



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

19 July 2021

Dear Friends

WELCOME TO THE NEWLY MERGED PARISH OF OUR LADY OF COMPASSION, FORMBY

It might seem strange to welcome you to something that began its life 7 months ago! But since our Archbishop decided to merge the three previous parishes of Our Lady's, St Anne's and St Jerome's into the new parish of Our Lady of Compassion, we have had very little opportunity to enjoy normal parish life. Today, the restrictions placed on us by the government to protect the population from Covid have been lifted. The decision is a controversial one and the debate will rage on for many weeks I am sure. Responding to this decision, the Archdiocese has issued guidance for all parishes. You will have had all these details given to you over the weekend Masses and on our usual information platforms. Our Lady's and St Jerome's will return to their normal configurations. Stewards will be replaced with welcomers who will be quietly on hand to assist. Face coverings must still be worn, and we ask you to gel your hands as you come into church.

But how do we move forward from here? The summer holidays have now begun, and I know that some of you will be going away for a very well earned break. So things will remain on the quiet side. But once September begins, and the schools return, I expect things to quickly start to take shape. So let me update you with where things are at the moment.

ST ANNE'S CHURCH

As you know, there will be a meeting of St. Anne's Parishioners on Thursday, August 5th at 7.30pm at St. Jerome's Parish Centre. After this meeting, the Archbishop is expected to make his final decision about the future of St. Anne's Church.

ST JEROME'S CHURCH

When the decision about the future of St. Anne's Church is made, a decision about the future of St. Jerome's church will also be made. I have been told that the church is likely to remain open for the foreseeable future because of its proximity to the school. The decision will be made about how exactly the church is to be used. I know that there will be frustration about the time it is taking to reach these decisions, but there are many churches across the diocese facing a similar situation and awaiting similar decisions. Hopefully, we will not have to wait much longer.

THREE INTO ONE?

No, this is not a reference to the theology of the Blessed Trinity! But it is still something of a conundrum. How do three parish communities merge into one? All those traditions, histories, ways of doing things, and people? It is a huge ask! Traditions and memories don't just disappear overnight.



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

They should be remembered and cherished. We can only make a beginning and move forward in faith. But a number of things need to be laid out clearly so that we all know where we are.

There are some sensitivities, anxieties and even upsets across our Catholic community at the moment. The community of St. Anne's is facing the possible loss of their church after 90 years of worship and life there. That pain has to be acknowledged. The community of St. Jerome's are anxious and upset about the future of their church and what forthcoming decisions will mean for them and the use of the church. The community of Our Lady's is anxious about all the things they were familiar with seemingly disappearing. Add to this the shutdowns of the pandemic, seemingly slow decision making by authorities, village gossip and the fact that we are all greater worriers than we used to be, all adds up to a painful, even toxic mix. If you are worried, anxious, upset, then I hope these words will help bring a little calm and reassurance. How do we move forward? Well, at a time when community identities are shifting and changing, we should begin by focusing on our first and primary identity. To be clear about what we are about. We are Catholic Christians, disciples of Jesus Christ, brothers and sisters, members of the Church, the Body of Christ, part of a diocesan family. This is our foundation, our deepest identity. It transcends everything, even change itself. All that we do begins and ends here.

Now, we will all have different ideas about how all this works in practice. But one thing is clear. Jesus Christ must be at the centre of our community. His face must be seen and his words must be heard. This is the reason we gather for Mass, our central act of worship. So it seems to me that we should begin by asking ourselves; is Jesus clearly seen and heard in our Catholic community? Is it clear to those seeking him that he is here, in us, in all we do?

HOW DO WE ORGANISE OUR PARISH LIFE?

Only when we ask and answer the questions raised above can we then consider how we plan out our parish life, since Christ has to be at the heart of every aspect of our structures. I am placing three key areas at the heart of our new parish;

Evangelisation

In other words, the preaching of the Gospel. This is not simply my preaching. This is the outreach of every single parishioner to others around us. It is the seeking out of those who are looking for deeper meaning, acceptance, faith. It is accompaniment. It is the patient listening that people need.

