

# FINAL REPORT OF FR. PHILIP INCH, EPISCOPAL VICAR FOR PASTORAL DEVELOPMENT, TO THE ARCHBISHOP CONCERNING THE FUTURE OF ST. ANNE'S CHURCH, FRESHFIELD

Dear Archbishop Mc Mahon,

I am writing this letter to present my summary of the consultation and discussion with the parishioners of St. Anne's that took place in April and May 2021, and at an open meeting in August 2021.

In Advent 2020, the three former parishes of Our Lady of Compassion, St. Anne's and St. Jerome's became one parish under the patronage of Our Lady of Compassion. It has been suggested that the new parish would be served by two churches, Our Lady of Compassion and St. Jerome (the two largest) and that St. Anne's should be taken out of sacred use.

The consultation brought 13 responses to Mgr. Walsh, the parish priest, and 4 directly to you. At the meeting held on August 4th, 62 parishioners were present.

It is only right to say that in all the responses, written and verbal, the love for the church building is evident. Comments have been made about the prayerful atmosphere of the church. But what is striking is the fact that there was much more concern about, and love for, the community of people who gathered. A realistic appraisal of the situation was generally accepted (with one or two strong exceptions). There was a plea to find a way of keeping together the strong sense of community that has been a real feature of the life of St. Anne's for many years. This has been a sustaining reality for many of those who commented.

The building is loved, but the changing circumstances and the reality of numbers (priests and people) have enabled people to reluctantly accept that a hard decision has to be made. I think this can be summed up in one comment made at the August meeting;

'Formby has three churches, each with a small community. Let's accept the reality, we cannot sustain three churches. Let us come together, around our parish priest, not as three communities but as one strong parish. Three weak parishes cannot grow, but one strong parish can'.

If St. Anne's was to remain closed, something would be lost, but something also would be gained. Some of the practical questions that emerged were;

Could transport be provided for those who do not have cars and would find it difficult to get to Mass?

What will happen to the buildings at St. Anne's?

Is there a covenant on the land and what about the Weld Blundell family and the ownership of the church?

Could Formby have another priest to assist Mgr. Walsh?

Can we have a final Mass at St. Anne's?

Could there be a permanent memorial acknowledging St. Anne's in one of the other churches?

Could St. Anne's be used by community groups or another Christian denomination?

In the light of all the above, I think it is fair to say that it is with sad resignation that the people of St. Anne's see the closure of the church as inevitable, but also as a step on a new and hopeful road.

Fr. Philip Inch