

My Dear Brothers and Sisters,

As you will be aware, over the last few months some significant changes have been taking place which impact on the life and work of St. Justus' parish in Pembury. These changes include the recent sad loss of deacon Bill Eason, the opening of a major new hospital in the parish, the announcement of an anticipated housing development in Paddock Wood and, of course, the arrival of new Catholics from the Ordinariate of Our Lady of Walsingham.

Taken together these changes are so significant that as your Archbishop I met with Bishop John, who, during these months has been in regular consultation with your clergy, who in turn have been involved with you, the parishioners, to review the situation. The purpose of this review was to identify the best way forward for the whole Catholic community with an eye to the mission of the local Church, its growth and renewal.

What became apparent is that the arrival of the hospital and Ordinariate in Pembury, and the anticipated house building project in Paddock Wood, present new and fruitful opportunities for both the parish and the Ordinariate. I think the first thing to note is that a parish once required to share a solitary priest can now be ably served by three. The obvious question then is how best to utilise these resources and ensure that each person and community can be enabled to flourish long into the future?

After prayerful consideration and in the light of the consultation, I have decided the time is right for the worshipping community of St. Anselm's to develop into a "quasi-parish" and no longer serve as an outstation of St. Justus, Paddock Wood. A "quasi-parish" according to Canon 516 of the Code of Canon Law is "a certain community of Christ's faithful within a particular Church, entrusted to a priest as its proper pastor, but because of special circumstances not yet established as a parish." I have therefore asked Fr. Behruz Rafat to remain as parish priest of St. Justus and focus his entire energy, alongside the community, in building up the Catholic life there. At the same time I have asked Father Ed Tomlinson and Father Nicholas Levisieur, priests of the Ordinariate of Our Lady of Walsingham, to serve the diocese by taking pastoral care of the whole Catholic community in Pembury, which will include the development of the facilities in Pembury.

I think it important to explain here exactly what we anticipate happening in Pembury where the recent changes I have mentioned impact most heavily. I am entrusting to Father Ed the oversight of Catholic chaplaincy for the new hospital and the existing hospice, whilst also building up the life of the Church in the village. In collaboration with you, I am asking him to pay special attention to the use of space and the development of the building so that it might, in time, provide a more fitting and permanent space for prayer.

An important aspect of this work, which will require your goodwill, will be the bringing together of existing parishioners and Ordinariate members into one family in accordance with the Holy Father's vision for the place of the

Ordinariate in the local Church while continuing to respect each other's patrimony and culture. Until now the two groups have necessarily existed in parallel, each with its own structures, priest and agenda. I, and those I have consulted, do not believe that this situation has proved fruitful in nurturing unity. So I dearly hope that, in looking to one priest and truly sharing resources, the whole community can now come together and explore a shared future together as two lungs of one vibrant Catholic body.

The vision then is that the creation of a quasi-parish in Pembury will serve as home to both the local Catholic community and also to Ordinariate members in the Tunbridge Wells area. It is important that the patrimony and culture of both is properly valued and preserved, and it is anticipated that, for as long as it seems prudent, the current practice of holding two Masses which reflect two differing traditions should be retained. As the Area Bishop in Kent, Bishop John will be fully involved at every stage of this process.

The timescale will be that Father Ed will assume overall pastoral responsibility for St. Anselm's from the First Sunday of Advent onwards and Fr. Behruz will be responsible for the community at St. Justus. Over the following twelve months they will continue to work together, along with Fr. Nicholas and you the people, to examine all the practical and Canonical considerations that arise. This will help both communities to become truly self-sufficient and, in the case of Pembury, properly united. This will be done slowly to minimise disruption, but I envisage it should be completed within a year.

Finally let me stress that I understand only too well that change can be unsettling. So much has happened in this parish in such a short a time! One fruitful chapter of life is coming to an end and a significant new chapter is beginning. Amidst all this change then prayer is needed as you mourn the past, and especially Deacon Bill, and begin to look forward to your future together. I sense real and fruitful opportunities for growth and development in these changes, and firmly believe in the presence and guidance of the Holy Spirit in bringing them about. So I ask you to be generous in your response, relying trustfully on that same Spirit to help you build up the mission of the Church in Pembury and Paddock Wood in the months and years ahead.

With an assurance of my prayers and good wishes,

+ Peter  
Archbishop of Southwark