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The Parishioners
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28 January 2025

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ

I write to you with a heavy heart but also with deep gratitude for the decades of faith, community, and worship that have shaped the life of St Mary's Catholic Church in Marple Bridge. After much prayer, discernment, and consultation, I must share with you the difficult decision that the final Mass at St Mary's will be celebrated at Easter 2025.

This decision has not been taken lightly. I am acutely aware of the deep sense of sadness and loss that accompanies the closure of any church, particularly one as beloved and significant as St Mary's. For many, this church has been a sacred space of prayer, celebration, and comfort – the site of baptisms, confirmations, marriages, and farewells. It holds cherished memories for generations of parishioners.

However, as a diocese, we must face the present challenges with honesty and faith. The primary factors underlying this decision are as follows:

1. **Limited Resources and Clergy Availability:** with only one priest serving this area, and a growing need for volunteers, it has become increasingly difficult to provide regular Masses and parish activities at multiple locations. The Diocese, in its stewardship of resources, must ensure that pastoral care is provided effectively, albeit in fewer locations.
2. **Nearby Provision for Mass and Sacraments:** while the closure of St Mary's will be a loss, it is important to remember that there are nearby churches where you will be welcomed. Mass will continue to be celebrated at the following locations:
 - o Annunciation, our Parish Church in New Mills
 - o Holy Spirit in Marple (1.2 miles away)
 - o Churches in Glossop

These communities stand ready to receive you and to journey together with you.

3. **Declining and Ageing Mass-Going Population:** over the years, we have seen a marked decline in attendance at Mass. The faithful parishioners who continue to gather at St Mary's are deeply committed, but their number has diminished, and few younger people are coming forward to sustain the life of the parish for the future.
4. **Financial Pressures:** the cost of maintaining and operating St Mary's church can no longer be justified given the smaller congregation and reduced contributions. Like many churches, St Mary's requires continuing care and costly maintenance that the parish cannot justifiably support.

I fully understand that this news will be deeply painful for many. The closure of a church feels like an amputation – a wound to a community that has built its life around a place of worship. It is, as many have said elsewhere, a process of mourning. I assure you that I will accompany you in prayer and support throughout this time of transition.

Looking Ahead in Faith

As we move forward, I ask you to see this as a moment of pilgrimage. The Church has always been a pilgrim people, trusting in the Lord's providence, even, or especially, in times of change and uncertainty. While the building itself will close, the Church – the People of God – endures. Christ promises to be with us always, wherever we gather in His name.

I encourage you to unite with and strengthen your neighbouring parish communities, where new opportunities for worship, community, and service await. I trust that the faithful spirit of St Mary's will continue to flourish in your hearts and lives.

In the coming months a final Mass of thanksgiving at St Mary's will be planned. This will be an opportunity to gather as a community to give thanks for the blessings shared, to honour those who came before us, and to commend the future to God's loving care.

With gratitude for your faith, your witness, and your understanding, I remain,



Rt Reverend Patrick McKinney
Bishop of Nottingham