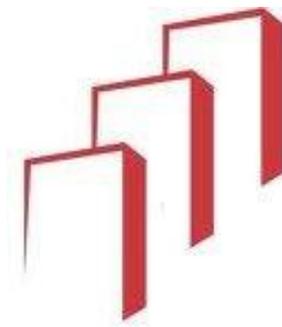


Milestones in a Ministry

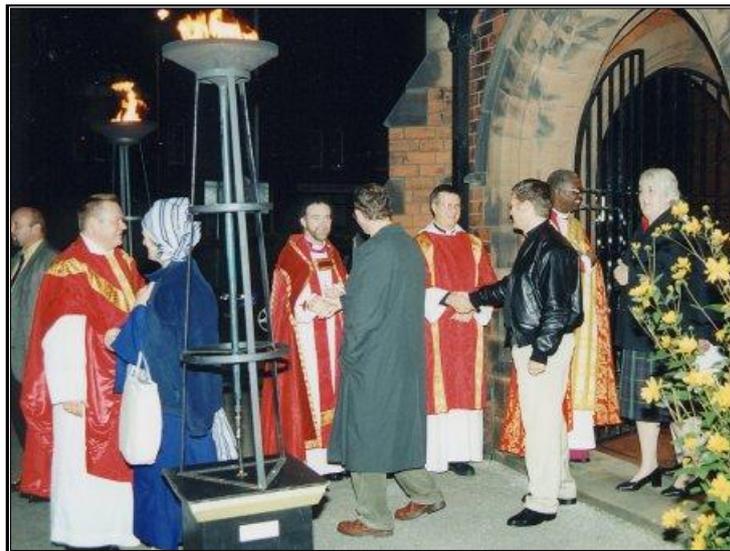


Fr Neil Kelley at St Faith's: 1999-2012

To mark the ending of his 13 years' ministry as Vicar of the United Benefice, we present year-by-year edited highlights, in words and photographs, of each year's events at St Faith's

AD. 2000

The Millennium year was the first full year of Fr Neil's incumbency, but also saw the culmination of St Faith's extended programme of celebrations to mark the centenary of our church. This milestone focuses on the spectacular events of the Patronal Festival in October.



The congregation leaving St Faith's at the end of the Patronal Festival Service and being greeted by Fr Neil, the Bishop of Liverpool, Fr George Gilford, and The Rt Reverend Emmanuel Gbonigi (Bishop of Akure, Nigeria). The flames provided a most spectacular sight and were the focus of much local interest.

A weekend to remember

The end of over two years of events marking the Centenary of St Faith's was celebrated in style at the Patronal Weekend of October 6th-8th, 2000. The actual centenary of the consecration of our church fell, of all days, on Good Friday this year, so it seemed a natural move to focus on St Faith's Day and go out with a bang.

All who attended (and well over a thousand total attendances were recorded at the various services and events) will surely agree that we did just that. A quite, solemn service of Benediction, with words from our first visiting preacher, Fr Channell of Cirencester, set the scene on October 5th. On the Patronal day itself, we filled St Faith's with people (320 of them), wonderful music and a matching pair of bishops. Bishop James of Liverpool preached memorably and movingly, recalling Lord Runcie and his place in our hearts, and making the traditional singing of *In our Day of Thanksgiving* even more poignant than usual. He was joined by Bishop Emmanuel Gbonigi of Akure, together with some of his visiting Nigerian party (those that could get visas, that is). Bishop Emmanuel blessed the fine new Centenary Banners. The liturgy was colourful, reverent and deeply affecting, and the wonderful music (Mozart's Coronation Mass; anthems,

and an inspiring range of hymns including the first airing of the Centenary Hymn) was provided from the back of church by the Crosby Symphony Orchestra, four excellent soloists and our own choir. The whole service, at heavenly length but never seeming long, was utterly unforgettable, even after the lavish food and wine for which we crowded into the Hall after the service was over. Its success bears further witness to Fr Neil's talents in the fields of liturgy and the planning and execution of music and worship.



