

A letter from Bishop Brian Noble, Bishop of Shrewsbury to the Parishioners of Ss Peter & Paul, New Brighton.

Dear Parishioners

It's now five years since, during my 2003 Visitation of the parish, I indicated concern about the long-term viability of Ss Peter & Paul's Church. No doubt you will recall that excessive size and on-going high maintenance costs, along with liturgical unsuitability and lack of social facilities were the reasons then given for our concern. It was these same reasons that prompted the Trustees of the Diocese in April 2007 to declare the intention to close the Church in two years time. Given our commitment to the continuation of the Parish, this new arrangement would obviously be dependent on our finding suitable alternative accommodation. Since then we have heard voices both opposed to such plans and others more supportive of them.

Last October we informed you of three possibilities:

- 1) sharing the premises of another denomination;
- 2) searching for a suitable site for a new building; or,
- 3) modifying the present church in such a way as to provide social facilities within its surplus space.

These options have been investigated. With regard to the modification of the present building, the quite basic suggestions proposed by the independent advisers we consulted, indicated a required expenditure of £700k.

Given the £888k already required for repair work, plus the high ongoing maintenance costs of the building, the Trustees concluded that this would not be a reasonable way forward. We also investigated the possibility of sites for a new church but concluded that a different solution would be more in keeping with current needs.

All of that being so, I write today, not only to inform you of these decisions but also to let you know that we have pursued the other possibility, namely, establishing a partnership with another denomination. Progress has now been made in our negotiations with the Diocese of Chester and, in recent weeks, we have entered into a Sharing Agreement with them for the use of All Saints Church. As a result of these developments, and considering them to be the best way forward – liturgically, socially and pastorally – I have now issued a Canonical Decree of Closure of this church as from 17 August.

Undoubtedly this is news you were hoping you would not hear. I know from experience elsewhere in the Diocese just how painful you will find this decision – and that, I understand. However, in spite of contrary points of view – I do consider the decision to be necessary and appropriate. In due course, there will be an opportunity to express at a special Mass, both the history of the church and current sadness at its closure. In view of the publicity that has been given in

recent weeks to the Vatican's involvement in this issue, let me make it clear that at no point has an instruction been issued requiring the church to be kept open.

Concerning the future, I appreciate that some may be apprehensive. Today is not the time to go into detail but I can assure you that our requirements for celebrating Mass, for reserving the Blessed Sacrament and continuing our Catholic traditions could not have been more sympathetically met, and for that I am most grateful.

Finally, you may be concerned that this decision has been taken before the initially announced two year period of investigation has run its course. My reasons for doing so are twofold. Firstly, I'm satisfied that the reasons leading to our decision would remain unchanged in 12 months' time. Secondly, given the divisions in the community to which this decision has given rise, it seemed pastorally desirable to resolve the matter sooner rather than later. Now, I can but ask you to look beyond buildings to your becoming more fully that which they signify – namely, the living presence of the church in this area. You have my prayers and best wishes.

Sincerely in Christ

+Brian, Bishop of Shrewsbury