

## PRAYER GROUP 35<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATIONS. 17<sup>th</sup> October 2015

On 17<sup>th</sup> October, the “Life in the Spirit” Prayer Group based at the Parish of St Joan of Arc Farnham celebrated its 35th anniversary. It has been meeting weekly with almost no breaks since 1980. Thirty six present and past members of the group and their guests gathered in the Parish Centre for a shared lunch and a chance to catch up with each other.



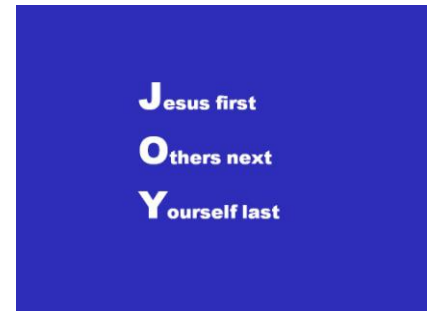
Alastair Emblem, who has led since 1992, gave the following quick history of the group since its foundation, followed by greetings from former members and others from the Catholic Charismatic world who have helped the group over the years. A time of joyful praise and worship was followed by a talk on the “Joy of the Gospel” by former prayer group member Carol Harnett, now a trainer of catechists. She encouraged everyone to pay attention to the powerful teaching of Pope Francis in his Exhortation “Evangelii Gaudium”. She pointed out that each of us needs to deepen our personal relationship with Jesus, so that, as a joy-filled and welcoming community, we can be more effective witnesses of God’s love. The afternoon ended with tea, a time of Adoration, and evening Mass in the Church.



## PRAYER GROUP 35<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATIONS. 17<sup>th</sup> October 2015

These are some brief highlights of this prayer group over the last 35 years. This will be a nostalgia trip for some of us oldies, and hopefully an interesting history lesson for newer people:

The group was started approximately 35 years ago by former PP Fr Michael "Smiler" Albon RIP 1981. He apparently had a sign on his study wall reading "JOY" – Jesus first; Others second; Yourself last. Joy has always been a foundation of our group, with a strong emphasis on praise in all our meetings. We are delighted that Joy is such a strong theme of Pope Francis.



After Fr Albon's untimely demise, the group moved out of the Presbytery to Madeleine Fowler's House until 1984



From early 1984 the group was hosted and led by Peter and Margaret Lloyd till 1991



In summer 1984 Alastair & Jenny joined the group



The group formed the prayer support for the Parish participation in the Diocesan Renew programme 1988-90.



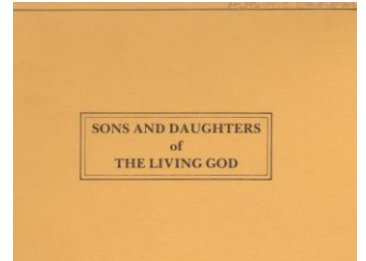
## PRAYER GROUP 35<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATIONS. 17<sup>th</sup> October 2015

In Autumn 1991 Fr Jim Martin became Parish Priest and allowed us to use the Church Sacristy for meetings.



April-May 1992 we ran the first Life in the Spirit Seminars jointly with Holy Family parish at Heath End.

Around that time, Alastair took over leadership



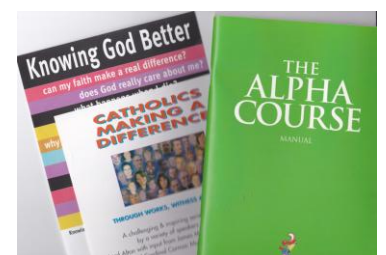
In 2001 Canon Tony Whale became Parish Priest and allowed us to meet in the Presbytery sitting room. In 2009, thanks to Fr Tony, the new Parish Centre opened and since then our regular weekly meetings have been in the Foyer room.



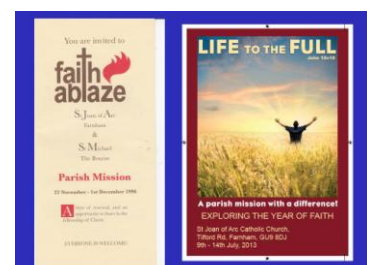
Most years we put on some sort of faith deepening course for the wider parish and beyond: Numerous different versions of Life in the Spirit;



Alpha and Cafe courses; Healing Ministry Training;



...and 2 Parish Missions in 1996 and 2013



## PRAYER GROUP 35<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATIONS. 17<sup>th</sup> October 2015

Other courses, Taize evenings, Holy Hours, Healing services, ecumenical services



Numbers have fluctuated constantly over the years. A couple of times we have reached a high as 21 but currently we seem to average out at between 9 and 12. For a long time we simply referred to ourselves as the Parish prayer group, because we were the only one. And although at heart we have always been a charismatic prayer group, for many years we were a bit shy about being too overt, for fear of putting people off.

But recent years have thankfully seen the development of a Rosary Group, a Mothers Prayers group, Healing Ministry and a Christian Meditation Group. When Fr Niven came 3 years ago we were encouraged to be more forthcoming about our charismatic nature. Around that time we started calling ourselves the Life in the Spirit prayer group. And of course we are delighted that Pope Francis is so enthusiastic about charismatic renewal.



