

Questions from Parishioners - St Mary's Church, Marple Bridge and the Annunciation Church New Mills.

- 1) Was Fr Emmanuel aware on arrival in our parish that MB was on an 'at risk' list? What's happening to Fr Emmanuel? Will he continue with New Mills or moved elsewhere?
- 2). Is it that one church in this area that needs closing - or is it that MB is the specific issue (state or repair; cost of upkeep; numbers attending Mass)? We would imagine MB is in much better condition than other churches and that it brings in money from the nursery rental.
- 3) Is it practical to keep open the church in Broad bottom and close MB?
St Mary's is in a conservation area near to the shops and village of Marple Bridge. It is easy to get to and has a large car park.
- 4) Who did the Bishop consult with on this decision? It certainly appears to have come as an unwelcome shock to the congregation on Sunday.
- 5) What's happening to the school linked to St Marys? Whilst many attendees use the Holy Spirit, this Parish is in a different diocese. How will this work?
What are the plans for St. Mary's school? The teachers and school children can walk from the school to the church and attend mass. The church and Parish Priest are integral to the school.
- 6) What happens to the nursery renting some of the church property? This is a popular resource for the local community. Will it be allowed to continue as is?
- 7) What happens to the graveyard? When this was extended some years ago many Parishioners reserved future plots for a fee. One Parishioner asks "including my own parents, who are now 86 and 87 respectively, and in poor health. Will they still be entitled to be buried there in due course? If so, who will take the funeral service?"
Who will provide security for the cemetery, provide water, make sure there is access to the graves and maintain the graves?
- 8) What are the plans for the land/buildings/car park? What are the plans for the other property attached including the church, the old school, the priest's house etc.. . Is this to be sold for development or mothballed?

9) What consideration has been given to expanding parking at New Mill for instance, as we all have to find an alternative mass to attend?

10) Will the Parishioners of St Mary's still be considered Parishioners when they have no church? New Mills is a dark and winding road and too far for many of St Mary's Parishioners to travel. Who will give them Holy Communion and the Sacrament of the Sick?
Will this still be Fr Emmanuel?

11) The letter said we could go to the Holy Spirit Church. Can this church cope with extra Parishioners? Has anyone spoken to the priest at the Holy Spirit church? Also, there is no acknowledgement regarding the emotional and psychological attachment to the church both as a building and the relationships built and fostered over many years between the church community.

12) When we had a meeting some years ago we were led to believe we would join with the church in Broad-bottom. Could this still be an option?

13) Could we have the figures about how many priests there are in the Diocese and if other churches are closing? Why has our church been singled out?

14) Why has this been done so hastily without giving time to the Parishioners to meet and see if there was another option to closing the church.

15) Why were Parishioners invited to 'Enabling Our Mission' campaign to encourage them to sign up for standing orders when it was decided that St. Mary's was closing down?

16) Why are we in a poor financial situation when the Nursery pays a substantial yearly rent? Hollins Wood Nursery has a 30 year lease. They pay rent for the lease of the building plus 12K per year for the use of the hall etc.

St Mary's is not a poor parish and we have fundraising activities also. Where do the funds go to? The Financial report of 2024 states there was £63,105.13 in the bank balance of 31/3/2023 and the Set of Account was £271,150,28. (The Set Account Includes various legacies from the parishioners).

The contributions at mass has declined since the Pandemic but we would like to know if this is just our church or are other churches in the same position?.

17) "Declining and Ageing Mass- Going Population" - Many Parishioner's have an issue with the bishop's letter on a point of ageism. To cite the declining age of the congregation as a reason for closing the church is unacceptable for the following reasons. (a) It suggests that older people are no longer of any importance or use to the church, when in fact the laity has traditionally been made up of retired people with the experience and time to carry out duties.

(b)The letter dismisses older people as worthless to the church and whose spiritual needs don't matter.

(c) The nature of many UK Christian congregations will always be older and cyclical - as one older generation passes, another generation will take up the reins.

Looking around the church on Sunday it didn't seem to us that it was a congregation made up of seniors only.

18) Parishioners have also voiced their concerns about not being part of the consultation and decision making process. Even given the same outcome, the opportunity to be part of the process would have eased the transition, been less of a shock to so many and we would not feel that our voices were not heard and our feelings do not matter.

19) One Parishioner has written, "From a personal perspective, I had a really tough time last year and joining St Mary's had become huge part of the healing process for me. God is constantly working to bring us back to him. I don't believe God wants his churches to close, he wants all to have the opportunity to worship Him wherever we are. There is something very special at St Mary's and to lose it feels like a real knock back in my journey".

20) When is the last mass at St Mary's and who will celebrate the mass?

21) What arrangements have been made to address the upset and distress of Parishioners in the interval between proposed closure and the actual closure?

Many Parishioners have been going to St Mary's Church for over 40 years. Can the Parishioners be supported by the Health and Wellbeing at the Diocese?

These are comments from Parishioners, "I don't know where to go to for mass. It's made me feel quite ill. It is a shock". "I'm worried about ... He looks ill since the news", "I've written out my final wishes and let my son know, to have my service at St. Mary's and to be buried in the graveyard, what will I do now?".

(22) One of the reasons the Parishioners number is low is because of COVID when our Catholic Churches should never have been closed. We are still recovering from that directive. Also, the previous priest, without any consultation, changed the Sunday mass to noon and this was too late for many Parishioners to come to mass. We have recently changed the Saturday evening mass and it was to be discussed to change the Sunday mass to an earlier time.

If we had been warned that the church was closing down much earlier it would have given time to inform people who live in Marple Bridge and Marple about the proposed closure of the church and this would have give the opportunity to come back to St Mary's church.

Now that they know, can this decision be reviewed?

Two weeks ago the church was full when we had a children's mass. Also, much work has been done to recruit a Parish Administrator and Parish Book Keeper and much work has been done to organise repairs at both churches by the dedicated and hard working parishioners of St. Mary's church and the Annunciation.

We would like to ask our Bishop to reconsider the decision to close St. Mary's Church. The church is 150 years old and holds the spirits of all those who have gone before us and the hearts of all those who currently attend.

To say we are heart broken is an understatement.

We look forward to your visit and your reply.

Kind regrds,

Parishioners St Mary's Church, Marple Bridge and New Mills.

