

EULOGY FOR DENIS KELLY from Sue Croucher

It is my privilege to say a few words on behalf of our parish here in Chipperfield. When our former parish Chairman Jimmy McIlroy passed away Fr Terry was left to choose his successor. As Pat Turner has reminded me Terry said at the time there is just one person who springs to mind and that is Denis Kelly. Fr Terry was obviously a good judge of character as Denis has indeed been a wonderful chairman. And for those who might think that all this job entailed was giving speeches and appeals on various occasions I must fill you in on what Denis was also doing quietly behind the scenes. For years he regularly counted the collection money with John Kelly (no relation but known affectionately as the 'Kelly Boys'), and much to Liam's delight he also took the money to the bank which saved Liam the task. He wrote a monthly article on behalf of the parish for the local Chipperfield News and they have thanked him for many years of contributing such valued and thoughtful narratives. He used the iPod to play hymn music at the Saturday 6.30 mass when there was no organist. He was a committed member of both the Social and the Finance committees.

Denis wouldn't mind me saying that using the iPod was not his most favourite job. He appreciated how the singing of hymns enhanced the mass but the operation was far from easy. The music on the iPod had mainly matched the hymnbook. However, the church bought a new set of hymnbooks with some of our favourite hymns omitted and the rest of the hymns listed and numbered in a completely different order. So, it all became a bit of a nightmare for him and things could and would go wrong. For instance, the congregation stood one Christmas to sing a rousing rendition of 'The First Nowell' but the music being played from the iPod was 'Silent Night'. Denis took the resulting rude comments with his usual good humour. It is no wonder however, that he so appreciated when Watford football club had a late kick off as that permitted him to miss the Saturday mass that week.

He was an active member of the Social Committee and could always be relied on to contribute at the various activities such as quizzes, BBQ's and Murder Mystery Evenings. In fact, he was always the first to offer to help stock the bar for these events, not by doing the 'Beaujolais run' but the 'Majestic wine' run. He seemed to like browsing in that shop and definitely had an eye for a good wine at a fair price. If we started to panic about anything before a fund raiser his 'it will be alright on the night' attitude helped keep us sane.

He was very much committed, along with Tony Trigg, to the finance committee. Two main things that he was heavily involved with in recent years were preparing for the consecration of the church by Cardinal Vincent Nichols in July 2018 and the separating of the adjoining priest's house from the church in order that the house could be rented out to provide the parish with much needed income. His contribution to the success of these projects was invaluable.

In all matters Denis was a mediator, he was always very diplomatic and he had a wonderful knack of rephrasing people's views in such a way that they would never cause any offence.

When Denis first had his cancer diagnosis, he had to embark on a course of chemotherapy at Mount Vernon Hospital. At the beginning of this treatment I was surprised to bump into him and Annie in Sainsburys. Never one to think before opening my mouth I looked him in the eye and said 'Oh, you're still standing then'. That remark haunted me and the next time I saw Annie I said I don't know what possessed me to say such a thing. She reassured me that he thought that it was one of the best things anyone could have said to him and how he had laughed. In fairness to Denis he was determined to keep on standing. People who did not know he was ill would never have guessed. He just carried on as usual. In December 2019 the church planned a big appeal for the refurbishment of the Mother and Baby clinic and dispensary in our adopted parish in Chingulungulu in Tanzania and a new clean water project in Kalamba in the Congo. Denis was an enthusiastic supporter of overseas aid and was going to launch the appeal at the two masses but I was aware at the time he wasn't feeling too good. I emailed him and said whilst I hadn't really a clue what to say, if he needed me to be his understudy I could then, if necessary, introduce the appeal for him. He replied, thanking me for my concern, but he was determined to do it. He said it was focussing on such things that kept him going. And so, he did it and as always, he did it very well. As recently as August this year when Fr Terry passed away Denis was able to help compose a eulogy for Terry which he stood up and gave at one of the masses in Chipperfield.

We know Denis had many friends including those from Westfield, Kodak, The Dacorum U3a, from Probus and other groups as well as our own parish here and had it not been for the corona pandemic and lockdown restrictions this church would have been filled to the brim with people wanting to pay their respects.

Denis was a kind and considerate man. A modest and respected man who you could always rely on. He has been an asset to our parish. He leaves a void here that will be very hard to fill. We will miss him greatly. Thank you, Denis, for all the good work you have done for us. May you rest in peace. Amen