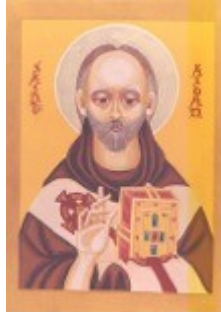


Meeting of the Parish Council with Fr. Philip Hall as consultant at St. Aidan's Orthodox Church on Saturday 5th November 2005.



Present:

Fr. Philip (Hall) Eight Council members were present. Apologies were received from Helen Hallam. Other people present: George Weymont, Mary Smith, John Smith.

Proceedings

Fr. Philip began by being shown about the entire Temple. This was a super experience. Fr. Gregory has showed him round before and he has been round the Temple by himself. Less than a year ago the Temple garden was very overgrown but is now in a very workable state. Also he noticed MANY changes over the last year within the Temple and was shown the work that has been done on the roof. This was all done in the friendliest manner with many "off the cuff" statements of appreciation for the Priest and the Deacon, showing that both these men are held in high regard. (These were in terms of their prayerfulness, leadership, preaching abilities and vision for the future.) Immediately the welcoming feel to the Temple was obvious – friendliness, fresh flowers, relevant and fresh looking tracts, nice and clean. The other obvious thing was the positive way everyone was talking about the Church's plans for the immediate future.

Fr. Philip assured the council that he was not inspecting the Parish but was there to help the council think about the mission of the Church, where they had been in their mission and where they might go now.

Comparing the review with recent documents it was clear that changes had already been put into effect:

- servers will sit outside the altar during the sermon,
- the introduction to the reading of the Epistle has been standardised and
- a gardener will be appointed from 2006.

Fr. Philip asked the Council members for matters they wanted to discuss several issues were brought up:

1. The Church Council is small and ageing. There are 2 vacancies, which should be filled with young people as soon as possible. How to involve other people?
2. Teaching – responsibility for specific areas of a development plan. For instance, all age teaching on spiritual direction and confession.
3. Social functions.
4. Fr. Gregory's workload.

These were looked at in turn:

One of the problems seemed to be that the council felt that they needed new blood and younger blood. People had been invited but no one had taken up the invitation. Perhaps one of the problems is that people are very busy and reluctant to commit themselves for years of service. Added to this is the possibility that people feel they do not have the skills to serve in this way. Might it be possible to co-opt people for very short periods (to complete a particular project for example or give advice to the rest of the council) perhaps for just one meeting. This could help to break the ice and also to train new people. The very short co-option should help co-optees and the council to stay focussed so that the maximum use is made of the co-option.

2. Teaching: People coming to this country find that the Antiochian teaching ministry is of enormous value. We should not be surprised to find that as well as all the things English Orthodox learn from "Cradle Orthodox" they also learn much from the English and often are converted to a deeper understanding of their faith. There was discussion about the difficulty of coming to a long term "prayer school" or school for confession etc. This was because people come from long distances and find it difficult to turn out after dark. However all agreed that "One off days or afternoons" (perhaps repeated every four years) and four different subjects each year (16 in total) would be far easier to attend.

3. Social functions – it may be best to appoint very short-term sub committees to organise these.

4. Priest's workload. Fr. Gregory admits to working a 60+-hour week. There is a comment that he is happy to continue to do this! It is obvious that he is but it will not help him to live the "Many Years" for which we pray at the end of each Liturgy. One of the tasks Fr. Gregory does is Treasurer. In Act of the Apostles this is one of the tasks that the Elders of the Church certainly did not do. The Council certainly felt that prayer, and a determined effort to find and train someone is necessary and urgent. That person MUST be able to use Microsoft Excel. Fr. Gregory's specific ability is as a priest and he should be freed up to attend to that. There are lots of people in the congregation – someone must be hiding their lamp under a bushel.

One member of the council pointed out that there was an enormous workload planned by the review. The suggestion that most of these could be crossed out as SHORT TERM aims was accepted but that they were still important in the long term.

THIS COMPLETED THE MORNING SESSION.

AFTERNOON:

1. Choir: Benedict clearly does an excellent job in the choir and appears always good-humoured and the choir sings very nicely. He is always there too! It takes a long time to learn how to put a service together and the choir needs to be congratulated for its prowess. Benedict could do with a deputy – someone that he can train up. He mentioned that by the end of the service his voice is tired – he could certainly delegate parts of the service (e.g. the Hours) to others. Some parishes encourage children to stand with the adults (not necessarily to sing) they then pick up the service and its structure very quickly.

2. Youth involvement in parish life. Several people mentioned this. It is clear that there is some involvement – there are young servers and girls hold candles in the Liturgy (outside the Altar). Young people also need to be trained for current and future ministry in the Church. Some places have Youth councils (like most schools) – with the incentive of plenty of spoiling a council can be brought together for short periods (like after the Liturgy). They cannot run the church but they can advise on issues that affect themselves. A number of ways of selecting a council could be used; elect, appoint, self-selection. Perhaps one could start with some servers and a similar number of girls.

3. Mission. There was some anxiety about the Macclesfield Mission. The Council members felt that they were excluded from this perhaps because it was felt to be important for the church at Macclesfield to be self-supportive. The Macclesfield Mission is very important and both Levenshulme and Macclesfield will benefit from its success.

4. What are the Council most proud of?

- The fact that we are told that people are made to feel most welcome here.
- The way in which our services are conducted including marriage and baptism services.
- The way in which the Temple has developed over a decade.
- The commitment and prayerfulness of our clergy.
- The development of an English Orthodox Church in this place.
- The joy of having so many children at the Liturgy, their attendance and exemplary behaviour.

5. What does the Council feel the purpose of this Church is?

- To make sure that there is and will be an Orthodox presence in this community.
- To love the Lord our God and our neighbours as ourselves.
- To make our presence felt by preaching the Word.
- To share the love of God with all.

The council members asked Fr. Philip a number of questions. Some of these are referred to above.

EXTRAS:

- There were questions about learning to pray and prayer groups. Prayer teaching, spiritual direction and confession are regularly referred to in sermons, the newssheet, the Apostle, and the Internet. Perhaps half-day conferences may help.
- Another suggestion was to have prayer partners who pray at their own homes BUT at the same time.
- How to get people to come on time to the Liturgy? This appears to be a common and regrettable Orthodox problem!
- Should video recorders be allowed at services? Annoying as they are they do give a wider audience to the services. Perhaps the operator could be allocated one or two places in which to stand. This will prevent too much disturbance in the congregation particularly during the Liturgy.
- How to get people interested in mid-week services and vespers? These could be linked with the prayer days / training days or, perhaps, three times a year invite guests to a specific service – vespers for instance. Bring a friend.

CONCLUSION

The day concluded with Vespers. Fr. Philip was very inspired by the day and immensely enjoyed the Divine Liturgy on Sunday. Lots of people, a wonderful buzz of conversation and a huge range of ages and lots of people receiving Holy Communion.