

DIOCESE OF SALFORD



Wardley Hall, Wardley Hall Road, Worsley, Manchester, M28 2ND

7th August 2020

A Pastoral Letter for the Parishes of Saint Charles Borromeo, Rishton, Our Lady and Saint Hubert with Saint Wulstan, Great Harwood and Saint Mary, Clayton-le-Moors

My Dear Brothers and Sisters,

In January 2017, I published a document entitled *Strengthening our Presence as Church: A Journey in Hope*. It contained proposals for the re-structuring of parishes within the diocese. There were just a small number of cases where it had not been possible at that time to determine the best alignment for a particular parish and these included your own situation. So I asked you to give further thought to this and, in particular, to consider the possibility of closing Saint Charles' church and of only using one of the Great Harwood churches for Sunday Mass.

I wrote again to you in March 2017, expressing my gratitude to all those who responded to this further period of consultation, and I reported that, whilst it was still proposed that these three parishes amalgamate to form one new parish, future use of the four church buildings could be determined when consulting further about this amalgamation.

During the past three and a half years, there have been various meetings and discussions with priests and people across these three parishes to further test out the proposal for this amalgamation. There was also a desire to give the people of St Charles parish the opportunity to look at how they might keep the church open. Several factors converge now to bring us to a moment of decision about the future of this church.

The change of parish priests and the discussions I referred to above give us the opportunity to make progress in the very near future with implementing the formal process of consultation about the proposed amalgamation. Creating a new parish is the first step that we must consider.

Recent surveys of the buildings have enabled us to see the extent of the damage resulting from a long period of deterioration and to assess the cost of the work required to bring them back to a suitable level of repair. We are looking at around £450,000 for the church and £250,000 for the presbytery. It is hard to see how a Mass going population of around 80 to 90 people per week would be able to raise this sort of money and it seems unjust to saddle future generations with such a huge debt.

More immediately, following the closure of our churches in response to the Covid-19 pandemic, I do not see how St Charles Borromeo church can reopen, even in the short-term, without a considerable amount of money being spent to make it a safe and hygienic place for private prayer or public worship. It must therefore remain closed for the foreseeable future and, quite possibly, permanently.

We will only be able to make a final decision once the outcome of the discussions about the amalgamation of the parishes is known, so I am ready to issue the letter launching the formal process of consultation as soon as it is practically possible to hold the necessary meetings. As part of that process, serious consideration needs to be given to the use of and need for the four church buildings that would be within the proposed parish.

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Any hope of keeping St Charles church open would depend on the new parish agreeing to finance the necessary repairs. Equally, any permanent closure of the church can only take place once the territory of the present parish has been amalgamated into a new or neighbouring parish.

Given the state of disrepair into which these buildings have fallen, it is imperative that we take all the necessary steps to act speedily in pursuing the formal consultations required for determining the future.

Whatever your feelings may be (agreement, disappointment, relief or sadness) I would ask you to engage in the growth and development of the Church in this Diocese, where each one of us is an ambassador for Christ and a missionary disciple. Let us all use the challenges of this present time to build a Church for future generations.

“Stay with us, Lord, on our Journey”

With my prayers and good wishes,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'John' with a cross at the end.

+ John Arnold
Bishop of Salford

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