*Dear Parishioners, Christmas, 2019*

*The warmest of Christmas wishes to you all, and especially to any who are visiting our parish during this festive season. If you are returning to us after an absence, welcome back!*

*This joyful season brings with it so much for us to reflect upon, and so much to give thanks to Almighty God for. It is right and proper that we do so, in the midst of our festivities. The truly awesome gift given to us and all of humanity of God himself, come amongst us as one like us, has its echoes in all the smaller gifts and tokens that we give and share with each other at this time of year.*

*The year that has been has been a tumultuous and in many ways turbulent one. Political chaos and instability with social strains and stresses. There is a mountain of worries that sometimes even has an existential dimension, as we fret about our future and the future that we might leave to our children and their children.*

*As it is today, so it was 2000 years ago, when God chose to come into the lives of his people - with all its messiness. The Bethlehem stable that we honour and recall each year had its imperfections. Cold and draughty, possibly smelly and not a little bit frightening for two young parents; forced a long way from their home by political dictat. Yet, into this situation, God chose to come, and the world was redeemed because of it. As God chose to come into the imperfections of the Bethlehem stable, so too he enters our imperfections and transforms them by his presence, if we but let him.*

*In our thanksgiving we reflect on all that has been in the year that has passed, and for some this brings sharper pain than other years. The pain of loss, of bereavement, of separation of sickness or of loneliness. Into these too, God comes and brings healing, in his own time and his own way.*

*For my part, this year has brought great change and so many blessings. This is an opportunity to say thank you to the whole of the community of St Matthew’s for the warmth of the welcome that I have received, and the love that has been extended to me over the last four months as your new Parish Priest. I have been truly overwhelmed and humbled by the great generosity shown to me and the kindnesses that have been extended by so many, it is all greatly appreciated. It is a privilege to offer all the Christmas Masses for your intentions.*

*St Matthew’s is a thriving parish, thanks be to God, and there is a tremendous prayerfulness and a generosity of spirit that takes a variety of forms. There are many who work tirelessly throughout the year to keep our parish as it is. This devotion comes in big and small ways. To all the many, many people who give of their time, energy and resources to our parish, this Christmas, I simply say a profound thank you. Elsewhere in this Christmas newsletter there are notices about things to come as we look forward to 2020, but for all the blessings that we have received in 2019 let us thank and praise God and honour him in his son, the infant Christ of Bethlehem.*

# MASSSES AND SERVICES THIS WEEK

THURSDAY 26th  *[St Stephen] – Annual Mass for Altar Servers*

11:00 **DANIEL & EILEEN MCSWEENEY (ANNIV.)**

SATURDAY 28th *[The Holy Innocents]*

18.00 (Vigil) **JOE DA CUNHA RIP**

SUNDAY 29th **THE HOLY FAMILY OF JESUS, MARY & JOSEPH – YEAR A**

 9:00 **SIMON MANOUVEL RIP**

11:15 **ANNA RIP** *1*8.00 **THE GOOD COUNSEL NETWORK (int.)**

MONDAY 30th *[6th Day in Octave of Christmas]*

 10.00 **VINOWARD JEYARAJAN (ANNIV)**

TUESDAY 31st  *[7th Day in Octave of Christmas]*  10:00 **EVELYN RAMSARAN (ANNIV)**

WEDNESDAY 1st *[Solemnity of Mary, the Holy Mother of God]*

**11.00** **AGNES MULLIGAN (ANNIV)**

THURSDAY 2nd *[Ss Basil the Great & Gregory Nazianzen]*

 10.00 **YUYU LOU RIP**

FRIDAY 3rd *[Christmas feria]*

10.00 **ANN CALLANAN (ANNIV)**

SATURDAY 4th *[Christmas feria]*

 10.00 **LAURIE SCUDDER RIP**

 *10:30 -11:30 Exposition (Confessions Available.)*

 *17:00 – 17:45 Confessions*

 (Vigil) 18:00 **ROLAND FIGUEIREDO (ANNIV)**

SUNDAY 5th **THE EPIPHANY OF THE LORD– YEAR A**

 09.00 **ROLAND FIGUEIREDO RIP**

 11.15 **PHILLIPA LLOYD RIP**

18:00 **JOSEPH KAVENAGH (ANNIV)**

**PARISH SICK LIST**

Please remember our sick parishioners in your prayers: Jo Brookes, Tom Erhard, Teresa Bingham-Daly, Don Williamson, Victor Kumaratharsan, Jean Vaughan, John Cash, Mrs Klavkowski, Michael Enskat, Laura Everest, Curzio Pirfo, Czeslaw Czaprowski, Mary Hodgison, Alexandre Silva, Bella King, Margaret Tso, Gerard O’Brien, John Donohoe, Margaret Saines, Mary Ahern, Dominic Manley, Cecil Cain, Eileen Murray, Kathleen Wood, Duncan Webster, Lisa Walker, James Elton, Michael Coyle, Timor Yonel, Jason Jackson, Luke Slater, Anna Benton, Joe Da Silva, Emma Quirke, Mary Wallace, Jacob Nuske, Susan Birley, Barrie Jervis, Ann Kelly.

