

Divided parish

For 30 years I have been a parishioner at Our Lady of the Rosary, Blackfen. In the past year there have been a number of changes, particularly in the way we worship ("That was not my Mass", 21 February). The main Sunday family Mass at 10.30 a.m. has been replaced by a Tridentine Mass with everything in Latin.

This Mass used to be the social focal point for parishioners, young and old. Elderly and isolated parishioners liked to come out and be part of the wider family of the parish. They could meet their friends using parish facilities. A substantial number of parishioners no longer attend this Mass, which now attracts people from outside the parish particularly the Latin Mass Society. Numbers are down on previous years. The giving of this time to the Latin Mass group has led to the break-up of the community within our parish. Parish facilities are not available after other Masses for the use of vulnerable parishioners.

We have no objection to Latin Masses in the parish but at a time more suited to the parish's needs. There has been no consultation at any level with parishioners although we have asked for this many times. Powerful international bloggers seem to set the agenda. Is this the ultimate takeover of our parish?

Maureen Hedderman

Parishioner, Our Lady of the Rosary Parish, Blackfen, Sidcup, Kent

This weekend 40 people came to the traditional Mass on Saturday morning, nearly a third of them were under the age of 22. Last weekend over 250 were there as part of a "Day with Mary". The weekend before, more than 50 were there for Saturday-morning Mass. The Sunday 10.30 a.m. Mass is beautiful and inspiring many. The three other new-order Masses are wonderful too. We have a young man hoping to set off for seminary, and many more growing in faith. Other young parishioners are adopting leadership roles around the country. Many priests would give an arm and a leg for such faith and hope.

We have great sympathy for Mr Wynne and his friends quoted in *The Tablet* last week, but we greatly regret that Fr Finigan, who has inspired so many so much, is so strongly challenged by them as a result.

Adrian Treloar and family; Wendy Kane and family; Caroline McCabe and family; Frank Venn; Chris Strudley; Julie Boon and family
Parishioners, Our Lady of the Rosary

Fr Finigan has done every thing in his power to prevent the ordinary parishioners from being informed about what he is doing. If you read his blog and that of other supporters of the Latin Mass Society, you will understand why



'Beautiful and inspiring' or divisive? The Roman Missal of 1962

it is so important to stand up to them. Several bloggers are collecting money for Fr Finigan to buy candlesticks and vestments. Thank you, but we have enough (how many does he need?); the money would be much better spent by Cafod.

Sue Reynolds

Parishioner, Our Lady of the Rosary

I thought Elena Curti's article could have instigated a debate about how much change was acceptable in a parish as a result of the Pope's recent *motu proprio*. The resulting comments on Fr Finigan's blog were very offensive. The interview I gave you was a genuine attempt to express the very real concerns felt by some parishioners at the loss of community experienced by them as a result of the changes. At no time was the Tridentine Mass or the people who prefer it attacked by us. It was a great surprise to me that Catholics could be so vindictive and intolerant of other points of views held by people of the same faith.

Margaret Murphy

Parishioner, Our Lady of the Rosary

Elena Curti's piece on the liturgy at Blackfen created the impression that Fr Finigan has acted wrongly. The fact that some people got upset is not proof of wrongdoing. What he has introduced in Blackfen is wholly permissible as far as the Universal Church is concerned, he has taken steps to introduce the Extraordinary Form gradually, he has provided full catechesis all along, he has not been unkind or uncharitable to anyone. My conclusion is that it's not Fr Finigan who has been unreasonable, and the article failed to draw this out.

(Fr) Stephen Brown

*Chaplain, University of Bradford
catholic-chaplaincy@bradford.ac.uk*

Is it the priest's right to re-order a parish church and spend parish funds as he sees fit with no reference to his parishioners? Is it proper for a priest to re-shape a parish's customary and legitimate liturgy so that it conforms to some private devotional practices of his own? Just

what is the role of the parish priest?

