



Diocese of Plymouth
From the Office of the Bishop

Statement to Holy Angels Church, Chelston and to The Assumption of Our Lady Church, Abbey Road – 7th March 2021

You will be aware that Fr John Smethurst will be celebrating his final Mass as Parish Priest here on 15th August. Whilst he will continue to live in the area, in his own home, he will no longer be exercising care of the Parish from that date. I want to put on record our immense gratitude to Fr John for all that he has given here at Chelston these past years. I know that he is much loved and that you will miss his priestly pastoral care of you. You will appreciate that it is only right that at this stage of his priestly ministry, Fr John no longer has the responsibility of the pastoral care of a community. Whilst we hope he will remain well for many years to come, I know we will want to wish him well for the next stage of his priestly ministry where he will no doubt be available for priestly supply in this part of the Deanery, having submitted his resignation from ecclesiastical office as required by the Canonical requirements of the Church.

I am sorry to say that there is no priest, diocesan or Religious, presently in the Diocese, available to come to Chelston after Fr John departs. Nevertheless, it is important that we seek to ensure that all the people of Holy Angels continue to receive pastoral and spiritual support. This will come under the oversight of Fr Colin Groombridge at the Assumption of Our Lady Church, Abbey Road, who will be your new Parish Priest. A Sunday Mass will continue to be celebrated here and the timing of this is to be worked out later. The deanery clergy are also looking at the provision of a Sunday evening Mass at a Church in the area. There will need to be close collaboration between the community here and the community at Abbey Road and I thank Fr Colin for taking on this new responsibility.

Although there is no priest from the diocese available to come and work at Chelston, we are hoping to have a priestly presence here by establishing Holy Angels as a Shrine Church, with a priest, and possibly a seminarian, from the Institute of Christ the King Sovereign Priest ministering here. An integral part of the Institute's charism is using the traditional Latin liturgy for Mass and the Sacraments. Holy Angels would be a place of devotional and spiritual life not just for the local community, but for people further afield in the Diocese. There will be Eucharistic adoration every day, the Celebration of Morning, Evening and Night Prayer daily, as well as opportunities for Confession.

So, whilst the normal pastoral needs of parishioners are met by Fr Colin, the Shrine and the Institute will maintain a Catholic priestly presence and devotional life in the Church. We see this as being an integral part of the mission of the Church in this area, and complementary to other aspects of the life of the local Church. The priest, or priests of the Institute – because others will visit at times – will hopefully also assist with pastoral care in the hospital and the local primary school. This will all be done in collaboration, and with the guidance and co-operation, of Fr Colin.

This pattern of a Shrine Church, overseen by the Institute, in a local parish, is already happening in other places in this country - in the Dioceses of Lancaster and Shrewsbury. It has proved to be very successful, and the presence of the Institute in those places is much appreciated. The priests of the Institute are very respectful of local people, and participate well within the local deanery, and collaborate well with local clergy.

One of their number will be joining a meeting with the Parish after Easter, in 5-6 weeks' time, when you can hear more about them, their work and their charism as well as ask any questions. I am sure that you will make him, and other members of the Institute, welcome.

I believe that this 'new beginning' for the Catholic community can be one filled with many graces and blessings, not just for the local Church but for the whole Diocese. I thank you for your cooperation and ask for your prayer and support for this new chapter in the life of the Catholic community here.

+Mark O'Toole
Bishop of Plymouth