Saturday saw *A Night at the Opera*, a concert of vocal items performed by four of Fr Neil's seemingly inexhaustible supply of imported musical talent. Paul Keohone, Allan Adams, Carole Marnoch and Dervla Ransom (from Covent Garden and English National Opera), ably accompanied as always by the vicar, gave us a first half of operatic extracts, singly and in various combinations. Then, after more interval lubrication, they performed a range of lighter music, of which no-one present will forget Allan Adams' hilarious *Have Some Madeira, M' Dear*, complete with moustache and evil leering. But the whole evening was quite magical, and the audience (over 200) were carried away on a wave of lovely melody from four wonderful voices. There at the end, a chance for us to belt out *You'll Never Walk Alone*. The rapturous applause throughout the evening, which passed by all too quickly, marked a truly unforgettable occasion. Crosby will rarely have enjoyed such a standard of singing.

Sunday's Dedication High Mass was a fitting conclusion to a not-to-be-forgotten weekend, as another full house worshipped with lively devotion. Fr Dennis celebrated the Eucharist while, at short notice, our very own Fr Charles (Billington) oldest surviving Vicar of St Faith's, preached in his own inimitable and long-remembered style. This splendid and wonderfully worshipful service ended, as our Sunday mornings do these days, with the entertainment of the Notices: this time featuring the Junior Church's holding aloft of their portraits of the Vicar.



Fr Neil with his predecessors at St Faith's, (from left to right) Richard Capper, Peter Goodrich and Charles Billington.

Following this, over 150 folk descended on Merchant Taylors' for a fine Celebration Lunch (school catering, to give the hard-worked church catering team a break). Here, our many guests and friends had time to share memories and compare notes in a convivial and relaxed hour or two. Here, as throughout the weekend, it was good to welcome, among other friends, Basil Horswill from Canada, a (very!) old member of our choir making a pilgrimage, with his wife and friends, to join us eighty years on. He had contacted me through the internet: truly an example of Ancient and Modern at one!

And then it was almost time for Festal Evensong and Solemn Te Deum. Bishop Rupert Hoare, Dean of Liverpool Cathedral, preached to us, and yet another colourful procession, wreathed in holy smoke, did the rounds of the church.

And at last it was all over. Reviewing in retrospect the years of planning and execution of our celebration, it is hard to believe it is at an end. We owe so much to so many people: Vicar, priests, readers, servers, choir, wardens, sidespeople, flower people, caterers, embroiderers, cleaners, printers, shifters and builders, publicists, centenary committee members, and of course, worshippers. All the fine family of St Faith's (and not a few from St Mary's!) have done so much over the years to make it all possible. Looking back to the great service that marked the centenary of the Foundation, then fast forward to the great services that have just marked the ending of it all, it seems like a great arch spanning those years, as well as spanning the century before it. Surely that arch has touched heaven.

But neither time, nor our creator God, stands still nor will let us stand still. Time and again from the pulpit recently we have heard our proper thanksgiving for the past put into its rightful context of hope and endeavour for the future. Without that looking forward, our looking back would be merely self-indulgence, a luxury we certainly cannot afford. And so we give thanks once more, in the words of the Centenary Hymn, and pray for the years ahead. And Dag Hammarskjöld's words may close our centenary book: 'For the past, thanks: to the future, **YES!**'



Bishop Emmanuel dedicated two Centenary Banners during the Patronal Festival and is here seen with Audrey Dawson admiring one of the two banners.

Audrey had the idea for the banners, worked on them and coordinated the project.

The banner makers on parade



**Lord, for a century of praise.
Here on this holy ground;
For Faith in whose strong sacrifice
Our watchword still is found,
We give you thanks, and ask your grace
For holiness like hers:
To serve your world and keep the faith
Throughout the turning years.**

(A verse from the Centenary hymn)



Earlier in 2000, Palm Sunday was marked by a colourful public procession of servers, clergy, choir and congregation from the grounds of nearby Merchant Taylors' School, across the A565 and down the road to the church.

Before the service, banners and palms were unloaded from cars, and, possibly for the first time in its august history, the school witnessed a biretta being worn.

The Nave Altar was decked with palms for the occasion



Another milestone of 2000 was the holding of the first of a sequence of yearly parish pilgrimages to the Shrine of Our Lady of Walsingham. Words and images from that event, together with the pilgrimage in the following year, will feature in next year's Milestone. Mention will also be made of the first United Benefice Dramatic Society Pantomime (oh yes it will...)

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