PARISH PRIEST'S REPORT FOR 2025/6

FOR THE PARISHES OF RICKMANSWORTH, CHORLEYWOOD AND MILL END

It has once again been a busy 18 months across our parishes as we have continued to journey together in living out our calling to be in a relationship with God and to help others to have an encounter with him.

Our Senior Leadership Team continue to be a great source of support to me in ensuring that we not only focus on the practicalities of maintaining our sites and Services but also seek to live out our parish vision. In the summer of 2025 Anne Lorrimer-Roberts stepped down from her role having represented Chorleywood on the SLT since it was founded. In her place stepped forward, Francis Holly. We continue to be supported by the Divine Renovation coaches in reflecting on why we are doing things, and Lizzie will tell us a bit more about that in her SLT report in a few minutes.

Our Joint Parishes Pastoral Council continues to support this mission by their bi-monthly meetings and this year elected a new Chair, Ben Sadler days before his wedding! We will hear more about their great work in supporting the SLT in Ben's report later, but here I would like to thank all those who have been a part of the JPPC over the past couple of years, and for their continued work building on our Parish Development Plan, which has been the foundation of many things you will have seen that have taken place in the parishes.

MINISTRIES

In our 2025 Annual Financial Return Statistics we calculated that there are 222 volunteers across our parishes. Since then, the numbers will have risen! I am so grateful for all those who carry out different ministries which all play their important part in parish life. In our liturgies we see the contribution of our Altar Servers, Musicians, Readers, Welcomers and Eucharistic Ministers. We also have many ministries which are not so evident but no less important, such as our Sacristans, cleaners, flower arrangers, counters, catechists and Youth Group Leaders and those assisting us in the parish office.

A particular note here to those who after many years of service are stepping down or having a break from their roles. A big thank you to Liz Townsend who will soon be stepping down from co-ordinating the Children's Liturgy in Mill End after 15 years of service. We thank our Youth Group leaders Margaret, Toni and Belinda, who for many years have looked after our teenagers each month at our Youth Group. As Lizzie will mention later on, the Alpha Team have completed 9 seasons of Alpha with many having been involved since the start and are taking a break this year. A particular thanks to Deidre who has been a rock of Alpha. Alongside her, we remember the late Mike Eaton, who has been a real source of wisdom and a prayer warrior for Alpha and the parish, who sadly we lost just before Easter. Also, this year we were greatly saddened by the death of Alec Ray, a member of the 11 o'clock choir and founder of our Welcoming Team at Our Lady's, as well as Derek and Sue Treanor and Jo Whelan, who were so involved in the music at St John Fisher for many years. We keep all of them in our

prayers and pray that we may continue to have such faithful servants to our parish in the years ahead.

I thank all those in involved in ministries in the parish past and present for giving their time and their skills to fulfil these roles.

EVENTS

Over the past year we have once again, had a number of events in our parishes.

During Lent 2025 we had Days of Recollection for our Readers and Ministers of Holy Communion, and the Stations of the Cross led by different groups across our parishes.

In May in Rickmansworth we had another successful gardening day to clear up the site and prepare us for our summer celebrations. The rain did not dampen spirits and the site continues to be a beautiful space in which to enter into prayer and reflection.

Our summers have again been filled with our parish processions and celebrations with our Marian Procession at Our Lady's followed by a parish picnic, and our Corpus Christi procession in Mill End followed by a very successful Hot Brunch. Then in the middle of June we've had a St John Fisher Procession in Chorleywood, ending with a litany of the English Martyrs and being rounded off by a plentiful supply of cake! These have been great opportunities for us to celebrate the independent nature of each of our parishes with traditional Catholic devotions, and really have now become an annual occasion for each community.

Over the past two summers we have also had the next instalments of our joint event of the summer – Brass on the Grass. Both in 2025 and 2026 we were spoilt with sunshine, and the number of volunteers for setting up and running the event has been very exciting. A huge thanks in particular to all those who co-ordinated everyone, and working with the different groups in the parishes who have made this important event happen.

