

Holy Cross, Topsham: Music

There is a strong tradition of music/singing at Holy Cross going back decades. In the latter part of Fr Robert Plant's time as parish priest (1998 - 2008) the 'old' pipe organ, bought by Fr Jaffa years before from a Methodist church, was deemed irreparable and so removed. In subsequent years, singing was accompanied on a portable electric organ or unaccompanied. In 2017 we were able to buy the delightful, historic Gray organ with funds raised by our parishioners plus very generous local support from the Topsham community and a Locality Fund grant.

Organ - built by brothers Robert & William Gray, London, in 1786. Mechanical action. Single manual keyboard of 54 keys, 27 pedals (late addition). Total 399 pipes, 66 wooden, 333 metal. Eight stops. Sufficiently versatile for solo recitals as well as accompaniment for choir but also playable by a competent pianist without using the pedals.

Strengths

1. The historic organ, which provides pleasing accompaniment to congregational singing at Sunday Mass and attracts occasional visits by organists from far afield. Annual organ recitals, solo or accompanied by cello or singers, have been very well attended by the local community and have raised funds for charities.
2. The congregation at Sunday Mass is familiar with a wide range of hymns and joins in enthusiastically with singing.
3. We are fortunate in having an able and loyal organist.
4. Currently, the choir comprises 8 individuals.
5. We have sufficient copies of *Laudate* hymn books, including full music editions for choir and organist.
6. Hymns for each Sunday are chosen by the same two choir members each week, conferring by phone after reviewing the Sunday readings, the recommendations in *Laudate* and our lists of familiar hymns, taking into account when each has been used.
7. There is a reserve 'Music Fund' (invested by the Diocese and generating an income of £200-250 p.a.), being money unspent after the fund-raising appeal to buy the Gray organ. This fund could be used to purchase additional music or to provide organ lessons.

Weaknesses

1. We have no back-up for our organist who reluctantly admits he is no longer young and relies on others to bring him to Mass from Budleigh Salterton.
2. Of our choir members, only 4 are able to attend at least twice a month. Everyone has a variety of commitments in life, is sometimes ill or injured, or simply needs a break. Occasionally the organist is joined by only one or two singers.
3. It is currently not possible to have any true choir rehearsals. Instead, we can only manage a brief 'warm up' of the 4 hymns chosen for that day in 15 - 20 minutes before Mass.
4. Stairs to the organ loft are steep and winding – a challenge to the elderly or anyone with mobility problems.

Aspirations

Ideally, we would like a back-up organist (or pianist) and 2 or 3 more singers able to make a regular commitment. The singers do not need to be able to read music – the main requirements are an ability to sing in tune, willingness to contribute with enthusiasm and behave as a team player.

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