The Code of Canon Law (Canons 528ff), describes the pastor as one who should strive to know the people entrusted to his care and recognise and promote the proper part which the lay members of the Christian faithful have in the mission of the Church. He should place the celebration of the Eucharist at the centre of parish life. The code recommends consultative parish councils and expects each parish to have a finance committee.

The participation of parishioners in the governance of their parish in Blackfen appears to be minimal and, sadly, the Eucharist seems to have become a focus of division.

Priests have to acknowledge that parishes belong to parishioners, under the authority of the local bishop. As pastors, priests are temporary custodians of parish property and, observing local custom, they are there to serve, to support, to encourage and animate the Christian community that has usually been established long before their arrival and will continue to worship long after their departure. If liturgical abuses exist, these should be corrected; if liturgy follows the norms laid down, the choices of parishioners should be respected.

Robin Houghton

*Molières-sur-l'Alberte, France
rehoughton@yahoo.com*

There will be no winners in the unhappy dispute dividing the parish of Blackfen. The losers will be the silent faithful for whom the Mass is all and church politics irrelevant.

Clive Flynn

Halifax, West Yorkshire

Editor's note: We received a substantial post-bag reflecting many opinions regarding the parish of Blackfen. Pressures on space preclude using them all. We also do not publish personally abusive letters, nor those that have been sent to blogs prior to being submitted to The Tablet.

Early baptism and school places

May I congratulate Mgr Patrick Kilgarriff on his excellent Parish Practice article (14 February). His welcoming approach and involvement of the local school community contrasts positively with the unwelcoming and exclusive approach of some within our church.

As a recently retired Catholic secondary headteacher, who worked in senior positions in Catholic schools in the dioceses of Westminster, Southwark and Brentwood, I know better than most the damage done to Catholic education as a whole by one or two governing bodies. The current dispute between governors of the Cardinal Vaughan Memorial School and their bishops puts them at odds with the governing bodies of virtually all Catholic schools in the dioceses of Westmin-

ster, Southwark and Brentwood. I know from experience that these governing bodies and their headteachers will all have spent many hours discussing and agreeing the admission principles now in use.

On a very personal level, the aspect of "The Vaughan" argument which most upsets me is that school's desire to give preference to those children baptised in the first year of life. Through no fault of their own my very young grandchildren were not baptised until age two and three, when my wife and I were granted legal parental responsibility for them. Since their baptism they have been very involved in their parish community and have attended weekly Mass. They attend Catholic schools.

The Cardinal Vaughan Memorial School serves the area of our west London home and in time we may wish them to be educated there. Why should they be considered second-class Catholics by any governing body?

Alan Whelan

London W7

mralanwhelan@hotmail.com

Questionable evidence

Melanie McDonagh (Books, 21 February) asserts that Newman "took against one unfortunate young man in his community for some fault of which the man was never aware and, by all accounts, ignored him for the next 30 years". What Melanie McDonagh really means "by all accounts" is an unsubstantiated account by a particular contemporary writer (whom she praises in her review), which has no factual basis. Newman's alleged achievement, anyway, would hardly have been possible physically in his small Oratorian community. As he once wrote, "lies have a wonderful vitality, like weeds".

(Fr) Ian Ker

Faculty of Theology, Oxford University

ian.ker@theology.ox.ac.uk

Dissent that devalues

Bishop Patrick O'Donoghue took some flak over his comments on the damage done in the Church by so-called "loyal dissent". Although sharing some of his concerns, Nicholas Lash's other comments on *Humanae Vitae* ("Could the shutters yet come down?", 24 January) come under that heading.

