



THE ARCHDIOCESE *of* BIRMINGHAM

PARISH VISITATION DEANERY OF BANBURY & WARWICK Parish of Our Lady & St Wulstan, Southam [161]

Visitor: Canon Paul Fitzpatrick
Parish Priest Fr Arul Samy

Date of Visitation: 21 March 2024

Summary of Visitation Activities:

20 March 2024

Conversation with Fr Arul Samy.
Conversation with Mr John Brine, Temporary Head of St Mary's School and Angela Scull, Chair of Governors.
Meeting with Parish Finance Committee
Meeting with the Sisters of the Poor Child Jesus.
Celebrate Mass: 5.30 pm, Our Lady and St Wulstan.
Meeting with Fr Arul Samy

Sunday 21 March

Celebrate Mass: 10.00 am, Our Lady and St Wulstan.
Meet parishioners afterwards.

A brief profile of the Parish.

Our Lady & St Wulstan was founded in 1876 by the Sisters of the Poor Child Jesus. This German congregation had at its peak over forty sisters residing at the Convent, Church and School. In 1925, the Church and the Presbytery was given to the Archdiocese of Birmingham.

At one time a building connected the Convent and the School which spanned a substantial area. In recent years the Convent building (which adjoins the Church) was sold, the connecting buildings demolished, and land sold. The school has many of its original features, stretching back several generations.

Today, the site is challenging as it is cramped, with the Presbytery and Church on the left side of a narrow entrance, with the Convent on the other, and a new Convent/Retreat Centre flanking on the right. The original convent is in very poor condition and is not occupied. The boundaries are difficult to define, due to party walls, and the Church Boilers sit underneath the Convent building. I would recommend that the Diocesan Property Department should survey the site.

Over the last two years, Canon Paul has met three headteachers at the School. A new headteacher, Mrs Chadbourne has recently been appointed at St Mary's School. She brings great energy and experience to the School, which is greatly valued by the Parishioners. The School is in many ways the soul of the parish, and certainly its future. The school is served by a dynamic group of Governors, under the very able leadership of Mrs Angela Scull. At the time of the visitation, Canon Paul had a very positive conversation with Mr John Brine, the temporary Head of St Mary's School and Angela Scull, Chair of Governors. He has subsequently returned to visit the School and meet Mrs Chadbourne.

The Parish Meeting

The aim of the parish meeting was to discuss the implementation of the Diocesan Vision: *'Our vision is to be a Catholic Diocese which is faithful to the mission entrusted to us by Jesus Christ, full of missionary disciples who work together co-responsibly in vibrant communities of faith, joyful in their service of God and neighbour'*.

Canon Paul had three separate meetings with parishioners or parish groups. The parishioners made him most welcome and revealed what a close and tight knit community they are. However, both the parishioners and especially the Parish Finance Committee are alarmed at the number of former parishioners who no longer attend St Wulstan's Church and go to Mass elsewhere. There has been a considerable decrease in the number of people attending Mass at Southam. This corresponds with a similar drop in revenue and income, which is a cause of concern for the Finance Committee. Their reserves are decreasing, and they are worried that they will shortly go into debt without the resources to ensure there can be a balanced budget. The future of the parish is uncertain.

It is to be hoped, that as part of the Rugby Cluster (or by joining the Leamington Cluster) the parish can be aided by the good practice and support of its neighbouring parishes. The newly formed Deanery Pastoral Council may be of assistance.

Parish Masses and Liturgy

There is a lively music group which supports the liturgy at Mass. The parishioners respond well to their encouragement. There is also an excellent team of Altar Servers.

Affirmation of Parish Life

St Wulstan's is a close-knit parish community, with deep roots in the area. The School is at the heart of the parish community, which offers a means to draw many younger families into the life of the parish. Working as part of a cluster of parishes, St Wulstan's may find the support it requires at this time.

Finally,

I should like to express my thanks to Fr Arul Samy and the School Community for their welcome.

Canon Paul Fitzpatrick

25 June 2024