

Letter to Parishioners 29th June 2018

Dear Parishioners,

As you know in September Fr Kim will become Parish Priest at Our Lady's and Grovehill while I will continue to be Parish Priest at Boxmoor and St Mark's. Given this news and with the summer break soon upon us, it's an appropriate time to share with you our thoughts and plans as we will work closely together to strengthen our life as the Catholic Community in Hemel Hempstead.

"Hemel Catholic"

This is the name of the website for our parishes and it succinctly describes what we have become over the last few years. We are in fact one Catholic Community, operating with 2 priests in 4 parishes, with 4 schools and 4 churches; but working together in so many ways. Parishioners today feel able to attend one another's churches for weekday Mass and at the weekends. Readers and ministers regularly serve in churches other than their own and this is great to see. Our baptisms, 1st Communion and Confirmation courses are cross-parish, our adult formation and RCIA is cross-parish, our Caritas outreach is cross-parish and we share staff and resources across the parishes too. Our schools are working closer with each other and the parish-school relationship is very healthy.

This is a unique situation in our Diocese and it has evolved thanks to the vision and support of so many people, including Fr. John and Fr. Derek, and members of our parish councils and finance committees. Working ever closer together has to be the way forward for us and Fr Kim and I are committed to building on the *Hemel Catholic* model.

I would love to see all our parishioners understand and support this vision so much so that they will be able to say they belong to the *Hemel Catholic* community.

Worship – Faith - Mission (Outreach)

These are the 3 pillars of our parish life. They are the 3 things we need to constantly renew and refresh. They are what we do as a Catholic community! We are so grateful to the many people who are involved in these areas across our 4 parishes and I hope that many more will feel welcome to get involved in Ministry, Catechetics and Outreach. We do need more help in each of these areas of our parish life, so have a good think during the summer and let us know how you can get involved once we start up again in September.

One area of our life which we will focus on next year is Adult Faith Formation. Both Fr Kim and I and our eager and experienced catechists are keen that we help you to grow in your understanding of the faith. That's why we will be offering opportunities to get together and explore again the basics of our faith so that we can be renewed in our discipleship of the Lord. We do so much for our children and teens; it's time now for the adults!

Parish Finances

As you know, money matters a great deal in any Catholic parish. We receive no funding from external sources such as the government and so your offerings are the main source of income we rely on for our mission. We know that there are many demands on your finances and times are not as certain as they used to be. Likewise we know that the cost of running our parishes increases year on year, so we have to keep on reminding you to be generous and to use ways that make it easier for us to budget and grow. I agree with Cardinal Hume who once said we should be giving about an hour's pay per week to the parish.

We will be running a Stewardship Campaign in the coming year which we hope will help you to review the level of financial commitment you are able to make to the parish. In the meantime however, we do ask every adult parishioner to ensure they do give to the parish every week and where they are able to, to set up a standing order at their bank and sign the Gift Aid declaration. Forms are available in each church and from the parish offices.

Youth Ministry

Where are our young people? Why don't they feel they belong to their parish? Why is Church so unattractive to them? These questions should bother all of us, since without engaging our young people today; there won't be anyone in our parishes tomorrow!

I like Pope Francis' command that we need to go out and find people where they are and in those places, make disciples. If our youngsters aren't in church, then the church needs to go and find them.

Inspired by this we are delighted to announce that we have secured funding from the Cardinal's Appeal Fund for a Leader in Youth ministry in Hemel who will be employed by the Diocesan Youth Service, be based at St Mark's in JFK and will minister to our young people in school, with the goal of supporting them back into parish life. This is an innovative and exciting project and I hope we will find the best candidate. Watch this space...

Changes in September

Much of our day- to-day life will be unchanged when Fr Kim becomes Parish Priest on 1st September. He will assume full pastoral responsibility and decision making for his parishes. But as we hope is clear, both of us will continue to work closely together for the pastoral good of the Catholic Community in Hemel.

The main change will be a revision of the weekday Mass schedule to allow for the priests' days off. This means that Mass at Grovehill will move from Wednesday to Thursday and Mass at Boxmoor will move from Thursday to Wednesday. The times of these Masses will be decided once we have discussed them with our regular weekday Mass-goers.

The 4 Parish Structure

We are conscious that our community needs stability and a sense of certainty as we step into the future. Both Fr Kim and I feel that it would help our ministry as your Parish Priests and secure the long term stability of the Catholic Community in Hemel to ask the Cardinal to restructure our parishes by way of a formal merger.

This would mean that our 4 parishes would merge to become 2 new parishes – Hemel East (created out of Grovehill and Adeyfield) and Hemel West (created out of Boxmoor and St Marks). This would NOT mean the closure of any churches and it would NOT mean the change of name of our churches, but it would simply be the formalisation of the existing pattern of how we work today.

We believe that if this merger is agreed by the Cardinal you would experience very little change. It would mean that in each new parish set up, there would be one bank account, rather than 2; one finance team rather than 2 and your priests would be able to serve the pastoral needs of 1 parish far easier than 2. We think that this is a sensible, rational and logical step to take for our future. What do you think?

To help us discern the way forward we invite you to tell us your view about the proposal to merge parishes. We'd like you to use a special form online at <https://hemelcatholic.typeform.com/to/j5yd8R> or you can email hemel@rcdow.org.uk or write a letter to me or arrange to speak with one of us in person. But we will put a time limit on this exercise from **Sunday 1st July to 22nd July**. Once this is completed we will decide whether to take the proposal to the Cardinal whose final decision it will be.

Finally...

Having been your parish priest for the last 2 years, I am very hopeful and confident about our future. Understandably changes that have been made and changes which will have to be considered have not suited everybody and I acknowledge the anxiety and difficulties people have experienced. We are living in challenging times on many levels in the church and in society at large, but I trust that the generosity of spirit which characterises our communities will permit us to adapt to our changing circumstances so that our shared mission to *know Christ and become Christ* in the world will bear much fruit.

May God bless all our efforts to build His Kingdom here in Hemel!

Fr Paul & Fr Kim