

Extract from St Mary's Bulletin for 3rd May 2026.

From Father Josua Hilton, Parish Priest – St Mary & St Alban

For those of you who did not hear last week's news, the Bishop has announced that upon the retirement of Fr Bob Owens, the parish priest of St Bernard's, Halifax and of St Theresa's, Queensbury, that I will be appointed as the Parochial Administrator of those parishes, in addition to my responsibilities here at St Mary's and St Alban's. This is because, at present, the Bishop does not have a priest available to send to fill these vacancies.

This, however, will only be part of a temporary and interim arrangement. From August, it will no longer be possible for a priest to say Mass at the church in Queensbury and in the fullness of time, the future of the buildings there will have to be considered. For the time being, there will have to be a slight adjustment in the Sunday Mass schedule to allow for the provision of a Sunday Mass at St Bernard's. This will be facilitated as follows: There will no longer be a Sunday morning Mass at St Bernard's. The morning provision will consist of the two morning Masses at St Mary's, 9:30am and 11:00am. Instead, a vigil Mass will be celebrated at St Bernard's at 5:00pm on a Saturday evening. To assist me in the provision of this Mass, Mgr Micheal McQuinn, the Parish Priest of St Columba's and St Malachy's will be discontinuing his vigil Mass at St Malachy's. He and I will then take turns in offering the vigil Mass at St Bernard's and the 6:00pm Sunday evening Mass at St Alban's, on a week on week off basis. I am very grateful to him for his generosity and support in this matter.

As I said above, this will only be a temporary arrangement. The Bishop has asked that in the coming months, that we, as a whole Deanery, enter into a prayerful period of dialogue and consultation to discern together how we might best provide for the needs of the Catholic community here in Halifax and across Calderdale. This will mean looking carefully at **all of the parishes** in the town and assessing which Masses, buildings and structures are best placed to serve our needs going forward.

Decisions of this nature are never easy. We all know that change can be difficult and unsettling but as St John Henry Newman once famously wrote "To live is to change, and to be perfect is to have changed often". – I was looking through the safe here in the presbytery the other day for a baptismal record and I came across a draw full of cuttings and papers of parish history. (It's very interesting and I'm thinking of ways to preserve and exhibit them) but what struck me was just how much the Catholic life of this town has changed over the last 200 years or so. In the 1820's, there were very few Catholics in Halifax indeed. A priest would ride in on horseback from Leeds and offer Mass in small room above a hotel that stood at 62 Woolshops. Over time, the Catholic community of this town grew and flourished and so St Mary's was built and subsequently the other churches in the area. The priests and people of those days wrote that story and it is now our job to take up the next chapter. Mercifully we are not reduced to riding a horse from Leeds and renting small rooms above hotels, but things will inevitably have to change. And that is no bad thing.

As I said from the pulpit last week, to quote the late Fr Bernard Funnell, "Bishops do not close churches. Lapsed Catholics close churches." – I don't want to hear anyone complaining about the Bishop or the Diocese. This is our issue and it is our responsibility to find a resolution. All of us know Catholics in our own lives who sit at home on a Sunday, or do anything rather than go to Mass. We

have to reach out to them. We have to understand that churches, like so many aspects of life work on a 'use it or lose it' basis. It is no good having a child baptised and not returning again until it is time for First Communion or even attending Mass once or twice a month or simply when we feel like it. When churches are full, they stay open. That is to say nothing of our spiritual need of the Eucharistic assembly.

It's my opinion that this process will end in a very positive result for the Deanery. With the reshaping of structures I believe we have a rare opportunity for the reinvigoration and renewal of our Catholic life as a town. The future, to me, looks very bright indeed. But it's going to have to be a team effort.

God bless you all,

Fr Hilton