



THE PARISH OF ST PETER & THE WINCHESTER MARTYRS

24th July 2020

Dear Parishioners and Guests,

As our school year has drawn to a close, I wanted to take this opportunity to thank you, to look back over the past year and to look ahead to some of the exciting things that we have coming up.

Firstly, then, an '**enormous thank you**' for all the love and support and prayers you have given to the parish and to me personally over the last year. Who would have known what was in store for us and yet, in many and varied ways, you have stepped up to the mark, and much more besides. Much of this has been in the background, gently but lovingly doing your bit to help us be a parish where every day we are "**bringing people closer to Jesus Christ in hope and joy**".

At the beginning of this school year, I shared my vision for the parish, to find new and creative ways of releasing the incredible potential that the people of St Peter's and the Winchester Martyrs have been given, to be the parish God is calling us to be. I want us to be a community where people flourish and blossom, where any visitor will see that we are fully alive and brimming over with joy.

Some of you have been involved directly in helping us to shape the parish plan; others have already begun to play their part in starting to bring it to fruition. More recently, many of you have got on board since the lockdown, offering your prayers, time, talents and financial gifts to enable us to "pivot"; that is, to remain faithful to our mission whilst changing the methods and strategies necessitated by the dramatic change in circumstances. What has been especially pleasing is witnessing many

examples in which we have worked together, building bridges between each other rather than walls, all rowing in the same direction.

Thank you so much to all of you, especially those who have shown incredible patience and understanding of the constraints under which we've been working.

Secondly, let's look back at some of the key features of the last year:

- ✘ We welcomed Fr Stephen, who is living and working here in the parish and studying at St. John's Seminary, Womersley;
- ✘ We launched a new parish website (very timely given what the future held in store);
- ✘ We've introduced a new way of preparing our children to celebrate their First Reconciliation and their First Holy Communion and we've watched them grow in their faith and love of the Lord Jesus (and are now hoping they can celebrate their First Holy Communion next term);
- ✘ We celebrated Mass for the Feast of the Blessed Winchester Martyrs and launched our parish vision;
- ✘ We welcomed the Mayor of Winchester for Mass and a small reception;
- ✘ We ran "Called and Gifted" so that parishioners (and others from further afield) could begin a process of discerning the gifts which the Holy Spirit has given them for the benefit of others;
- ✘ We took a pilgrimage to Rome, San Giovanni Rotondo (Padre Pio) and Assisi;
- ✘ We welcomed guests into St. Peter's for our annual "Night of Lights" just before Christmas;
- ✘ We were delighted to welcome Louise Buxton as the new substantive Headteacher for our Catholic parish Primary School;
- ✘ We blessed our bibles at the beginning of the Year of the Word;
- ✘ We welcomed Allegra Mutanda as our new parish Director of Evangelisation and Leadership.

All of this, without mentioning the daily and weekly Masses, prayers and sacraments, and countless activities supported by our ministry groups.

Then, of course, Lockdown began. We closed our church doors but very much kept our Church open for business. Since Thurs 19th March, the Solemnity of St. Joseph and our last public worship before lockdown, we have:

- ✘ Introduced live streaming for daily Morning Prayer, Mass and Night Prayer. This has been an amazing success with over 45,000 total views, 532 subscribers, about 900 views on average per weekend and about 50 on average for weekday Mass (we've also enabled people to gather with us from all over the globe and families to unite with each other at Mass, even when separated by thousands of miles);
- ✘ Offered an online Children's Liturgy before the Sunday morning Mass;
- ✘ Gathered virtually to celebrate Holy Week, Easter, Pentecost and a whole host of Feast Days;
- ✘ Mourned the loss of loved ones and rejoiced in the healing of others;
- ✘ Begun an Outreach exercise called '*PeterCares*' to make contact with elderly and vulnerable parishioners, to see how they are managing and provide support where needed. To date, we have managed to contact 188 parishioners to ask if they needed our support and we are continuing to keep in touch with 105 of these who have welcomed a regular friendly call;
- ✘ Introduced online evangelisation through Alpha, as well as discipleship programmes. Since lockdown, we have 45 guests who have completed our Alpha programmes and another 70 people have joined either a discipleship or a Scripture reflection course;
- ✘ Established collaborative music ministry, with contributions coming from across the parish and worshipping communities, from the very young and the once-very-young;
- ✘ Created a Prayerline, where anyone can either offer prayers, or ask for prayers: it is simple, confidential and informal;

