

NEWSLETTER

Parishes of St Anthony of Padua, Onchan; St Joseph, Willaston; St Mary of the Isle, Douglas

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Third Sunday of Easter **18th April 2021**

(Year B for Sundays) (Cycle I for weekdays)

Dear Parishioners,

At last lockdown is easing. For some the virus has had life changing consequences – the loss of family members or separation from close family at a time of bereavement or serious illness. Some have lost their livelihoods. Young people have had their education disrupted and their future employment prospects blighted. Grandparents have been separated from their grandchildren. Those living alone have been isolated. Each of us has their own story of how the pandemic has affected them. And, of course, our pattern of regular Mass attendance has been disrupted. In every case the year 20/21 has been a lost year. The end of the current emergency for me will be when I can freely visit family and friends in the UK and return to take up duties immediately on my return. For others a return to normality will be carefree holidays in the sun. Will I ever be able to ride my motorbike to France and Spain again?

From Monday churches can reopen. It will be good to have parishioners back in church again. Many will be taking a cautious approach to their return to Mass. This is understandable and, indeed, wise. Those wearing masks should be respected. **Hand sanitising and reasonable social distancing will be in place and parishioners will be encouraged to socialise after Mass outside the church building rather than within. Holy Communion will be given under one kind and in the hand only, avoiding skin contact with the minister. The sign of peace will also be exchanged without close contact.**

During the lockdown things have changed in ways that will never be reversed. Fr Brian Dougherty retired in the early days of lockdown. This week Fr Michael Thompson leaves the Island to take up a new appointment in Whiston and is being replaced in Castletown and Port Erin by Fr Joseph Kiganda. This leaves the Island with just three active priests.

St Joseph's Church in Willaston has been closed for over a year. On my arrival on the Island in 2015, I was advised that the future of St Joseph's was in doubt. And certainly, the feeling of the building gave me that impression. In an attempt to reverse this trend, I embarked with the help of Deacon Graham on a process of modest and gradual refurbishment. Over time the sanctuary was reordered with the tabernacle restored to its central position and the beautiful carved statue of St Joseph the Worker given more prominence. The sanctuary was recarpeted with the new carpet covering the entire length of the main aisle. New windows were fitted in a style more in keeping with that of a church. The more welcoming feel that resulted was eventually reinforced with the introduction of a new heating system. The 'new look' St Joseph's was officially 'relaunched' on 11th February 2018 with a Sunday afternoon Service for the Sick and Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament followed by Afternoon Tea. It was an enjoyable occasion well supported by parishioners including those from St Anthony's and St Mary's.

Numbers attending the Saturday 6.00pm Mass increased as a consequence but many of the top up now attending were those who saw St Joseph as a convenient alternative to existing Mass times in other churches. Over time attendance at the Saturday evening Mass has disappointingly stabilised at an average of 40 people. The retirement of Fr Brian now calls into question a 6.00pm Saturday evening Mass at St Joseph's in addition to an existing Mass at 5.00pm. People are prepared to travel to a Mass that suits them and the majority attending Mass at all our churches travel by car. Others walk, some travel with friends or take public transport and some make use of St Anthony's minibus in normal times.

Numbers at daily Masses at St Joseph's reveal the same pattern. With some exceptions, the handful attending are as likely to be seen at St Anthony's or even St Mary's on other days. Prior to lockdown, provision of 10.00am Liturgy of the Word at St Joseph's was dependent on Eucharistic Ministers from St Anthony's.

I have always maintained that our parishes are seen to include those Catholics who are infrequent attenders. We have a mission to them also. Curiously, they can be the most resentful when business as usual is not maintained on the rare occasions they wish to return. For them the church building provides a focus for their faith that only openly expresses itself at life's key moments – for funerals, weddings and baptisms. But we have to be realistic. The call on these moments at St Joseph's are few. Over the last five years there have been 12 funerals, no weddings and 3 Baptisms. (These figures compare with 63 funerals at St Anthony's and 207 at St Mary's; 6 weddings at St Anthony's and 32 at St Mary's; 33 baptisms at St Anthony's and 214 at St Mary's).

There is always sadness at closing a church. I felt the same when the church where my grandfather's funeral took place and where I was baptised was closed, even though it was replaced by a new building 200 yards down the road. Closure of the church at St Joseph's will inevitably be interpreted by some as an abandonment of the people of Willaston. St Joseph's nursery provides a valuable service to young families. St Christopher's, the charity based in the former presbytery, provides a range of services for the Island's vulnerable children and young people. Whatever decisions are taken we need to ensure that a living legacy to the church's commitment to social care in the area remains.

