

St Mary's Chelsea

Rejoicing in the Past ~ Planning for the Future

BLESSED BY
CARDINAL
VINCENT NICHOLS
ARCHBISHOP
OF WESTMINSTER.
22 SEPTEMBER 2017
FOLLOWING RENOVATIONS
INITIATED BY
CANON
STUART WILSON
AND COMPLETED BY
MONSIGNOR
MARTIN HAYES.
RECTORS OF ST MARY'S
GENEROUSLY FUNDED
BY PARISHIONERS
THROUGH GROWING
IN FAITH

Five years ago Cardinal Vincent Nichols launched Growing in Faith, a special fundraising campaign which helped us build on our strong history and saw parishes working together to address our shared needs. Growing in Faith supported the Diocese through prayer, volunteering and financial support.

Our priorities have a cost to them and there is no doubt that we needed to generate additional funding to support our mission. This is the consequence of having a desire to grow and to ensure the future development of our parishes our clergy and our

ministry to the poor, the vulnerable and the marginalised.

Here at St Mary's we participated in Growing in Faith



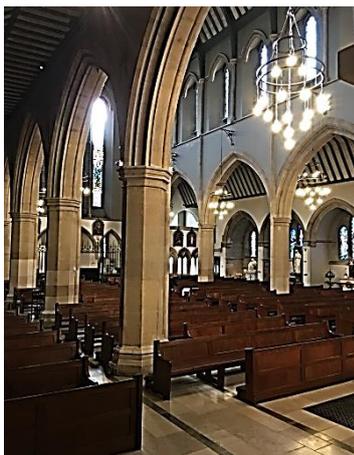
and as well as supporting our diocese, it was discerned that our priorities should be, the refurbishment of the ten Almshouses for which we have responsibility and the restoration of our church.

Bathrooms Before and After Refurbishment

2018 saw the completion of the Almshouse project. Now our residents live in newly renovated flats which we can all take great pride in. Special thanks should go to the trustees of the Almshouses, they would not wish

to be named, but their unstinting efforts speak of the generosity of this community.

Our second priority was the restoration of the church. The plan for restoration had three phases and as history would have it each phase was presided over by a different Parish Priest. Canon Stuart Wilson took up the challenge of beginning to restore the fabric of our buildings. Some years ago he began by attending to the Rectory which had fallen into a state of disrepair. Next he began fundraising to install underfloor heating and replace the tired wood block floor with a new floor made of Purbeck stone. This once draughty old building now feels warm and welcoming, even in the depths of winter.



The second phase of the church restoration concerned the installation of a new lighting system. Using the most up to date technology, the lighting design was commissioned and installed. St Mary's is a significant building architecturally and the lighting had to be right so that the beauty of the church could shine out for all to see. This phase of restoration was completed in 2017 under the wise stewardship of Mgr. Martin Hayes

In January of 2018 Fr Shaun Middleton was appointed as Parish Priest of St Mary's and it has fallen to him to complete the work of restoration. Fr Shaun meets regularly with parishioners to discern a way forward and over the last year it has become apparent that the final phase of restoration has several components.

Firstly the stone work is very dirty and needs cleaning. Over the years there has also been a lot of water ingress. This together with the natural wear and tear that churches are subjected to means that the whole church needs re-decorating. Perversely the new lighting system



really shows how badly in need of re-painting the structure is.



Finally to restore the architectural integrity of the building it is envisaged that the High Altar which was moved to the North Chapel in the 1970's, should be restored to prominence on the sanctuary. Mass will continue to be said facing the people, The Altar Mensa will be separated out and brought forward, whilst the reredos and tabernacle will return to the back of the sanctuary.

Meanwhile, the Altar dedicated to St Thomas More will be placed in the North Chapel and the organ moved into the position now occupied by the More Altar. Thus opening up that space and exposing the lost stone tracery which sits behind the organ.

Finally the Baptismal Font will be brought from the back of the church and placed in front of the North Chapel, so that we have a dedicated baptistery. This will be a true focal point for the Sacrament that unites all Christian people.

We are all aware that buildings are only one part of the story of the faith of a community. Therefore, we would like to start a fund which would pay for the services of a Catechetical Co-ordinator who would work with all our volunteers to ensure that first class provision is made for all our sacramental and educational work.



Projected costs for this entire project are in the region of £500,000. St Mary's is a comparatively small parish and this seems like a colossal amount of money for us to raise. Yet we believe that the presence of this church, with its atmosphere of welcome and stability is worth maintaining and developing. It stands out as beacon

of hope in a sometimes dark world, a place where people can gather to worship or where they can simply be alone, to silently think and to pray.

So many people have committed themselves to a tireless fundraising effort for St Mary's over the last 12 years. As we approach the last lap, our energy may be flagging but with the end in sight perhaps we can find that one final burst of imagination and good will that will see this beautiful old building fully restored, shining like a vision of the new Jerusalem so that it might rejoice in its past but look forward with hope to its future.

If you feel that you would like to know more about St Mary's and our project then please do feel free to make contact with Fr Shaun who would be happy to meet with you and to talk through the plans that we are developing.

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