

Real unity evident as churches share base

WHEN fire struck at St Wilfrid's RC Church, there was one obvious way for local Anglicans to help.

Worshippers across the road at Holy Trinity Church, Ventnor, offered their building so Roman Catholics could celebrate Mass there. And it has worked so well that it could become a permanent arrangement.

It's a mark of how good the relationships are between Christians of different denomi-

nations in the town. The churches also work together on a holiday club and the clergy meet regularly for breakfast.

The major fire last December gutted the inside of the church and caused the roof to collapse. The building remains fenced off and is unusable. The congregation at Holy Trinity stepped in with their offer straight away and Roman Catholic mass is now celebrated at 5pm each Saturday in the Church of England building.

"It was an automatic thing for us to make the offer," said

the Rev Graham Morris. "We only use the building for an hour on Sunday mornings and an hour on Thursday mornings, so it made sense for them to use it.

"It's worked well, and there has been some crossover between services. Those Catholics who couldn't go to Shanklin celebrated Christmas with us, and there was a Catholic mass on Easter Sunday here immediately after our service.

"A lasting memory for me is seeing worshippers from the two churches sharing preparations for Holy Week. You wouldn't have imagined that they were two different congregations.

"We are enthusiastic about the possibilities for the future, and one of those possibilities is to negotiate a permanent arrangement."

Father Claro Conde, who is the RC priest covering an area from Brading to Atherfield, said: "We have three options: we could rebuild the church completely, we could rebuild part of it, or we could continue to use Holy Trinity for services and use the local school hall for smaller meetings or weekday mass.



The Rev Graham Morris (left) welcomes Roman Catholic priest Father Claro Conde to Holy Trinity Church, Ventnor

"We are exploring all these avenues, and some practicalities have to be addressed. But it is quite exciting."

There was a history of Roman Catholics worshipping in Holy Trinity - they did so when St Wilfrid's was being repaired after suffering from subsidence.

There's also a history of working together on the Ventnor Beach Mission, which will be re-titled as a holiday club this summer. It's one of the longest-running ecumenical

projects on the Isle of Wight, and up to 140 children will take part in the event between July 22-29.

"There is a real sense of collegiality among the clergy," said Graham. "And if we can share our church with another denomination, it really helps our building to work for us.

"The vision of our PCCs is that our churches should become real spiritual centres for the local communities, and this is a significant part of that."

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Stand and deliver!

"STAND and deliver - your money or your life" was the demand of those threatening highway men (and women) of old, so history tells us.

But, alas, having completed a grand total of three months as your diocesan secretary, I have discovered that there are people out there who see my role as having certain similarities!

I had served in parishes as PCC secretary, churchwarden, and assistant curate, but had never picked up that perspective of the diocesan secretary.

Certainly the job description in the application pack, among much else, included management of the diocesan budget; but there was no mention of a requirement to be able to ride a horse, or look fetching in a three-cornered hat.



the last word

by the Rev Wendy Kennedy
Diocesan secretary

And so far the only 'weapon' issued to me has been a pretty mean looking stapler.

One of the big surprises has been just how 'hand to mouth' our finances really are.

At a quick glance our accounts seem to show we are well shod, but the hard truth is that the vast majority of our assets are, in fact, the houses in which our clergy live. Selling

the vicar's house to pay the vicar is not really one of my options.

So, as I sit here pondering the task of explaining the 2008 contribution needed from parishes, I am really hoping you believe, as I do, that what Christ's Church is already and, crucially, what it needs to become for the world, is worth us all stretching for.