In September we celebrated the Jubilee Year of Hope by firstly welcoming the National Walking Pilgrims to Our Lady's. A group of 8 pilgrims stayed with us, and were greeted with a great feast cooked by our volunteers, and a comfortable bed for the night in the presbytery and parish hall. At the end of the pilgrimage, they told me the welcome they got in Rickmansworth was the best they had over several weeks of walking! The parish then went on our own walk as 60 people walked the Westminster Way. It was a much longer day that we had anticipated, as we traipsed across London visiting different churches, whilst trying to avoid large protests around Parliament. But it was an unforgettable day, and we will have another walking pilgrimage in London at the end of this month.

In October we had a Parish Quiz Night, where my team celebrated our contribution by holding aloft the wooden spoon!

In November, we once again marked the month by remembering those who have died with the blessing of graves and our Mass of remembrance for parishioners who had died at Our

Lady's Church on the first Saturday of November. This has now become an annual event cherished by both those who have lost a loved one in the preceding year, and others who wish to remember someone close to them who has died. Our tradition of blessing graves in our local graveyards also continued throughout the month, as did our involvement in the local Remembrance Sunday marches and Services, including for the first time me joining the Chorleywood Remembrance Service at Christ Church at the invitation of the Anglican Ministers of the village.

We have continued to have Youth Masses around Pentecost and the First Sunday of Advent followed by activities and refreshments for our young people. In June 2026 this included Deacon Liam Lynch preaching about the importance of keeping the flame of faith burning in our lives as we get older. Also, in December, the three parishes came together once again for our joint Christmas Carol Service, in 2025 hosted in Mill End and followed by refreshments in the parish hall. It was particularly encouraging to see a full Church with lots of visitors coming to this Service.

St John's in Mill End also once again had a mini-Advent Fair which was a great success and we thank all those who worked so hard to put this together at such a busy time of year. Post-Christmas for the second year we also had our Cafod Parish Fun Run which had over 30 people in attendance, and brought a great deal of laughter and joy to the usual quiet days following a very hectic Christmas season.

In Lent 2026 we had a Forty Hours Devotion with the Blessed Sacrament being exposed for prayer across the three parishes, including over two nights. Different groups and individuals led prayers at different parts of the Forty Hours, and St John's School and our GIFT families also took part in the prayer, giving great witness to us passing on the faith to our children.

In 2026 we have also seen an increase in weddings in our parishes, going from one in 2025 to 10 this year. It has been a real joy to journey with these couples and witness their union. It has also been heartening in recent weeks to welcome several newborn children into the parish, from previous weddings I have conducted, which is a real reminder to us of the role of the Church to be with families throughout the cycle of life.

SAFEGUARDING AND HEALTH & SAFETY

The safeguarding of children and vulnerable adults in our parishes continues to be of utmost importance. I express my thanks to the Parish Safeguarding Representatives of our three parishes for their care and vigilance in this work, ensuring that all those involved in working with children and vulnerable adults are DBS checked and trained. In particular we thank Matt McKiernan who stepped down from the role of PSR in Mill End in January 2026, after over 20 years in the role. We are very grateful that after an appeal, Anjali Kemwal-Button has generously stepped into the role for Mill End parish.

One addition to the PSR role is to ask our parish volunteers to complete the Safeguarding Training that has been created specifically for a Church setting. The parish and diocese are

audited to ensure this training has been completed, so if you have been asked to do it, please ensure you have, even if you have done it in another setting, to ensure everyone in our parishes is safe and we have healthy a culture of safeguarding.

In terms of Health and Safety we have a statutory responsibility to check that all of our premises are safe places to be in and we are very grateful to all those who help is with this difficult work, in particular Alan Opie, Michael Quinn, Peter Baxter, and Jim Elsdon, in taking the lead on this in each of our parishes and for their diligence in ensuring the ever-changing requirements Health and Safety legislation are being fulfilled.

