

Vicar's End of School Year Report

Another school year is over.

For many, it's been another year of sleepovers, children's parties, school homework, lost, found and lost again uniforms, and after-school clubs. For some, it's been a busy year of tutoring, 11+ examinations and the beginning of the transition to secondary school. For all, it's been a hectic year. Now is a time to let out a collective sigh of relief and give thanks to God for the successful completion of another school year.

As Vicar of St Michael's, this is my first 'school year' in Highgate and I have been amazed at how quickly it has gone. The passage of time from the falling leaves of autumn through the freezing snow of winter and the green shoots of spring to the heat of summer has been a blur. It seems like only yesterday we pulled up from Cambridge and settled in Highgate with all the trepidation and excitement that moving home entails.

Nothing prepares a person for a particular role better than being in that role. As vicar, one of the first things I have learned is that an essential part of my role has to do with schools and the school year. The church has links with St Michael's Church of England Primary School, Highgate School and Channing School. This means that there is a fair amount of interaction between the church and schools throughout the school year.

The church is used by local schools for their special services. We also receive classes from different schools who visit the church as part of their Religious Education curriculum.

One of the joys of my role has been taking regular school assemblies at St Michael's primary school or giving the odd talk at Highgate School. In many ways, taking assemblies is similar to giving a sermon in church. The main difference is that the 'congregation' at school assemblies is made of mostly of school children.

There's an innocence about children which can make them a 'terrifying' congregation for any priest. You know where you stand with children. You know if an assembly went well or if it didn't. You know because the children show you by their enthusiasm at the assembly.

As the school year has progressed, I have been moved by how an increasing number of schoolchildren say 'hello' to me as I walk about the streets of Highgate. Some even call me by name! It is gratifying to know that in the space of a school year, I have moved from being a 'stranger' to being a familiar face they are comfortable enough to say hello to in public. That's one of the privileges of being a priest.

The need for greater interaction between St Michael's church and our local schools cannot be overemphasized. The extraordinary success of the Music Marathon which we hosted at St Michael's church during this school year is a case in point.

The Music Marathon saw St Michael's open its doors to the community from morning till night. It showcased the musical gifts and

talents of many children from all the local schools and beyond that, it was a great medium for enhancing greater community cohesion in Highgate.

At the end of my first school year, I appreciate the particular role schools and the school year play in my ministry in Highgate. I am encouraged by the existing interaction between St Michael's and the local Highgate schools and it is my hope that we can build on these existing links and develop them further.

Jesus set great store by children, saying in Matthew's Gospel: "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these" (Matt 17:14). Children are important to Jesus and they must be just as important to us also.

If we are to be faithful to Jesus Christ, St Michael's must be a church that stands securely alongside the many schools in Highgate catering for the personal and spiritual wellbeing of all our children. We must also be a church that's a welcoming place for children and a space they associate with having fun.

At the end of this school year, we give thanks to God for his mercies, his steadfast love and his manifold blessings on us and on all our children. To God be the glory.

Have a wonderful and refreshing summer holiday!