

Weekly Message from Fr William for the First Week of Ordinary Time

Dear People of St Mary's, I hope the Christmas Season has been one of peace and blessings for you and your families, despite the limitations we've been living with this year. I keep hearing about ways in which people have been helping each other and supporting each other with phone calls, food deliveries (including Christmas dinners), and distribution of information from the website for those who don't yet have internet, and maybe lots of other ways too that I'm not even aware of.

2021 sees a new chapter for the Ampleforth community. Last week we elected a new abbot. Here's reproducing the press release:

Fr Robert Igo has been elected ninth Abbot of Ampleforth, the largest Benedictine community in the UK. The election took place at Ampleforth on 5 January, in the presence of Abbot Paul Stonham OSB, delegate of the President of the English Benedictine Congregation, the Right Rev Christopher Jamison OSB. Dom Robert takes on the role of Abbot with immediate effect and replaces Abbot Cuthbert Madden, whose eight-year term of office had come to an end. The new Abbot will now hold overall responsibility for the monastic community and its many works. Fr Robert was born and educated in Manchester and worked at Manchester Royal Infirmary as a Student Nurse for three years in the 1970s. He was ordained priest in the Anglican Church in 1980 and served in parishes in Sunderland and Hartlepool. He was received into the Catholic Church in 1987 and joined the monastic community at Ampleforth in August 1988. He was ordained a Catholic priest on 27 June 1993 and three years later joined a small group of Ampleforth monks in Zimbabwe, at the monastic foundation established by the Ampleforth community in 1996, the Monastery of Christ the Word in Macheke. Since 2005 he has been Prior at the Monastery of Christ the Word. The blessing of the new Abbot will take place at a special ceremony presided over by Bishop Terence Patrick Draine of Middlesbrough, on a date to be arranged.

Fr Robert is known to St Mary's. He has been our conduit in Zimbabwe for our International Outreach, and the funds we've been sending to support children in the local township of Macheke with their school fees. I've projected photographs on return from my own trips to Zimbabwe that have included Fr Robert, so you might possibly remember him.

Regulations for this third national coronavirus lockdown exempt our churches from closure, which are permitted to remain open for in-church mass. However, due to the current national surge of infection and the increased threat to you and to our society at this time I am again taking the decision, as I did with the pandemic surge in October, to voluntarily keep St Mary's closed after this Sunday till further notice.

Some of you may have noticed in recent weeks that it's possible to make virtual visits to the church via livestream during the week, in addition to the livestreaming of our three Sunday masses. I'll do my best to continue to make this possible.