Over the years, sixty-four churches have been closed in the Liverpool Archdiocese. This includes Pulrose. Of the remaining almost 200 churches, three quarters are currently closed and a number will not be reopening after lockdown. This is a challenge faced throughout the UK and Ireland. Ultimately the decision on the future of any church rests with the Archbishop and his Council of Priests. ***Please let me have your views, comments and suggestions by email or letter to St Mary's parish office.***

In the not too distant past, the area covered by Sacred Heart Pulrose, St Mary 's Douglas, St Joseph's Willaston and St Anthony's Onchan was cared for by six priests. Numbers of priests have diminished to the point where I am the single active priest. The fall in the number of priests is matched by a fall in church attendance. New parishes were created to physically accommodate the numbers of those who saw weekly Mass attendance as a necessity for all Catholics. Those days are over. Are we experiencing a return to the 19th century when St Mary's was the single mother church serving a minority committed Catholic congregation? What is the Holy Spirit telling us?

There are no rewards in managing decline. Unpopular decisions have to be taken. The Mass is central to our faith. It is my unwelcome duty to ensure that there is reasonable provision for the celebration of the Mass for all those who wish to attend. That provision has to be sustainable into the near future. I have been praying to the 'Sleeping St Joseph' about this. I would also ask your prayers for me. *Fr John*

Masses for the coming week
All Masses from St Mary's are livestreamed

Saturday 17th April Third Sunday of Easter	5.00pm	St Mary's <i>Livestream only</i>	People of our Parishes
Sunday 18th April Third Sunday of Easter	11.00am	St Mary's <i>Livestream only</i>	Jimmy Stack, deceased
Monday 19th April	12.10 noon	St Mary's <i>Public Mass</i>	Hannah Mary Hayes & family
Tuesday 20th April Blessed James Bell of Warrington	12.10 noon	St Mary's <i>Public Mass</i>	Antoinette Abraham, anniversary
Wednesday 21st April St Anselm	12.10 noon	St Mary's <i>Public Mass</i>	Ann Osbaldeston, deceased
Thursday 22nd April	10.00am	St Anthony's <i>Public Mass</i>	Angela Ruane, deceased
	12.10 noon	St Mary's <i>Public Mass</i>	Aisling Smith, deceased
Friday 23rd April St George	12.10 noon	St Mary's <i>Public Mass</i>	Rozsa Isaba, deceased
Saturday 24th April Fourth Sunday of Easter	11.00am to 12.00 noon	St Mary's	Confessions and Exposition
	5.00pm	St Mary's <i>Public Mass</i>	Mary McCarthy-Glynn, month's mind
Sunday 25th April Fourth Sunday of Easter <i>Day of Prayer for Vocations</i>	9.30am	St Anthony's <i>Public Mass</i>	People of our Parishes
	11.00am	St Mary's <i>Public Mass</i>	Barbara & Brendan O'Friel, 80 th birthdays

- **April 22nd is Earth Day.** Now the largest secular observance in the world, it is marked by more than a billion people every year as a day of action to change human behaviour and create global, national and local policy changes. Churches worldwide back this movement wholeheartedly. The Global Catholic Climate Movement (GCCM), created in 2015, was the combination of two transformative events that would shape how the Church and humanity responded to the ecological crisis: the *Laudato Si'* encyclical release and the Paris Climate Agreement. More information at <https://catholicclimatemovement.global/>
- **Mill Hill Missionary Red Boxes at St Joseph's:** Jo Webb has been in touch to say 'Thank you' to parishioners for donations totalling £164.20. If anyone would like their boxes emptied please contact Jo on 670205. Thank you.
- **Thank you from CAFOD:** Thank you for your generous donations to Family Fast Day. In Zimbabwe the community vegetable garden which your donations helped provide is growing well. During the pandemic families have survived on the vegetables. Your support has also helped to provide sanitisation in family homes. CAFOD offer a live Children's Liturgy every Sunday at 10am. Registration via <https://cafod.org.uk/Education/Children-s-liturgy>.

This week Pope Francis said the following:

"Holiness is not only for some 'specialists of the divine', it is the vocation of all believers. Union with Christ, which mystics like St. Teresa experience in a special way, we also receive through Baptism. The saints stimulate and motivate us, but it is not for us to literally try to copy them. Holiness cannot be copied because that could lead us away from the unique and different path that the Lord has for each one of us. What is important is that each believer discerns his own way, each one of us has his own way of holiness, of encounter with the Lord."