

THE CATHOLIC PARISH OF  
**BOGNOR REGIS AND SLINDON**

We are followers of Jesus, on fire with his love,  
sharing that love with each other and with the world.



14<sup>th</sup> May 2022

Dear friends,

We find ourselves, in the Church, living in times of enormous challenge and change: the demands upon faith-communities emerging from the pandemic, not just having survived, but being renewed; the pressure of witnessing to faith in an increasing secular society; and a declining number of priests serving our parishes, to name but a few. But whilst these are serious and immediate challenges, we are never without hope. We proclaim Jesus risen from the dead, always with us, sharing his Holy Spirit with all the baptised so that the Gospel can be preached and the Kingdom established throughout the world. Whilst many matters clamour for our attention, our focus remains on evangelisation – *evangelisation is the cornerstone of all pastoral action, the demands of which are primary, pre-eminent and preferential* (St John Paul II).

On the journey we have undertaken over the last year there have been many things to consider, and many viewpoints expressed, but a constant feature of it all has been to be rooted in prayer – collectively when we have met, and individually along the way – for which I, and the Parish Leadership Team, are very grateful.

The pandemic has challenged many people to think about what's important in life, to reflect on what it all means, and to seek answers. Being an evangelising community means being open to all who come seeking, ready to listen to every question, and to walk alongside every enquirer. For a long time we were unable to celebrate the eucharist together – coming back together has been an opportunity to remember that a eucharistic community is a mission-oriented community, fulfilling the command of Jesus as he offered himself in sacrifice, *Do this in memory of me* and its related imperative at the end of Mass, *Go and announce the Gospel of the Lord*. The arrangement of Sunday Masses should serve these priorities of mission and evangelisation. With the guidance and support of Bishop Richard in terms of his vision for the parish, the Deanery, and the Diocese as a whole, the Parish Leadership Team have concluded that the right thing to do is to celebrate all three Sunday Masses at Our Lady of Sorrows – Sat 6pm, Sun 9am and 11am. This arrangement is underpinned by the practical and prayerful opportunities it presents. Three Masses at Our Lady of Sorrows allows for a variety of ways of celebrating Mass to be offered – a quieter Mass, a more traditional Mass, a more family oriented Mass. (Although these 'labels' are simplistic, they serve a general point.) Three Masses in the largest Church offers the greatest opportunity for growth in terms of capacity, encourages the maximum use of facilities for Children's Liturgy, coffee after Mass etc. In addition, Our Lady of Sorrows is in the centre of town, is the Church best served by transport links, and is the one to which visitors are generally drawn. Practically, it is an

arrangement that is simple to understand (for parishioners and visitors), has the greatest chance of longevity, and would be the easiest for a supply priest to cover etc

In the feedback from the trial which began in January there was very strong feedback that the alternating Saturday evening Mass between St Richard's and St Anthony's was not working or much liked. There was a very strong sense that the Vigil Mass ought to be in Our Lady of Sorrows. Many people suggested alternating between St Richard's and St Anthony's at 9am on a Sunday morning. Whilst there are good reasons to favour this – not least, enabling existing communities to celebrate Sunday Mass on a Sunday, the cost in terms of opportunities lost for mission and evangelisation by only celebrating one Mass on a Sunday morning in Our Lady of Sorrows was felt to be too great.

This is a bold decision, but I can assure you, it has not been an easy one. The Parish Leadership Team were not completely in agreement, and there has been a great deal of soul-searching, some sleepless nights, and an acute awareness that many people will find this decision very hard to accept. Over the last six months I have had various conversations with people – some concerning past events that have generated suspicion of the clergy and the institutional Church, some related to the importance of Sunday Mass being on Sunday, some rooted in the love and heartfelt attachment to a particular building as a place of worship in the highs and lows of life, some on the gift of community on their journey of faith. I can only assure you that I have heard you, that I understand, and that I have carried each of these people and their concerns in my heart.

To turn to practical arrangements, the plan is for this new schedule to come into effect at the end of July, so the last Saturday evening Mass at St Anthony's would be on July 16<sup>th</sup> and at St Richard's on July 23<sup>rd</sup>. We would start completely afresh with ministries' rotas, inviting parishioners from across the parish to serve the new schedule. We are committed to exploring all possibilities which would help St Richard's and St Anthony's continue to serve the mission of the Gospel in this parish, including looking at the weekday Mass schedule. Not least, the Cemetery at St Richard's would continue to serve as a resting place for those who have gone before us, and as a place of peace and prayer for those who mourn a loved one.

Our invitation to each and every parishioner, going forward, is that of St Peter: *Come to him, a living stone, though rejected by mortals yet chosen and precious in God's sight, and like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ* (1 Peter 2:4-5).

With prayers for each of you, for your families and loved ones; in confidence and hope that the risen Lord accompanies us as he accompanied his disciples on the journey to Emmaus,



Fr Chris and the Parish Leadership Team