**CATHOLIC CHILDRENS SOCIETY APPEAL DURING ADVENT & CHRISTMAS CRIB OFFERINGS**

With grateful thanks for the enthusiastic response to the appeal during Advent and Christmas for the work of the Catholic Children’s Society. Together we have raised an incredible sum of in excess of £1,800, which will be added to this year’s Crib Offering. The final total will be made available in the New Year

**LOOKING AHEAD TO 2020**

**THE YEAR OF THE WORD**

2020 has been designated as the ‘Year of The Word’ by The Holy Father, during which we are all encouraged to reflect more deeply on the Word of God, its role in our lives and its power in the Church. ‘The God Who Speaks’ initiative, being promoted by the Bishops’ Conference of England and Wales is one resource that is available to us at a parish level, so that this opportunity for prayer, reflection and catechesis on the Word of God is not missed. Please visit [www.godwhospeaks.uk](http://www.godwhospeaks.uk) for more information.

During Lent, it is hoped that we will be able to host a series of talks given by an exciting range of speakers focusing on different aspects of the Word of God in our lives, our theology and our journey of faith.

**SECOND COLLECTIONS AND APPEALS**

There are many calls on our generosity, as we all know. During 2020, we will try to limit the special appeals and second collections to those we are mandated to make, and certain other special needs that are close to the hearts of parishioners, after consultation. Ideas are always welcome, however may not all be possible to facilitate this year, and kept open as possibilities for later years. Suggestions will be reviewed by the parish finance committee and the Parish Justice and Peace group periodically through the year. As previously announced, we will publish upcoming special appeals with plenty of notice, and the first of these will be the Cardinal’s Lenten Appeal that will be made during Lent, with an announcement during the weekend of February 23rd. Second Collections for the repayment of the hall loan will be taken only once a month from January 2020

**HALL REFURBISHMENT LOAN AND PARISH FINANCES**

As we all know, the great project in the parish in recent years has been the refurbishment of our Parish Hall and Centre - now completed. A number of parishioners are keen to hear the news regarding this project. The total project cost was in excess of £530,000. The loan sum outstanding is now £268,000, which continues to decrease through a combination of fundraising activities and income generated from the use of the hall. During 2020, we will be looking at new and creative ways to increase revenue from the facility that we have, as well as use it for its primary purpose – as a centre for our parish community. Final cosmetic touches to the refurbishment are currently being worked on, and further news will be available in the New Year. In order to maximize the potential of our facility and ensure wear and tear does not overly affect it adversely, we will be re-structuring our prices for hirers and clarifying their responsibilities. Significantly discounted rates of hire will be offered to parishioners should they wish to hire the facilities for private events.

A summary of parish finances will be prepared and made available during January. As well as the generosity that we receive each week through the weekly collection and planned-giving envelopes, many of our parishioners chose to contribute generously through regular Standing Orders, which has not always been acknowledged publicly. These figures will be summarized monthly in the newsletter next year. After the renovation work of the office that came as a result of an insurance claim, there will be outgoings next year for general preventative and seasonal maintenance; certain things cannot be avoided in a large public building almost at its centenary, and our statutory responsibilities must be met also.

**IDEAS FOR PARISH PROJECTS & INITATIVES**

We are always open to ideas about what we might introduce in our parish that aid or elevate our worship of God, deepen our faith, strengthen the bonds of our parish community, or assist in outreach. There are many opportunities to get involved and our Parish Pastoral Council will resume meeting in January. Please feel free to approach Fr Brian or one of the members of the PPC. Some initiatives may be considered for later years, if it is not possible or practical introduce immediately.

**PARISH COMMUNICATIONS & WEBSITE**

Unfortunately, due to an ongoing fault, for some time now an incorrect number for the parish office has been circulating, not least when sought out on web search engines. It was thought to have been resolved many weeks ago, but appears to have still been causing confusion recently. I apologise to anyone who has been trying to contact us using the old number 01923 825 639. I have been assured this week that this number is definitely disconnected. The correct number for the parish is 01923 840 736, which comes through to the office and the voice-mail system if required.

The re-vamping of the parish website will begin soon, and photos of the church are very welcome. We hope to have a gallery of images available there, especially any that show the magnificent decorations for the Christmas Season. I think everyone will agree that the Church is shown to its very best in this season and the incredible work that has gone into preparing the decorations has been worth it. We hope also to have better links on the website for parish news and events also.

Wishing everybody at St Matthew’s a very happy and holy Christmas, and every blessing for the year that is about to start. With an assurance of my gratitude and continued prayers,

 *Fr Brian*