



Parish Priest: Rev. Mgr. John M Walsh

Parish: Our Lady of Compassion

Tel No: 07104 873230

Email: ourladyofcompassionformby@rcaol.org.uk

Web: ourladyofcompassionformby.org.uk

16 May 2021

Dear Friends

'It never rains but it pours!' This was my first sentiment on hearing the news late last night that Public Health England had ordered surge testing here in our town after the so called Indian variant was found, and infections climbed rapidly. It was almost surreal to see images of Formby people queuing for testing on Sky News this morning!

What a pity we have come to this point. Only a few weeks ago the virus was virtually suppressed here. So much hard work and sacrifice! We had even begun tentative arrangements for welcoming more people back to church and seeing restrictions lifted next month. Then this. We are reminded that this virus is vicious and persistent. We have been told that being fully vaccinated does not completely prevent us acquiring the virus and passing it on to others. Indeed, the full efficacy of the vaccine is only now being tested.

In short, this is a setback and a regrettable one at that. The coming weeks will require all of us to be extra cautious in our behaviour. We are all desperate to get back to some normality. As we have now seen, this won't happen when our guard is relaxed and risks are taken. Let's make one final push.

My thoughts have been with the community of St. Anne's over the past few weeks. The consultation which is about to end has brought many submissions by email, letter, phone and conversation. I have read each and every submission several times over and made notes of each conversation. I want to thank each one of you who sent in a submission for all that you wrote and communicated. Every single submission is being collated to be sent and read by the Archbishop. Once this has been done, I will write to you about the next steps after the diocese has been in touch with me.

I have to be honest that, even though I have put a brave face on it, I have found the whole process difficult on a number of levels. Having been Pastor of St. Anne's for four years, and having lived there with Fr. Bradley for the same time (although I had to relocate to St. Jerome's at the beginning of the first lockdown to avoid bringing the infection into Fr. Bradley who was shielding), I have a myriad of wonderful memories. A beautiful little church, wonderful, prayerful and kind people and a lovely spirit.

I realised, when I was appointed to St. Anne's, that it was already at risk of closure. I say this because the dramatic drop in priest numbers and vocations made it an inevitability. But I had hoped for several years of ministry there. Then COVID struck and accelerated a process that was almost certainly underway before I arrived. But it doesn't make it easier. How do we talk about the ending of an almost 90 year story of worship, faith and community? The answer is, on one level we do and on one level we don't.



Our Lady of Compassion

18 School Lane, Formby, L37 3LW

Served by the Churches of Our Lady of Compassion and St. Jerome

Roman Catholic Archdiocesan Trustees In. Reg. Charity No: 232709



Parish Priest: Rev. Mgr. John M Walsh

Parish: Our Lady of Compassion

Tel No: 07104 873230

Email: ourladyofcompassionformby@rcaol.org.uk

Web: ourladyofcompassionformby.org.uk

Page 2

Yes, the church may close and only the Archbishop can make that decision. The memories are tied to the building. But on another level, the story continues in the people and in the continuation of what is essential; faith. It is this that is passed on. The community of St. Anne's are like orphans and feel homeless, so now two things must happen.

First, I am resolved that should the Archbishop decide to close the church, then a full farewell final Mass will be celebrated in St. Anne's Church, which will enable St. Anne's community to enter their church again, celebrate Mass together and say farewell to their church. I will also provide a 'bun fight' afterwards so that we can all be together as a community one last time. But we must await a final decision of what is to happen next.

Secondly, there must be no spiritual orphans in Formby. Not only do we await the Archbishop's decision about St. Anne's, but also his plan for St. Jerome's. The new parish created by the Archbishop last December was purposefully placed under the patronage and protection of Our Blessed Lady. The church of Our Lady of Compassion will become more and more our home, the home of the whole Catholic community. We must now, slowly but surely make a home there under Our Lady's protective mantle. How do three communities gradually become one community? Humanly speaking, it is very difficult. In God's plan all things are possible. Only He can bring this about. But we know that whatever we commend sincerely to Our Lady, she will most certainly obtain for us.

So many intentions! We will need a lot of patience and faith going forward. But in the end, it is God's work. Let's remember that when we get tired or dispirited, or when the news about the virus is getting us down.

After all this, we have so much to look forward to!

God bless you and your loved ones!

Father John



Our Lady of Compassion

18 School Lane, Formby, L37 3LW

Served by the Churches of Our Lady of Compassion and St. Jerome

Roman Catholic Archdiocesan Trustees In. Reg. Charity No: 232709