***"You, Charismatic Renewal, have received a great gift from the Lord. You were born of the will of the Spirit as a current of grace in the Church and for the Church."***  
- Pope Francis, June 2014

***We have had a number of messages from former members and other people associated with the group over the years, so I will now read these out and add a few comments.***

Our thoughts and best wishes will be with you on that day. We have much to be grateful to the St Joan's Prayer Group for, both from the Group and from many of the individuals we met and who have influenced our prayer lives. **Bill and Cherry Smith.**



I remember the prayer group with great affection and as a very important moment in my own spiritual journey. **Will Newton**  
(Dr William Newton, Associate Professor of Theology, Franciscan University of Steubenville, Austria)

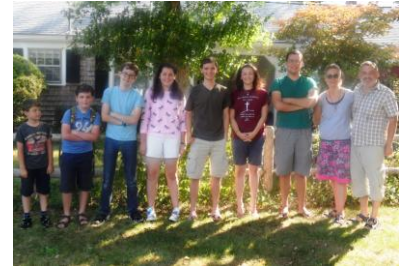


It's a great witness that the prayer group has faithfully met over all this time especially when many groups come and go. **Phil Kershaw**  
(Member of Cor et Lumen Christi Community)



## PRAYER GROUP 35<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATIONS. 17<sup>th</sup> October 2015

Well done guys, what an achievement. You have done a wonderful job- 'persistence in prayer.' Think of the amount of prayer that has been generated in the group. Wow! I think the prayer group for me was my first experience of praying with others outside Mass. So that was a big thing for me. I think I joined it when I started to pray regularly - still going. Thank you for that... I remember going when I was pregnant and then bringing the baby to the group and being conscious of the noise. **Helen Harrold**



May God bless you and pour out his anointing on you all for the exciting times ahead! **Jenny Baker.** (*Regional Coordinator, Celebrate conferences; Member of English National Service Committee for Catholic Charismatic Renewal.*)



Congratulations it is so encouraging to see those who have persevered in the Spirit. I am sure that over your long history, the Lord will have touched so many lives through your faithfulness and service. Unfortunately I am unable to be with you for your special day but I assure you that we will be united in Spirit. I will remember you all in a particular way that day. With all good wishes **Michelle Moran.** (*President of International Catholic Charismatic Renewal Services; Founder of Sion Community.*)



Over the many years that we have been involved in some small way with the Farnham Prayer group either as speakers at various events or simply by knowing this faithful and faith filled group of brothers and sisters in Christ our own lives have been mightily enriched in so many ways. With all our love and prayers and regrets that we can't be with you. May Our Lord bless you all abundantly both now and in the years ahead. Thank you all so very much for being a light shining in the darkness for us and for so many others. With love and prayers **Geoff and Gina Poulter** (*Former Directors, Catholic Bible School*)



"I am grateful to the Lord for your 35<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, and we pray with you for a new outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon each member of this 'Life in the Spirit' charismatic prayer group at St Joan of Arc in Surrey" Blessings, yours in Christ, **Oreste Pesare,** (*Director of International Catholic Charismatic Renewal Services, Vatican City.*)



## PRAYER GROUP 35<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATIONS. 17<sup>th</sup> October 2015

"Sue and I send you our warmest congratulations and best wishes on the remarkable occasion of your 35th anniversary! This is a wonderful milestone and a great tribute to your commitment and faithfulness over the years. I always enjoy coming to speak to you because I get a real sense of your continuing enthusiasm and desire to keep growing in the Life of the Holy Spirit.

You have faithfully presented the Life in the Spirit Seminars many times over the years (I think I first came to speak in 1991) and as you probably know, Pope Francis spent time at the recent Worldwide Priests' Retreat in Rome, during which he said he would like every parish to run the Life in the Spirit Seminars regularly, because Baptism in the Spirit is so important. So you are a great example of what he is now requesting - well done!

Alastair invited us to join you today for your celebrations, but sadly a prior commitment (the Celebrate Weekend in Torquay) made this impossible. We will, however, be praying for you and giving thanks for your faithful witness over so many years. Please keep going - you are an answer to the needs of so many people in your area!

Yours in the love of Jesus,

### **Charles and Sue Whitehead**

*Charles Whitehead is founder of Celebrate Conferences, Chairman of the International Charismatic Consultation ([ICC](#)); Past President of International Catholic Charismatic Renewal Services ([ICCRS](#)); Former Chairman and Life Member of the English National Service Committee for Catholic Charismatic Renewal (CCR); Co-chairman of the Charismatic and Pentecostal Leaders Conference; Director of [Premier Christian Radio](#) and the [Christian Healing Mission](#). He has also been made a Papal Knight of St. Gregory the Great.*

Our sincere thanks to all of those, and we remember all of them in our prayers today. We also remember those former members of the group who have gone to be with the Lord. We pray for them, as indeed they are surely praying for us today and every day. We bow our heads for a moment and remember:  
Fr Michael Albon; Margaret Campbell-Grey ; Madeleine Fowler; Chris Bell; Peter Lloyd; Nick Mills; Shirley Hildreth; Margaret McBrien.

Eternal rest give unto them O Lord, and let perpetual light shine upon them, May they rest in peace. May their souls and the souls of all the faithful departed through the mercy of God rest in peace. Amen.

And last but by no means least, we have received a greeting from Bishop Richard...



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**Rt. Rev. Richard Moth**  
**Bishop of Arundel & Brighton**  
**High Oaks**  
**Old Brighton Road North**  
**Pease Pottage**  
**West Sussex**  
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**Tel: 01293 526428**  
**e-mail: [bishop@dabnet.org](mailto:bishop@dabnet.org)**

**To all in the Parish Prayer Group**

On this 35<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of your foundation, may I take this opportunity to thank you all for your prayers for the Parish of St. Joan of Arc, for your local community, for the Diocese and for the wider world.

Your presence and service to the parish since your foundation by Fr. Michael Albon has borne much fruit in so many ways. The courses and programmes that have been arranged have added much to life of the parish, but much of the effects of prayer go unseen. There is so much for which to give thanks.

Please be assured of my prayers for you all,

With every Blessing,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Richard Moth'.

17<sup>th</sup> October 2015