

This letter is the start of a consultation about the future of the church of the Most Holy Redeemer, in Bishopdown, Salisbury.

As those who regularly worship at Holy Redeemer will have noticed, it currently faces significant structural problems; it is hard to heat effectively in the winter, hot in the summer, and the roof visibly has holes in it. When it rains heavily, as it has recently, water pours in.

These problems were looked at as part of our most recent Quinquennial Review of the buildings in our parish. Holy Redeemer is now 60 years old (it was consecrated in 1964) and the roof needs to be replaced. The particular construction method used means that it cannot just be patched up – it is not a matter of replacing some loose tiles, but of re-roofing the whole building. Unfortunately, the costings we have done suggest this is likely to be prohibitively expensive, with estimates ranging from half a million to a million pounds.

This raises obvious questions about whether we can actually afford this – we would need a huge fund-raising campaign to raise the money – but also about whether that is the right thing to do, and a good use of our energy and limited resources. Holy Redeemer is currently used for Mass only twice a week - Wednesday at 10am and Saturday at 6pm. The Wednesday Mass is attended by up to 30 people; to a significant extent these are the same people who attend daily Mass wherever it is celebrated around our city. This Saturday Vigil Mass is attended by between 70 and 90 people. Most of those attending do not necessarily live especially close to the Church – like all our churches it draws a congregation from all over Salisbury and from the outlying towns and villages.

Given that St Osmund's parish has three church buildings within 2 miles of each other; and that we are currently preparing for a future where fewer priests will serve larger areas, we are asking the question whether our mission is best served by raising sufficient funds to repair and maintain our Holy Redeemer church.

It goes without saying that this would be a very difficult and sad decision to have to take, given the fondness which many of us share for this beautiful and community-built church. However, facing this situation, the feeling of the clergy and team is that we cannot justify the amount of money it would take to keep the church building open. We are therefore beginning a consultation, to see whether the rest of our parish community shares our discernment.

Bishop Declan has granted permission for us to, *'begin an open consultation in the Parish of Saint Osmund for the proposed closure of the Most Holy Redeemer Church, Salisbury with a view to redeveloping the land (in conjunction with the Diocese).'*

Therefore, we will begin a formal consultation during the month of May and you will be invited to complete a questionnaire and attend a briefing meeting – much as we did last year with the merger. The collated evidence will then be sent to Bishop Declan for his deliberation and then, if he decides to proceed, on to the Council of Priests for approval or otherwise. It is our intention to have the collated evidence with the Bishop by the middle of June 2023.

We hope you understand that the prospect of closing any church is deeply troubling and upsetting. As a pastoral team we have prayed and reflected and simply don't see any other way forward; for the reasons given above.

Please let this consultation be an opportunity not only for you, but for the Holy Spirit working through you, to provide the Bishop with the evidence he needs to make a decision that is in accordance with the wishes of the Holy Spirit. Then all will be well!

God bless you.

From Fr Anthony and the Pastoral Team here in the Parish of Saint Osmund's.