

Speaking of social events, several people have already mentioned to me about the possibility of organising different social initiatives in the parish. We have our monthly Prize Bingo, of course, which is an excellent fundraiser, and we recently had a 'Sale of Work'; it would be good to continue with these and other similar events. Some parishioners have also expressed an interest in establishing a St Columba's 'Social Calendar', with a programme of events, such as dances and parties – St Columba's Night, St Andrew's Night, St Patrick's Night, Valentine's Night (!) – together with Summer Barbecues, Harvest Festivals, and Christmas celebrations.

These are some of the ideas that have already been put to me, and I am more than happy to support any/all of them. Can we realise them? Of course we can! The only thing stopping us is ourselves. With the necessary enthusiasm, commitment, and a desire to take things forward in our parish, then 'the sky is the limit', as they say!

Parish Pastoral Council and Fabric & Finance Committees

In order to discuss some of these ideas, and to put them into practice, I will be forming both a consultative Parish Pastoral Council and a Fabric and Finance Committee in the near future.

And Finally..

Thank you for the warm welcome that you have given me, and for your tremendous support. I will do all I possibly can to ensure that St Columba's continues to flourish, and to offer the necessary pastoral and spiritual support for everyone concerned. Please do come and talk to me about anything that you would like to see here – this is *our* parish, after all!

With prayers and blessings for you and your families,

Fr Domenico

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Stained glass window depicting Colum Cille (St Columba), Iona Abbey.

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Peace be with you!

Dear friends in Christ,

To quote the Apostle Peter, "Lord, it is good to be here"! I am delighted to be among you once again, this time as your (first) Parish Priest. It is surely a tribute to this faith community, and to the way it is flourishing, that St Columba's is now a separate and independent Parish. With gratitude in our hearts, we give thanks to Bishop Hugh for his support and encouragement, and we additionally thank Fr James Bell, who for the last seven years has tirelessly served as Administrator of St Columba's.

A very big “thank you” is also due to all of you who contribute – and have contributed – in so many ways to the running of St Columba’s. I will resist the temptation to single out any individuals, so as to spare your blushes; you know who you are, and you know that your invaluable assistance is greatly appreciated. We have a very good team of committed volunteers, who work hard in the parish – but we are always on the lookout for more! Our community is one that is blessed with many extremely capable and talented members, and we welcome any contribution, large or small.

Children and Young Adults

As I mentioned in my homily for the Feast of St Columba, the road ahead for us is an exciting one. It is wonderful that we have numerous young families in the congregation, and it is our privilege – and responsibility – to support our children and young people in the development of their faith. This is so important, given the absence of a Catholic Secondary School in this area, let alone in our Diocese. We know that various demands are placed on children nowadays (schoolwork, music, and sports activities, to name but three). However, the spiritual dimension in our lives also deserves some ‘quality time’; it requires space to grow and mature, like a fine vine. It needs to be nourished regularly. How can we tend effectively to the spiritual development of our children, and how can we ensure that proper faith formation keeps apace with their other interests?

Serving at the Altar during the Mass is a very good way of giving our children the opportunity to participate actively in the liturgy. We have one new Altar Server – Iobe – who is doing an excellent job! Please God, he will be joined by others in the near future. Please think about encouraging your children to come forward and offer themselves as Altar Servers. As long as they have made their First Holy Communion, they can serve!

Youngsters sometimes begin to drift away from the Church after receiving the Sacrament of Confirmation. There are many reasons for

this, but usually it is because they do not feel that they are part of their community, or that they are not valued, or that the celebration of Mass/the Church has nothing relevant to say to them in their own lives. I hope and pray that St Columba’s can continue to offer our young people an appropriate, welcoming environment in which they can celebrate their faith, learn more about it, and feel really confident and happy to continue practising it. During my time as Assistant Priest in Inverness, I ran a Young Adults’ Group, and I would think that we could have a similar group here in our parish. I would particularly appreciate any suggestions and ideas from our young people themselves: please do let me know how we can support you, and help you to grow spiritually.

Ongoing Adult Faith Formation

Another area that is often highlighted by congregations in different parishes is the desire for ongoing faith formation. This is an important consideration. If we are to be effective evangelists in the world, we have to know what it is that we believe! Increasingly, other people will ask us about what the Church teaches, and therefore we should “always be prepared to make a defence to any one who calls you to account for the hope that is in you, yet do it with gentleness and reverence” (1 Peter 3: 15). I would like to introduce various talks and courses in the future – these would be relaxed and informative in nature, and would be open to anyone.

Social Events

Everyone appreciates a good movie in congenial company, and ‘Faith in Film’ evenings at St Columba’s is something else that we might consider. I know that these occasions have proved popular here in the past. Just bring yourself – popcorn is optional!