



THE ARCHDIOCESE *of* BIRMINGHAM

PARISH VISITATION

DEANERY OF BANBURY & WARWICK

Parish of Immaculate Conception, Bicester [57]

Parish of Holy Trinity, Hethe [117]

Visitor: Canon Paul Fitzpatrick

Parish Priest Canon John Batthula

Date of Visitation: 16 & 17 March 2024

Summary of Visitation Activities:

16 March 2024

Conversation with Canon John Bathula.

Conversation with Mr Daniel O'Connor, Head of St Mary's School and Sean Taylor, Chair of Governors.

Meeting with Deacon Michael Panejiko

Meeting with Deacon Nick St. John.

Meeting with Parish Secretary, Lucia Hattam.

Meeting and Lunch at the Convent, with Sr Rose & Sr Sami.

Parish Meeting with the parishioners of Holy Trinity, Hethe.

4.00pm Celebrate Mass of Confirmation, Holy Trinity, Hethe.

6.00pm Celebrate Mass of Confirmation, Immaculate Conception, Bicester.

Meeting with Canon John Batthula

Sunday 17 March

Celebrate Mass: 9.00am Immaculate Conception, Bicester.

Meet parishioners afterwards.

Celebrate Mass 11.00am Immaculate Conception, Bicester.

Parish Meeting and Shared Lunch, Immaculate Conception, Bicester.

A brief profile of the Parish.

The Parish Priest is Canon John Batthula who is very dynamic and experienced. He has been at Bicester for eleven years. He is also a very fine Dean of the Banbury & Warwick Deanery.

Holy Trinity, Hethe traces its history since its foundation in 1832. It is one of the oldest foundations in the Archdiocese. The parishioners are very proud of its history, and of the Church and its Parish Hall. The Mass attendance is small (40) and its income does not cover

the expenditure required. This is a rural Church which draws its congregation from a large geographical area, including beyond the boundaries of the parish and diocese.

In 2023, the Parish of Immaculate Conception, Bicester celebrated the 80th Anniversary of the founding of the Parish and the 60th Anniversary of the opening of the Church. There is an active Parish Pastoral Council. Under Canon John's leadership, the establishment of a Deanery Pastoral Council is the most advanced in the Archdiocese and has met on one occasion.

As a result of the M40 corridor, Bicester & the surrounding area is growing continuously, with large areas of new housing and development. There is also further allocation for more building in the near future. The population of the parish is double the size of its foundation, with a population that is often transient, which has its own challenges. In common, with many of our parishes, the parish is much more diverse in its background and culture than it was only ten years ago.

The John Paul II Centre is a wonderful resource for the Parish and the Deanery. It also is the focus of much of the parish activities. It is also very demanding in the time and resources (human and financial) that it requires to manage it. Canon John spends a considerable amount of his time managing the centre. It is unlikely that his successor would do the same.

The Parish Meeting

The aim of the parish meeting was to discuss the implementation of the Diocesan Vision: *'Our vision is to be a Catholic Diocese which is faithful to the mission entrusted to us by Jesus Christ, full of missionary disciples who work together co-responsibly in vibrant communities of faith, joyful in their service of God and neighbour'*.

Both parishes are familiar with the Diocesan Vision. The foundation of a Parish Pastoral Council at Bicester has aided the implementation of the Diocesan Vision.

Holy Trinity, Hethe: Parishioners are concerned about the long-term future of the Church. The fact that 20+ people attended the parish meeting does indicate their loyalty and concern for the parish. Canon Paul acknowledged this and discussed the importance of rural ministry across the Archdiocese. He explained that in the coming five years 50+ priests will retire, with only 5 to replace them. There will be similar demands in other areas, such as governance.

He explained that there were no plans to close the Church. Canon John has committed himself to celebrate Mass weekly, and to care for this parish in its entirety. He will require the support of all the parishioners of Hethe to accomplish this. This cannot be assured indefinitely, but at this time it would be better to seek to amalgamate the two parishes to avoid duplication of functions and to lift a burden from Canon John. This was accepted unanimously by the parishioners.

Immaculate Conception, Bicester.

Over 100 people attended a very enjoyable bring and share lunch, with individual and group conversations. Canon Paul enjoyed meeting the parishioners and discussing the Parish and the School, as well as its progress to Multi-Academy status, and the future of the Deanery.

He was particularly pleased to meet with members of the Parish Pastoral Council, Safeguarding Representatives as well as members from the Filipino, East Timor, and Irish communities (on St Patrick's Day) as well as parishioners from near and far away.

Parish Masses and Liturgy

Both Churches are very well care for and well organised.

At Immaculate Conception there is a large number of Altar Servers. The Sacristy is well marshalled by Sr Rose. The two parish Deacons exercise their ministry frequently and take an active role in the life of the parish, as far as their full-time jobs allow.

There are two very fine choirs, which have an extensive catalogue of music and a breath of musical styles.

Affirmation of Parish Life

Canon John is a very dynamic pastor who works very hard to care for his parishioners and the institutions within the parish. The amalgamation of Holy Trinity and Immaculate Conception would be wise moving forward and would ease a burden.

The people of both parishes are involved in the life of the parish and are a good example of co-responsibility in action. This is particularly the case with the Parish Pastoral Council. The diocesan vision is advanced in this parish and in the deanery, thanks to Canon John's leadership.

Canon John is ably supported pastorally and with administration by the sisters who are warmly welcomed in the parish, not least by the sick and housebound. They support the functioning of the St John Paul II centre, but a longer-term solution is also required to support its administration.

Finally,

I should like to express my thanks to Canon John and Sr Rose and Sr Sami.

Canon Paul Fitzpatrick

9 April 2024