Catechesis

Put simply, this is the sharing of our faith. It is formal and informal sharing. It is the passing on of our faith to children, young adults and all seekers.

Welcome

This is not just welcoming people as they come through the church door. This is a basic attitude that permeates everything we say and do. It is the determination to avoid any kind of exclusivity, of an inward



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 3

looking community. It is following the vision of Pope Francis for a parish community; seeking others on the margins, avoiding staleness, welcoming to all.

Underpinning all this is the celebration of the Sunday Eucharist, the Mass, on the Lord's Day. Everything we do flows from this and to this. It is the most important moment of each week for our parish community. How do we build our new parish from these key areas? It is certainly going to need a common effort. But most importantly, the nearer we draw to the Lord, the more these gifts will appear. Some of you may be scratching your heads and thinking; well, it all sounds rather high brow and complicated, all we want to do is go to Mass and say our prayers. And that is exactly what I hope you will continue to do! These are the most important things. But I am speaking here about ways of thinking, ways of looking at the reality around us, ways of being faithful disciples. We might think that to deliver these new outlooks, we need a proliferation of committees and meetings and organisation. Some of those things are necessary. But we should never be in doubt. The preaching of the Gospel, the passing on of the faith, the welcome and inclusivity of our community, can only begin to appear and flourish as we draw closer and closer, both as a community and as individuals, to the Lord.

STRUCTURES

The Archdiocesan Synod sat in June. Its deliberations and decisions were far ranging and can be read on the Synod 2020 website. The outcome? A new Pastoral Plan for the whole Archdiocese, to be presented by the Archbishop at the end of November. This Plan is expected to introduce big changes across every parish, deanery and the structures of the Archdiocese itself. In short, significant change is coming. The priests have been asked not to create any new parish structures until the Plan is published.

But we cannot stand still until November. We have to begin to co ordinate the basic functions of the parish and get things started. But obviously, we cannot pick up where we left off 18 months ago. So much has changed. As a new parish we have to begin again as we learn to accommodate each other and learn to live with each other. Previously, Our Lady's had a Parish Council, whilst St Jerome's and St Anne's did not. A new Parish Council cannot be formed until the Archbishop's plan is published and we know his directions.. So I am putting into place a simple plan to move us forward.

I am gathering a small number of people from each of the former three parishes. This is not a Council, but a number of 'forerunners' if you like, to scout out the ground of our new parish, take stock and co ordinate the basic outreach of the parish. I will let you know who they are shortly. They will be looking for people to help, serve and assist. More details will be published in the coming days.

EXPECTATIONS

Since the reopening of the churches at Easter, there has been a growing demand for the Sacraments. The most obvious example is the four First Communion Masses celebrated recently, with a very large number of children. But demand for baptisms has grown quickly, with about 30 now waiting to take place. Four weddings are taking place this month. The number of funerals have been growing for some time. In addition, our two Schools are looking for liturgical celebrations in or for the School, which has led to two



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 4

Leavers Masses being celebrated in the last few days. We shall see the number of weekday Masses growing shortly.

All of this is very welcome and very encouraging. However, Formby is now served by just one priest. We remember the days when the three parishes were served by a number of priests. I am very grateful that the Archbishop has appointed two deacons to our parish who are a real blessing. We are also blessed that Father Bernard and Father Bradley are able to say Mass when needed, as well as the very generous priests at Mill Hill. But that will not always be the case. In short, our expectations will have to adapt.

A FINAL WORD

This has been a long letter. I wanted to set out a simple and basic map for our way forward. The map will grow and develop over time as we walk together, pray together and learn together in the coming months. We will need more faith, more patience and more love. Above all, I believe that we will need more forgiveness and healing. I know that some have found the transition of parish priest difficult. I know that some are finding the merging of our parishes difficult, and I know that some are finding the prospect of others getting involved and perhaps moving into their 'territory' very difficult. This is almost always the case when one parish priest leaves and a new one arrives. There is no easy way through it. I want to involve and include all who want to serve and work for our community in the coming months.

That all now being said, let us make a new start together, looking forward to the future, asking for the gifts of love, unity, forgiveness and peace. Our Catholic community has immense potential. Let's start tapping it for the good of all.

God bless you all!

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