

SALISBURY CATHOLIC CHURCHES

HOLY REDEEMER + ST GREGORY + ST OSMUND

PROPOSED MERGER OF THE PARISHES OF MOST HOLY REDEEMER, ST GREGORY & THE ENGLISH MARTYRS, AND ST OSMUND

UNDERLYING RATIONALE AND CONSULTATION PROCESS

1. Introduction Many Diocese including our own face a future with fewer priests. Priests are ordained to provide pastoral and priestly leadership and care through the Ministry of Word, Sacrament and Love to a Catholic Community which finds the hallmark of its identity in the Sunday celebration of the Mass.
2. Nationwide it is likely that we will only be able to keep the Mass at the centre of our Catholic life if we gradually cluster and then merge some parishes. Already it is not possible to provide a Priest in every parish - currently existing - in our Diocese.
3. The fundamental purpose of such clustering and merging is to sustain and promote vibrant Eucharistic and Evangelising Communities, and to steward wisely the gifts of God having carefully read 'the signs of the times'.
4. Our very Catholicity demands an openness to one another and a sharing of life and mission. There is no room for narrow parochialism in the Catholic Church. Every parish is an integral part, a living cell, of the diocesan family, and every parish must be open in faith and love to all the other parishes, especially neighbouring ones.
5. Only the Bishop has the authority to establish, alter or suppress parishes (See Canons 120-122, 515.3). Bishop Declan has granted permission for this consultation process to take place.
6. Over the last 25 years this Diocese has considered and discussed a future with fewer Priests on numerous occasions. The most recent was a diocesan-wide consultation process in 2009 that resulted in the recommendations contained in the document 'Parishes in Communion for Mission'. This document endorsed a process that was already underway in Salisbury; namely that the Parishes of St Gregory, Holy Redeemer and St Osmund's become a 'parish group'. This has been successfully achieved and the three parishes have been known collectively as 'Salisbury Catholic Churches' for nearly fifteen years now.
7. Whilst retaining separate Parish Councils, the Parishes already share one Parish Priest. This has meant co-ordination of Mass times and preparation for the time when we may be required to combine into a single parish, assisted, when possible, by other Priests (newly-ordained, temporary visitors from overseas, retired, Ordinariate, etc). A fundamental principle is that there are to be no 'priest-less' parishes.
8. Aim The aim of this paper is to state clearly the rationale for the Consultation Proposal and to set out the process by which a Consultation will elicit a response to the proposal from the people of Holy Redeemer, St Gregory's and St Osmund's¹ in order to assist the Bishop in his deliberations.
9. Background The Parishes of St Gregory, Holy Redeemer and St Osmund's already share in common:

¹ It will not encompass the chapels at Whaddon and Downton because they are administered from and therefore included in St Osmund's. It assumes for the time being that they will continue as outstations until further notice.

- a. An administrative hub based at the church of St Osmund's.
- b. A single Finance Committee with representatives from each parish.
- c. A combined Sunday, Holy Day and weekday Mass timetable.
- d. A jointly-funded Outreach Worker and associated Outreach activities
- e. Preparation for the Sacraments - RCIA, Marriage, Baptism, First Holy Communion and Confession, and Confirmation.
- f. Joint Estate Management, Safeguarding, Health and Safety
- g. Joint communications platforms: one newsletter, website, email and social media feeds.

10. Underlying Assumptions

- a. Whilst there are currently two Priests and three Deacons in Salisbury, clergy numbers are declining. There is no sign of a reversal in this trend in the short to medium term.
- b. The same is true of congregations which, as well as declining in numbers, for various reasons, are aged and ageing.
- c. Income from collections, essential for the maintenance of church buildings and the administrative support structure, has also declined; this decline is projected to continue.
- d. It is incumbent upon the Parish Priest and Leadership Team to seek an appropriate, unambiguous, legal structure that meets the present situation and will be relevant for future generations in order to properly play our role in the pastoral ministry of our Bishop.

11. Core issues

- a. Whilst the clustering of churches has been broadly well received, the lack of any formal merger creates ambiguity: between that pertaining to the group and that pertaining to the individual Parish; an area which can be exploited by some to the detriment and confusion of the whole. Merging will clear the ambiguity.
- b. The financial viability of each Parish varies. Over the next five years projected costs for each church are substantial and individual Parishes may not be able to meet the costs. Costs will be more easily and fairly managed under a merger, where all funds are held and shared in common.
- c. Merging three Parishes into one will provide stability, security and clear direction for the future. It will enable us to take a more strategic approach to the use of our buildings.
- d. Clustering has brought increased efficiency, improved communications and a sense of common identity and purpose across the Parishes. Merging will maintain and continue this sense of common identity and mission and yield further efficiencies.

