

Pastoral council AGM
Letter from the chair

A lot has happened in a year for our parish.

The sudden loss of Father George in September was a real shock to everyone. When our family moved to Thornbury 6 years ago we were struck by how lovely and welcoming Fr George was, and how good he was with the children, gathering them all on the altar for the Our Father. With the help of many others, he built a very strong Catholic community in the two churches and the school, and he was keenly missed at the centre of that.

This pastoral council was set up by Fr George as a way of building stronger links between the clergy side and the congregations of the two churches in Thornbury and Wotton. It was incredible to see how everyone in the parish drew closer together in support each for other in the days, weeks and months after his passing. There was such support from the Salvatorians, the Bishop and the wider diocese. Deacons Kingsley and Lawrence did, and continue to do, a brilliant job, not only with the urgent necessary tasks of finding priests each week and organising the funeral details, but also of bolstering the faith and sense of community among us. Thank you.

I'm very pleased that we have welcomed Father Frank Walters as our priest in residence. He brings that same warmth and welcoming approach that Father George had. I'm sure I'm not the only one who also appreciates his jokes at the end of mass – worth staying after the communion!

As our wider church faces change again, with the death of Pope Francis this Easter and the imminent choosing of the next Pope, it is a perhaps good time to reflect on how we as Christians evolve constantly. I missed Deacon Kingsley's sermon on Sunday discussing a renewal and revival of church attendance among younger people but heard a paraphrase of it from my husband. Instead, I was upstairs with my toddler in Little Church, among a host of new faces, a very visible example of the increasing number of young families joining the parish. It is truly lovely to see.

Finally on a personal note, I want to express my real gratitude to the community for their support to our own family this year. In November my young nephew was killed in a road traffic accident and we have deeply needed the love and strength of God and of everyone around us to cope with our own shock and grief; we found it here in abundance. Whether our loss is from further afield, close to our church or something very personal, it is sometimes the smallest interactions of those in our daily lives that can give us the greatest comfort. It is wonderful to know that we can find those interactions in our church community.

This is my third and final term as chair/vice chair of the pastoral council. Although I have said goodbye to so many important faces since I started in 2022, I have also been blessed and overjoyed with the arrival of my second child (who you might see pulling candles over on the altar!). With my hands full of parenthood, I'll be passing the baton of chair on to someone new for the next three-year term. I have been proud to serve as Chair, thank you to everyone else on the pastoral council and I am sure the next Chair will find this role as rewarding as I have.

Gillian Pollard
Chair of the Pastoral Council