

Changes at St Michaels Catholic Church, Tetbury.

We the parishioners of St Michael's Catholic community in Tetbury have seen many changes in the past three years. We were very saddened along with the whole of the Diocese of Clifton, his family and friends of the sudden death of our beloved Parish priest Mgr William Mitchell (RIP) on 29th August 2008. Mgr William will always be loved and greatly missed by everyone and will always be in our thoughts and prayers. In June of this year he would be celebrating his Golden jubilee, we give thanks for his ministry to our Diocese.

With the organisation of the Parish Pastoral Council and advice from Fr David Ryan, a rota was formulated for visiting priests so we could continue to celebrate Mass every Saturday and Sunday as normal. Everyone was very pleased that Bishop Declan also came to Tetbury and celebrated Mass during this time. We will always be grateful to these priests that we were able to continue to celebrate Mass in St Michaels.

The Parish and the Parish Council pulled together at this time, we took on the day to day running of the Parish; ensuring the church was prepared for services, welcoming visiting priests, dealing with the offertory collection, paying the bills, ordering church sundries and clearing out the now empty presbytery to name but a few tasks. All this only highlighted the multiplicity of tasks that had been done very quietly in the background by Mgr William.

A questionnaire was circulated to all parishioners, aimed at encouraging the congregation to take on new responsibilities, in order to enable the parish to continue as a viable and lively community. There was a very positive response with people offering to take on new roles, looking after the church, preparing bidding prayers and services, writing and distributing newsletters etc. Those who were unable to offer practical help supported the parish through prayer and encouragement. Sharing the work helped to bring everyone together, enhancing the feeling of solidarity and faith within our Parish. As a result, the majority of the congregation continued to support St Michaels, and we appreciated our range of visiting priests as we developed through their spirituality and understanding.

Ten months after Mgr William's death, we were very pleased when Fr Patrick Eastman was persuaded to come out of his well-earned retirement to serve as our Priest in Charge. Fr Patrick has had an interesting pastoral life, originally as an Anglican Minister and for the past 25 years as a Catholic Priest, including a number of years in the U.S. We as a Parish benefitted hugely from his knowledge, wisdom and insight. At this time the Parish Council appointed me as Parish Administrator with help from Carol for a short time who was our Parish Council Chairperson at the time; working in the Parish office in the presbytery, continuing to run all practical matters, allowing Fr Patrick to concentrate on our spiritual well being. The Parish took Fr Patrick to their hearts and after a year of turmoil and adjustment we are very happy to feel that as a community the Parish had faced up to and managed a difficult period of change.

However, two years after the appointment of Fr Patrick we have just embarked on another challenge; due to ill health, Fr Patrick has had to resign from his position as Priest in Charge of St Michael's Parish. We wish to thank Fr Patrick for all of his hard work whilst here in Tetbury and we wish him and Maureen, good health, happiness and God's Blessing for the future.

Bishop Declan appointed Fr Michael Davies, Parish Priest of St Peter's Church, Cirencester to be Parish Priest of St Michaels, Tetbury as well. On Friday 10th June 2011, Fr Michael was inducted as Parish Priest of St Michaels by our Dean, Fr David Ryan who reminded us that this was his third induction at St Michaels in ten years. First, Mgr Mitchell in 2001; then Fr Patrick as Priest in Charge in June 2009 and now Fr Michael as Parish Priest. Fr Michael's induction was a remarkable event in the history of the Catholic Church in Tetbury, in fact we believe in the whole country.

Canon law has only recently been altered within the Catholic Church allowing a priest to be Parish Priest in charge of two parishes at once. It is the first time in recent history that we have not had the care and spiritual direction of a resident Parish Priest. However, we could not have found a more thoughtful and kind man and a more generous sister Parish in St Peter's Cirencester.

As Parish administrator I said a few words giving a vote of thanks to those present including the religious from other denominations on behalf of the Parish Pastoral Council. I surprised Fr Michael by recalling that his passion has always been music, which I can testify to as a former pupil at Cardinal Newman School, Bath where he was our music teacher. We all look forward to his continuing encouragement in St Michael's music tradition. Fr Michael is now on holiday and we wished him a safe journey. While he is away he will be celebrating the Ruby Jubilee of his ordination; so he was thanked for his ministry to the Diocese of Clifton. We wish to thank Fr Michael for agreeing to be our Parish Priest as well as St Peter's, Cirencester; ensuring him of our support and prayers.

Three years after Mgr William's death we have encountered much change but we are still a Parish community and intend to stay that way. As a Diocese we are all experiencing changes as we look forward to a future with fewer priests. We have accepted the challenge brought to our Parish during these difficult times with a positive outlook and we hope you will too, change is inevitable and we must go forward for the unity of our Church.

We have to support Bishop Declan and the priests as changes take place, we know things are lot different now than forty years ago when we had plenty of priests. Please join with us to confirm our support and prayers to Bishop Declan, the priests, religious, permanent deacons and seminarians at this time.

In conclusion, from a personal point of view, I enjoy my work as St Michael's Parish administrator; it is an interesting and fulfilling challenge. I feel honoured to hold the position and I thank Bishop Declan, Fr David Ryan, Fr Patrick Eastman, Fr Michael Davies and the parish for their support and encouragement.

Elaine Wright on Behalf of the Pastoral Parish Council
Parish Administrator
St Michaels Catholic Church
Tetbury