



Calderdale Deanery Pastoral Letter 25th/26th April 2026

There are moments in the life of the Church when we are asked to let go of what has long been familiar, so that something more enduring, and more faithful to present realities, may take root.

Such a moment now lies before us.

At the end of July, Fr Bob Owen will retire from holding office as a parish priest. We give thanks for the generosity and fidelity of his priesthood, and we commend him with deep gratitude to the loving care of the Lord. With his retirement comes a necessary reshaping of pastoral life in Halifax and Queensbury. These changes will take effect from the beginning of August.

In this context, it is important to understand that the changes now facing the deanery are not prompted solely by the retirement of one priest. Rather, they form part of a wider and ongoing process within the Diocese, itself shaped by the broader reconfiguration arising from the closer collaboration and alignment of the Dioceses of Leeds, Middlesbrough, and Hallam. What lies before us, therefore, is part of a necessary and considered renewal of pastoral provision.

From August, the pastoral care of St Bernard's will be entrusted to Fr Hilton, Parish Priest of St Mary's, who will serve as Parochial Administrator. This arrangement will form part of an interim structure, accompanied by a revised pattern of Sunday Masses. The pastoral care of the parishioners in the Parish of St Theresa's, Queensbury, will also be entrusted to Fr Hilton. However, as from August it will no longer be possible to provide a priest to celebrate Masses for the small community in Queensbury, the future of the church premises there will need to be considered. These decisions reflect the reality that, given current numbers and the resources available, it is no longer possible to sustain provision for some of our smaller worshipping communities.

The situation at St Bernard's, along with that of the other parishes in the town, also presents significant challenges. It is therefore essential that all parishes within the

deanery recognise and understand the realities shaping diocesan provision of clergy and the celebration of Mass.

Such words are not easy to hear. A church is never merely a building; it is hallowed by generations of prayer, sacrifice, and quiet fidelity. Yet the life of the Church as the Body of Christ does not rest ultimately in bricks and stone, but in the living faith of her people and in the abiding presence of Christ in the Most Holy Eucharist.

In light of this, we now enter a period of prayerful consultation and discernment. In the months ahead, we will reflect together on how best to provide for the Catholics of Calderdale within the means entrusted to us, seeking a pattern of parish life that is sustainable, reverent, and centred firmly on Christ. There is also, in this moment, a genuine opportunity to simplify and strengthen our structures, ensuring that our pastoral and administrative life is both coherent and well-ordered.

Our aim is to foster a renewed expression of parish life, one that is viable, prayerful, and rooted deeply in the sacramental life of the Church. In all of this, we are reminded that the Lord never abandons His Church. He walks with us still, as once He walked with His disciples on the road, even when the path ahead seems uncertain and the horizon obscured.

Let us therefore move forward with quiet confidence, grounded in prayer, sustained by the sacraments, and united in charity.

Commending you all to the tender care of Our Lady of Unfailing Help.

+ Marcus

Bishop of Leeds