



ST. MARY & ST. GEORGE CATHOLIC CHURCH

Dear Friends

First I want to say what an immense privilege it has been to serve as your priest here in the parish of St Mary & St George. From the moment I arrived, your welcome, support and collaboration have been remarkable and I have been truly touched by that. I have always considered myself to be very fortunate and blessed indeed to have been appointed as your pastor. We may be a small parish but the vitality of this parish community has both energised and inspired me.

We have been through one of the most extraordinary of times together when, a few months after I arrived, we and the whole country and beyond were afflicted with the Covid pandemic. I imagine we never envisaged having to experience what has been called 'lockdown' with all the bleakness and desolation that brought with it: the closure of our churches; not being able to celebrate Mass; deserted town centres; and many other deprivations. A desolate time indeed, and what Bishop Mark called 'The Long Good Friday'. I will never forget that strange experience of celebrating Mass alone in this church week after week.

Despite that we held things together as best we could, but I did wonder how many or how few would return when the restrictions would eventually ease. Well, I need not have worried because so many of you returned – like the Israelite exiles – to again worship in the 'temple' of the Lord. It has been so good to experience with you the resumption of near 'normal' parish life and to see the renewed energy and enthusiasm being channelled to reinvigorate the life of this parish community.

So I know the announcement I am about to make will come as a shock.

As some of you know, I have some health issues. It has now reached the point where I need time out to address them. So, on health grounds, I will be taking an extended break from active ministry, and I will also be stepping down as Private Secretary to the Bishop. I will begin a nine-month sabbatical at the end of December and during that time will reside at my home in Bexhill-on-Sea, East Sussex.

When I depart, Fr Anthony Onuoha, parish priest of St Joseph's, Newton Abbot will take charge of this parish, assisted by Fr Joseph Nwiboko and Fr Appollos Mejuru. So you will be in very good hands and I am sure you will extend to them the welcome, support and collaboration that I have enjoyed from you.

I am sorry to break this difficult and painful news to you which I know will unsettle you but, having explained the circumstances, I hope you will understand.

The New Year then will truly usher in a new chapter for this parish, as well as for myself. Let us entrust ourselves to the intercessions of our patrons, to Mary, the Mother of our Saviour and to St George; may they watch over you and pray that this parish community may flourish with ever deepening faith in God's provident care for you.

With my prayers and all good wishes,

Fr Louis