

# *Interview with*

## FR VINCENT HARVEY

**How long have you been a priest? When you look back over your years of priestly ministry, which moments stand out most to you, and what are you most grateful for?**

I was ordained in 1979, and I'm coming up to my 47th year of ordination!

It is difficult to highlight specific high points in my exercise of priesthood! I have always enjoyed living and working with fellow priests, and working with deacons and laity! All of them have deepened my understanding of the church, ministry and priesthood, and enriched the exercise of Priestly ministry. Some of the friendships created have lasted into retirement.

For some years I was a Vicar General which was a challenging but 'eye-opening' time. To work closely with the Bishop (+Crispian Hollis and then briefly with +Philip) was a privilege: to see and share the issues they had to deal with made me appreciate the pressures a bishop is under.

One of the high points in the last 47 years would be the building of St Bede Church in Basingstoke. In particular the work of consultation with all parishioners in the area, in order to know that the direction we were moving in was correct! Not only was the consultation about the possibility of closing Mass centres, and building one church,

it also included consultation about its design! From day one, right up to the opening of the church, everyone in the parish was involved (in the sense of ongoing consultation).

I would say that the high point in my ministry was working with others, learning with and through them, and experiencing the fruits of priesthood!



**What were your expectations of retirement?**

I approached retirement with hesitation, as I am a bit of a workaholic! Nevertheless, as I had seen too many priests continue beyond retirement age and begin to allow development and forward movement to slow down, I was determined not to allow that to happen! I was blessed in that my retirement was not delayed, in fact was about a month early!

# CONTINUED...

As I come from Guernsey, I wanted to be near the sea. Some of my colleagues and friends were surprised I did not wish to return to Guernsey, where three of my brothers were still living (one has since died) and some of their children and grandchildren. I decided to stay on the mainland, because of the many friends I have made since beginning my training in 1972. I was 'dreaming' of being near the open sea, until the small bungalow that I'm in became available! The road I am on, is off a dead end road and I can walk to the small woods near me in two minutes, and within seven minutes walking be at the waterside, which is part of the huge expanse of Portsmouth Harbour!

## **What do you enjoy about being retired compared to active ministry?**

I enjoy my own space. Throughout my priestly ministry I have mainly been in large parishes, so always with other priests. I enjoyed being with other priests, as I feel it is more human and healthy to be able to share ideas and concerns with others! Nevertheless that does mean not having, completely, one's own space!

Also living without the pressure of work! I am supplying in various parishes, about three weekends a month: I am meeting a number of people to give them spiritual direction; and I have given the odd talk here or there!

Being retired means that all of this takes longer to do or prepare, certainly in my case! Nevertheless there is not the pressure one has when one is in a parish! I enjoy reading, walking (when my back allows me to do so) and catching up, as already implied, with family and friends!

## **What advice would you give to priests who are approaching retirement?**

I would say "grasp it". The Diocese, in particular the Priest Retirement Team, are excellent at helping with that transition. In fact, they continue to keep an eye on one's welfare. I am aware that the reduction in active priests creates many issues. Nevertheless, I do not think the answer is for priests, or deacons, to stay on beyond retirement. There will always be, of course, the exception, for various reasons! There are other solutions to the ongoing development of parish life, in terms of various ministries that can be undertaken by lay people! I think this has not been fully explored, for various reasons! It works in the mission fields (Africa, South America and other places), so should work here also. It means, of course, breaking the mould and having courage!

***"I would say that the high point in my ministry was working with others, learning with and through them, and experiencing the fruits of priesthood!"***