

Diversity Support Group Update

July 2025-June 2026

By Sylvia Wachuku-King

The fact that the Parish Pastoral Council has decided to adopt this Parish Review and Family Picnic approach again this year to bring parishioners together is proof that it worked well last year.

It's amazing how fast another year has flown again during which we have tried to promote peace, friendship and togetherness while respecting diversity among members of our parish community and those of our collaborators through participating in various activities and events. We continued to operate informally, organised four events of our own and supported two of other parish groups. We have held meetings as and when necessary and possible and have kept in touch via our WhatsApp group chat and friendly telephone calls.

We lost one of our members Irene Siepka, some of us attended her funeral and may her soul continue to rest in Perfect Peace.

Like in previous years a few of our members and collaborators contributed foods and services towards the International Food stall at the Autumn Fayre held on 28th September thus adding to the overall impressive takings that have gone towards maintenance and repairs of Our Lady's Parish.

Our annual Diversity Festive Bash was held on 13th December with an increase in attendance greater than the previous year. There was the usual singing of carols led by keyboard music provided by a member from the Ascent Group, shared delicious international foods and exchanged Christmas gifts. We also used the occasion to welcome Father Cajetan, who had just arrived to take up the position as our new Assistant Priest.

On Friday 6th March 2026 a few of our members participated actively in delivering the World Day of Prayer that was led by the Ecumenical Women's Group of Nigeria.

On Sunday 8th March we celebrated our 10th Birthday that began with us attending the 11.30am Mass at which the hymn **Ten Years of Grace and Unity** assembled by one of our members, edited by Father Keith and sung to the tune of **Praise, My Soul, The King of Heaven** was launched. We also had a party for which our friends donated drinks and delicious foods from different countries. One of our members assembled photos taken over the years to produce a interesting video that was shown at the party. There was dancing, reading of birthday greetings sent in by friends including the Eden Project, our main Big Lunch collaborator and sharing of stories related to the growth and development of the group. Souvenirs comprising a prayer assembled by another member and made into prayer card magnets, a 10p coin and sweets donated by the family of one of the members were distributed to attendees at the party. Copies of the song and prayer are at the end of this report.

Our 10th birthday gift by the Eden Project was nomination of the group to feature in BBC 1 Songs of Praise. With permission from Father Keith, the TV filming crew came down from Manchester to do the filming on Wednesday 15th April. The event took the form of a mini Big Lunch, with interviews, singing and cultural dancing and was well attended. Our friends from the Eden Project also came down to witness and help set it up.

The actual Songs of Praise episode was aired on Sunday 31st May. It was an excellent programme having been superbly edited to feature scenes that would be viewing audience friendly and favourable feedback has been received from family and friends all over. The television filming team has also expressed their delight with interacting with us. It remains an extraordinary surprise for us, one that we will never forget soon.

Despite having a celebratory event in March and a filming party in April our friends still supported us in organising a very successful and well attended Big Lunch on Sunday 7th June in line with the national Big Lunch weekend. We are presently collecting feedback and suggestions on how to improve next year.

As we start another decade, we will be consulting with other parish and community groups to explore ways to continue operating in a sustainable respectful way in the future. Meanwhile, we thank all our members for their different contributions that have enabled us to continue to stay strong and progress successfully together. We also thank our Parishioners, other parish groups particularly the Social Club and the Parish Pastoral Council for their support, not forgetting Father Keith, Father Cajetan, Rachel and Stephanie for everything particularly creating the enabling environment for us to flourish. Above all we thank Our Lady of the Annunciation for being our guard and guiding torch.

Much love and blessings galore to all of you.

Warmest Sylvia

Ten Years of Grace and Unity

(Tune: Praise, My Soul, The King of Heaven)

Happy birthday, ten years growing,
Through all joys and trials, we stand
God has kept our faith renewing,
Joining heart and joining hand
Here our diverse gifts are cherished,
Journeying to the promised land.

Cultural gifts we now are sharing,
Showing love in all we do;
Through our prayers and mutual caring,
Building friendships strong and true.
Through these moments faith is sounding,
Offering glory, Lord to you.

In this parish faith is growing,
Priests remind us we belong;
Grateful hearts to God are flowing,
Joining now in thankful song.
Through Your love forever bind us
Keep us faithful, true and strong.

Assembled by Our Lady of the Annunciation
Cultural Diversity Support Group
Edited by Father Keith Sylvia

Prayer for the 10th Birthday of The Diversity Support Group:

Dear God,

We celebrate 10 years of Our Lady of Annunciation Cultural Diversity Support Group,
Growing in faith, embracing our past with gratitude.

Thank You for the journey, the friendships, and the love shared,

A testament to Your presence always among us.

As we look forward to the future with hope,

May Our Lady guide us, inspire us, and bless our way.

May we continue to spread love, warmth and unity, and grow in faith, wisdom and understanding.

Through Christ our Lord. Amen