12. Generic procedure for merging parishes After a process of open consultation with each Parish involved, and with the Diocesan Council of Priests, a date for merging is to be agreed with the Bishop, and publicly announced.

13. The Bishop may write a letter to each parish involved, and either the Bishop or a Vicar General may visit each parish.

14. Transparency is important throughout the process. Many Parishioners have been engaged in this process informally for some time and have made good progress. This now needs to be formalised.

15. The effective and smooth merging of parishes is very much dependent on the goodwill of Priests and People together.

16. It is very important that members of each Parish community be kept fully informed throughout the process, and be offered the opportunity to contribute their thoughts and ideas.
17. For the effective implementation of the process a number of supporting documents will be prepared:
- a. Consultation Schedule will outline planned dates for:
 - i. parish announcements
 - ii. communications by email, newsletter, website and social media
 - iii. a programme of open meetings to be held in each parish and online
 - iv. collation and submission of responses to Bishop Declan
 - b. Questionnaire entitled 'Proposed Merger of Our Parishes'. To be made available in print, by email and online to all parishioners. Included in the questionnaire will be the key questions:
 - i. What are your fears and hopes about future merger?
 - ii. Is the current Mass schedule/locations the most appropriate one?
 - iii. What would be the most suitable times for these Masses (not just for individuals but for all parishioners and the parish priest)?
 - iv. Have you any suggestions as to how best to bring our communities together over the coming months, spiritually and socially?
 - v. What steps can we take to ensure that we preserve and support the particular identity and charism of each place of worship and the community that gathers there?
 - c. Consultation Meeting Running Order an outline of how the proposed meetings will be managed in each location and on 'Zoom'.
 - d. Consultation Meeting Participant Sheet to be issued to every attendee upon arrival at the consultation meetings.
18. We currently have two Parish Pastoral Councils as Holy Redeemer and St Osmund's have already combined. The existing Pastoral Councils should meet together as an opportunity to know each other and to plan the way ahead together. They are to prepare the way for a single Parish Pastoral Council, with each place of worship appropriately represented, from the date of merger. It may be appropriate for an existing Parish to retain a Pastoral Team to develop and serve its local community effectively.
19. Our already joint Finance Committee could work together to merge the currently separate bank accounts and finance systems into one from the moment of merger.
20. When two or more Parishes are merged into one, the merged Parish owns the goods and patrimony of the pre-existing parishes and assumes their obligations (cf. Canon 121).
21. Financial matters can all too easily become a cause for concern and tension, especially if parishioners from one parish come to think that their parish assets are being taken and used for the benefit of the other.
22. The Bishop will issue a decree of merger as required by the particular circumstances. Ideally there should be a celebration of Mass at which all members of the merging parishes can gather together. This may need to be in a venue other than one of the merged parish's places of worship. The Bishop is to be invited to celebrate the Mass. The date needs to be planned

in liaison with the Bishop with as much notice as possible, perhaps at the beginning of the merger.

23. Key points for consideration The following are some of the relevant key points that are normative for the establishment of any merged parish, but they are subject to exception by the Bishop when a strong case can be made for a different approach.
- a. A new parish priest: in situations where a merger brings into effect a new grouping of parishes previously served by their own priests, a new Parish Priest may be appointed. This may help to give a fresh start to the Catholic community, and to lessen the sense of one parish being 'taken over' by the other. This is not the case here in Salisbury as the Parish Priest is already shared. Guidance would be sought from Bishop Declan as to his intention in this regard. We would hope to remain as we are for stability and continuity.
 - b. A single Parish Pastoral Council or equivalent, and a single Parish Finance Committee. Any such structures must ensure truly adequate representation from each of the merging parishes. They should be New Structures, rather than simply adding to an established Council or Committee.
 - c. A new set of Parish Registers, Records, Finance Books, etc: all Registers, etc, from the previous Parishes should be transferred to the new Parish Church. Central location of Registers has already taken place but a new set of Registers should be prepared.
 - d. One Parish Church: most merged parishes will be single Parishes with multiple places of worship, some of which will have formerly been Parish Churches. Although sensitivity and care will be needed to help each Community towards a sense of full involvement in the new Parish, one Church needs to be designated by the Bishop as the Parish Church.
24. Monitoring The process of merging will require ongoing monitoring by the Bishop and the local Dean, before, during and after merger. When the local Dean is directly involved in a merger, a neighbouring Dean will be asked to contribute to monitoring.
25. Conclusion Formally merging the Parishes is the logical next step to the Parish grouping proposed by Bishop Declan in 'Parishes in Communion for Mission'. This Consultation will give Parishioners a chance to reflect upon all that has been achieved so far, express their views, demonstrate collegiality and provide evidence for submission to the Bishop for his deliberation.

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