- ✘ Committed to light candles for anyone who asks, every evening over this period;
- ✘ Sent in hundreds of photos of ourselves in order to brighten up the church building and put a huge smile on my face at Pentecost;
- ✘ Communicated with people via our website, the parish newsletter (Peterpost), email and a brand new Facebook page (we typically have 200 views a day, a high rate of engagement and a quick response time);
- ✘ Opened a “Virtual Tea Room”, which is seeing increasing attendance after the 10am live streamed Sunday Mass on our Zoom platform, and offering various prayer sessions, scripture reflections and courses on discipleship and prayer online in our “Virtual Church”.

We are extremely grateful for the hard work and commitment of the parishioners who have committed time, specialist advice and organisational assistance as well as to those who have supported our parish by taking part. Your commitment has made these important ministries and opportunities possible, so that we can worship and praise our God and support our neighbour.

Finally, this letter is an opportunity to talk to you about our ideas for the coming months as we emerge from lockdown into what will remain a challenging environment for most. Our focus will include:

- ✘ Developing how we work as a **hybrid church**. For example, we intend to maintain the live streaming of services and other successful online activities;
- ✘ Discerning new and better ways of **connecting** more effectively with parishioners and those on the periphery of our community so that we can reach as many as possible and no one slips through the net – through various communication channels, especially person to person;
- ✘ Running 2 online **Alpha** courses per week in the Autumn;

- ✘ Forming **small or medium-sized groups** - where we can come to know each other's name and story and where everyone experiences love and prayerful support on their pilgrimage of faith;
- ✘ A continuing need to be a very **welcoming community**;
- ✘ Continuing to develop a **leadership structure** which will support our countless volunteers in discovering and using their God-given gifts for the benefit of others;
- ✘ Looking at ways in which we can grow and support our **ministries** that look to serve those on the margins of our parish and beyond;
- ✘ Continuing to develop **discipleship groups** – in which the young and not-so-young can gather to sit at the feet of Christ, to learn more about Jesus and know him better and grow in love for him through prayer and reflection;
- ✘ Supporting people in their **life of prayer** – helping each other to discover, rediscover and savour the presence of Christ in his Church – in the sacraments and in our daily prayer, in private and in each other.
- ✘ Working on the **phased re-entering** of St Gregory's, St Stephen's and St Thomas More church buildings.

We would appreciate your feedback, including how you may be able to help us move forward with your or other suggestions.

Whilst this letter invites all parishioners to volunteer their time and talents in whatever way they are able, a special word of encouragement is extended to new volunteers. We hope you feel able to step forward so that we can achieve all that is needed to realise our Parish Vision and grow our Parish rather than simply maintaining it. If you already know where or how you might be able to support the mission, please contact us via office@stpeterswinchester.org.uk or 01962852804. In the meantime, we

are developing a clear process to bring volunteers on board and support them on their journey – more details over the next few weeks...

One of the aspirations that we have in our parish within the next four years is for 75% of our community to become actively and regularly involved in some way in one of our many ministries. This is an exciting and challenging commitment that we can only make with your generous support and a generous spirit.

May we be guided by our faith and the Holy Spirit as we seek to go where God is asking us to go and fulfil our mission of bringing people closer to Christ in hope and joy.

St Peter and the Winchester Martyrs, pray for us!

With every blessing,

Fr Mark (and his Senior Leadership Team)