ADMINISTRATION

In recent months we have been very frank about the challenges of running three independent parishes and the workload this creates not only on the parish priest, but most particularly on our Parish Administrator. After much discussion between the SLT and the three Finance Committees, we decided in February to launch the public consultation in the parishes regarding merging into one canonical parish. In this we presented how we wish to combine our parish, but still allow each parish to have some autonomy through having Cost Centres for income, to allow each Church to continue to fund its property works, whilst having a joint cost centre for joint costs of administration, parish activities, priests living expenses etc.

The response to this was very positive with 100 of 104 people who responded to our online and paper poll agreeing this was a sensible move forward, with 2 saying they were unsure, and 2 against the move. We also brought this to a public meeting in each of the parishes, where there was a similar level of support for the merge, and it was felt that was a mandate to therefore take the proposal to the Council of Priests and then the Archbishop of Westminster for their approval. As we await that meeting next month, we are working hard in the background to prepare for this to take place in January 2027 as planned. In the meantime, our Parish Administrator, Kerry continues to work diligently and with incredible commitment in running the administration of our parishes. We thank her for all her hard work and dedication to our parishes.

One major part of the merger is me putting together a combined Finance Committee, who will ensure our parish operations are run as efficiently as they are now by our three Committees, whilst maintaining the interests of each Church are met. In the past two years there have been far too many projects that the current FOPs have supported us with to name, but the ones currently in evidence are the Church and Hall roof being replaced in Mill End, the upstairs windows in Chorleywood being replaced, and the repair of the window at the Hall entrance of Rickmansworth taking place over the summer. There are many others also being planned to follow these. The FOPs work very closely with me and the diocesan finance and fundraising departments to find support where we can, and we were delighted to receive another National Lottery grant of £20,000 towards the work in Mill End, which is our third receipt of such a grant across the parishes over the past 3 years. We thank all the volunteers

who share their skills and time in our FOPs and supporting me and Kerry in ensuring the sites are maintained and the bills are paid, so we can live out our parish mission.

We also thank our Communications team for making our parishes presence felt on social media, with regular updates of things happening in the parishes and helpful tools in our faith posted, which I know are of great benefit to many in our community and beyond.

We also give thanks to Daniel, our caretaker and cleaner, who continues to care for our sites and ensure they are clean and safe places to work and worship.

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

It will probably not surprise you to hear that the biggest thing on my mind at the moment is the merger of our three parishes into one canonical parish, which I feel will help the mission of our parish community immensely in the long-term. It is a great testament to the work of Fr Shaun before me, and all those who have played a part in unifying our three parishes over the past 12 years, that when the merger was proposed, there were no major objections, and many even said they thought we were already merged because we do so much together.

Since I have been in the parishes I have been very open, that with the shortage of priests that we are facing in our diocese, we are very lucky to have an assistant priest, and especially Fr Dom. As one parish we will need to continue to be prepared for the reality of just having one priest in this area, something that could happen at any moment, and this may involve making some difficult decisions that none of us want to take!

However, I believe our parishes are already well set-up to face this challenge, with the incredible lay involvement in all aspects of parish life. There are a great number of very gifted people in our community willing to commit their time and energy to ensure our parish mission continues to flourish, despite the challenges ahead.

Another thing to be grateful for is the continued growth in the numbers coming to Mass, and in particular the number of new families and young adults engaging in our community. It was wonderful to see the bar at Brass on the Grass filled with Young Adults serving us, and so many families enjoying the activities that were organised for them.

This is something that we want to encourage in our parishes, as we continue to seek to help all those who walk through our doors, or who come into contact with our parishioners in the wider community can discover the joy of having an encounter with Christ and finding meaning in their lives.

Let us continue to entrust our parishes and all those who live in them to the Lord, and through the gifts of the Holy Spirit, seek to work together as missionary disciples to make his love and mercy known to our community and to all those we encounter.