canonised in 1987.



2016–2017 – Decoration of the Church

In the 30 years since the church was last decorated, the interior paintwork had, inevitably, deteriorated and was flaking off in places. This, together with damage caused to the interior by some of the other work that had been carried out, made the decoration of the church a priority.

Various options were considered but finally it was decided to aim to restore the Sanctuary to its former glory. When we raised this with the Historic Churches Committee, they said that we must employ an architect to design and oversee the work. Having worked with them on other projects, we appointed the Bernard Taylor Partnership as the architect for the scheme.

We knew that originally there was stencilling on the walls of the Sanctuary and we employed a specialist church decorator carefully to scrape away the more recent coats of paint, which then revealed some of the original decoration.

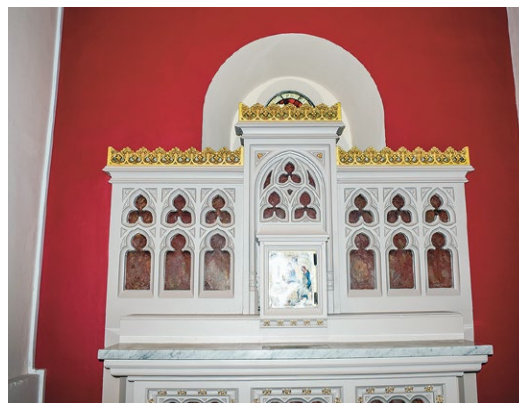
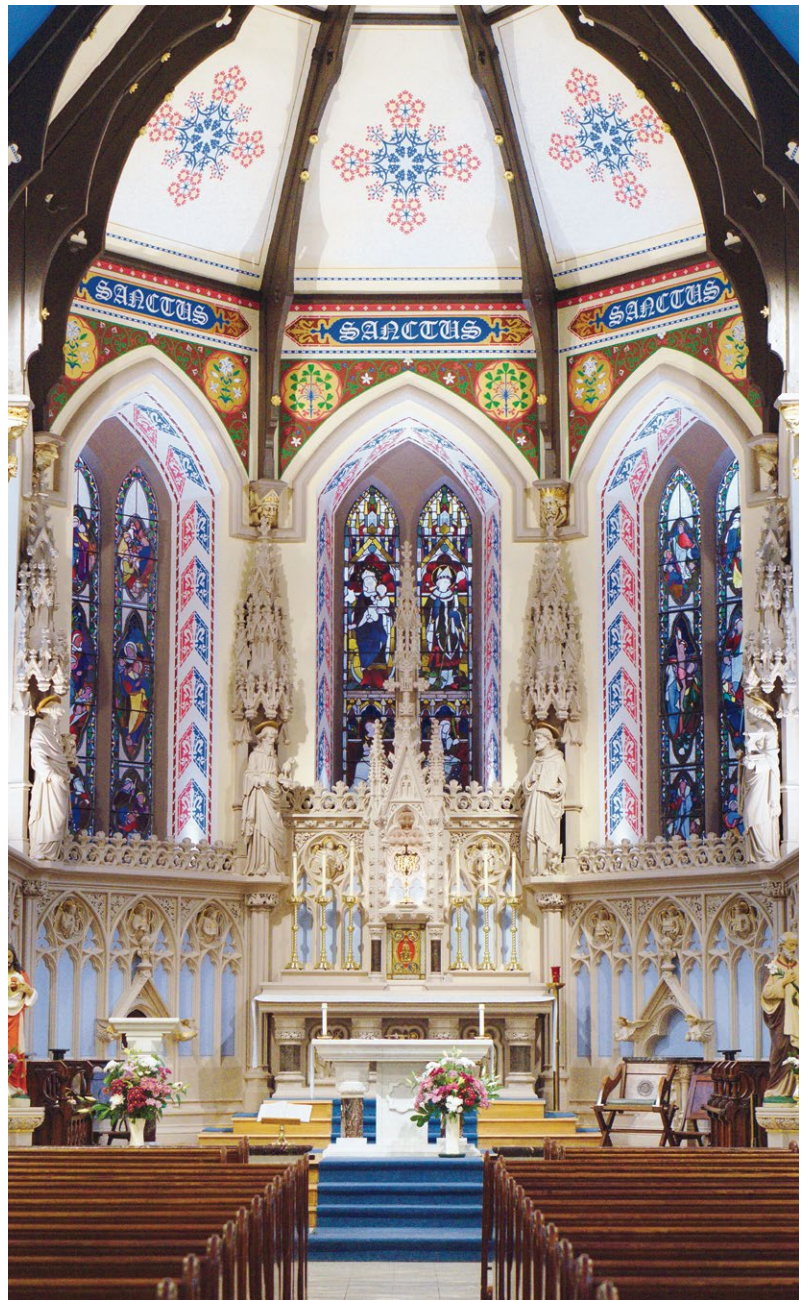
Exposing some of the stencilling was of assistance to the architect in developing the new design, an example of which is shown below. The decoration took seven weeks to complete, during which the



Left: Example of the extensive scaffolding required for the decoration

church was more like a construction site than a religious building; weekday masses were said in the Presbytery, but the church was cleaned every Friday afternoon to allow the weekend masses to take place.

In 2018, the decorator, Bernard Watson Ltd, was awarded the Prestigious Highly Decorative Award for his work on the church.



Above: The finished Sanctuary
Top left: The Sanctuary ceiling after decorating
Left middle: The stencilling to the surround of the right-hand Sanctuary window
Far left: The Lady Altar
Left: The Altar of Repose

2016 – 2017 – New Lighting

We were fortunate in obtaining grants in excess of £60,000 towards the cost of the decorating, which, with the continued generosity of the parishioners and a generous bequest from a deceased member of the Parish, made it possible to renew the lighting at the same time.



The existing lighting was provided by bulk head fittings, as can be seen on the photograph above and the wiring to the lights was carried in trunking running above the lights. The installation was inefficient, unsightly and inappropriate for a newly decorated church. It was clear to all concerned that the lighting needed to be replaced and for obvious reasons this should be done at the same time as the decorating. We identified a Gloucester-based company of lighting specialists with extensive experience of church lighting. Following consultations with the company, with the architect and the Historic Churches Committee, it was decided to install pendant LED lights, as can be seen on the right photograph. The level of illumination is controlled to suit the situation, for example, lower when the church is open during the day for private meditation and brighter when Mass is taking place.

6 AUGUST 2017

To celebrate the completion of the decorating and the installation of the new lighting, a special Mass was held at which the Celebrant was the Bishop of Salford, the Right Reverend John Arnold.



MINOR WORKS 2011–2018

- Safety hand rails at the main entrance to the Church.
- Lining the central heating boiler flue.
- Sanding and treating both the Sanctuary and Sacristy floors.
- Additional window guards in critical areas.
- Comprehensive CCTV installation.

WHAT'S NEXT?

We are currently designing a stained glass window depicting some of the history of the Church. It is hoped to have this installed for mid-June 2020.

The Last Word

This booklet is a testament to the way the Spirit is present when people work and pray together. Our Mission Statement has been clear and people, from their different perspectives, have bought into it. We have successfully reached out to the different communities of Oldham to establish understanding and to form genuine friendships. We have built a true community of communities, which celebrate their own identities but also work together to form a communion. We have practised a fundamental option for the poor, albeit within limits! We have supported each other through some traumatic times and celebrated many wonderful occasions together. Finally, we have maintained the church building in our charge and made it a place of warmth, welcome and worship. All of these, together, make Christ's Mission alive, here and now. Thank you!