It was antecedently probable that the Church's teaching against contraception would be upheld even when reviewed. It was just that, the common teaching of the Church. Nearly 40 years before Pope Paul VI's encyclical, Pope Pius XI had restated this common teaching in *Casti Conubii* in condemning contraception recently permitted by the Lambeth Conference. As well as having dissenting members, the interminable meetings of the Pontifical Commission would not give one any confidence that acceptance of the morality of contraception desired by many was immedi-

ately obvious. Further, the lucid explanation of the encyclical on the unitive and reproductive values of conjugal love gave a coherence and guidance to the morality or otherwise of all forms of sexual activity.

The negative effects of contraceptive practice are plain to see. In our own country there are now more OAPs than children under 16; a local paper headlined how schools were short of several hundred children to fill reception classes. As G.K. Chesterton shrewdly observed "birth control" means no birth and no control.

The dissent of Nicholas Lash *et al.* from the Church's ordinary teaching devalues the loyalty of those devout Catholic couples who, despite the sacrifices involved, over the decades and today live by the Church's teaching. Nor is this dissent likely to make any easier the lot of those of us happily working in parishes who are trying to pass on the correct teaching in these matters. Pope Paul VI a prophet? Certainly. And Bishop O'Donoghue is right too.

(Fr) Kevin St Aubyn

Whitstable, Kent

Bishop Williamson on women

Pope Benedict's actions with regard to Bishop Williamson and his three colleagues have ignited passionate debate in *The Tablet* and elsewhere on the legacy of Vatican II, the place of excommunication in the Church and the harm done by this episode to Catholic-Jewish relations.

Several writers have noted that Bishop Williamson's views on women are also not precisely in line with conciliar or indeed, papal teaching, as expressed for example in the last Pope's papal letter before the Beijing Conference in 1995: "There is an urgent need to achieve real equality [for women] in every area: equal pay for equal work, protection for working mothers, fairness in career advancements, equality of spouses with regard to family rights and the recognition of everything that is part of the rights and duties of citizens in a democratic state."

In September 2001, Bishop Williamson wrote, "because of all kinds of natural reasons, almost no girl should go to any university ... true universities are for ideas, ideas are not for true girls, so true universities are not for true girls ... Europe, centre of Christendom, is collapsing because European girls are all being taught to go to 'university' and to 'put off' having babies! Woman and family are in desperate crisis - do we want to follow the swine over the cliff"?

It is possible that *Tablet* readers are not aware of the extreme and offensive nature of Bishop Williamson's writings on women. Yet these writings are an affront to Catholic teaching on the full humanity of women.

Jennifer Stark

York

jenniferstark3@yahoo.co.uk



The living Spirit

This divine institution [Lent] has been planned with great profit to our salvation, in a manner that the exercises of these forty days may help us to regain the purity of our souls, making up, in a way, for the faults of the rest of the year, by fasting and pious deeds. However, we must be careful to give no one the least cause of complaint or scandal, so that our general behaviour may not be inconsistent with our fasting and penance. For it is useless to reduce the nourishment of the body unless the soul departs from sin.

Pope St Leo the Great

(Pontificate 440-461)

There are many kinds of service - helping someone with a meal, working in a shop with customers, working in the public service. Generally when we are serving we are involved in helping in some way. And maybe getting paid for it. The service of Jesus was different: his service of us was to redeem us, make us whole, repair the broken sides of humanity, bring God as close to humanity as possible. The quality of his service led to pain and suffering for him, and eventually his death. His was service to the end, like the parent spending the day and then a lot of the night looking after a child. In serving others with love, we share in the life of God.

Donal Neary SJ

Praying in Lent

(Columba, 2002)

We should all have a place of peace
A place to stroll and think and pray
And mine is Wapping where I live
I am so grateful, Lord, for this beautiful
and fascinating place.
Thank you for walks by the River Thames
There is always something new
happening
Even if I did miss the whale ...
So much history - so many stories
But in the evening walking by the river
after a busy day I find I am restored
By the waters of Wapping I pause, think
and pray and meet you there.

Garth Hewitt

Holy Dreams to Feed the Soul

(SPCK, 2007)

1 March is the first Sunday of Lent