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20 December 2019

To the Catholic Community of West Malling

Dear Friends in the Catholic Community of West Malling

I write to you as your new Archbishop on a subject that I know will be close to your heart.

Since coming to the Archdiocese in July, I have been made aware of the challenges of sustaining the properties of The Hermitage, St Thomas More's Catholic Church and the adjacent nursery. I have visited the site and seen the situation for myself.

As you will be aware, a major maintenance issue arose earlier this year with the collapse of part of the parapet into the roof above Fr Peter's accommodation. This is obviously a serious concern. Following further investigations into the state of the building, it has become clear that there are substantial maintenance issues with The Hermitage, which will be extremely expensive to resolve. The cost of these repairs and the on-going maintenance of the property is now beyond the means which the Archdiocese and parish can reasonably afford.

Following consultation with Father Peter and representatives of the Parish, and after discussion with the Trustees of the Archdiocese concerning the future of the property, the decision has been taken to make the whole site (The Hermitage, St Thomas More Church and the nursery) available for sale in Spring 2020. Offering the whole site for sale will ensure maximum flexibility in any potential transfer.

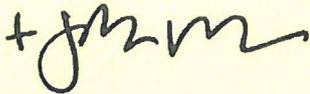
I appreciate that change of this kind can be very unsettling. Given the financial situation, however, there does not seem to be any other viable solution to the difficulties we now face.

I would like to assure you that arrangements will be made for the celebration of Mass in West Malling and for accommodation for Fr Peter. Options for alternative arrangements regarding this are in hand and information will be forthcoming about this as soon as it is available. We will ensure that spiritual and pastoral provision is made available in the best way possible. In the interim, I would ask you to do all you

can to maintain a positive spirit within the parish community, working with Fr Peter to enable this transition in due course.

Thank you for your kindness and understanding.

With very best wishes and the assurance of prayers



The Most Rev John Wilson  
Archbishop of Southwark

31 December 2019

To the Curate (Temporary) of West Malling

Dear Brother of the Curate (Temporary) of West Malling

I write to you at your new residence on a day that I know will be a day of

great change for the Archdiocese. In July I have been notified of the decision to

reassign the curate of the parish of St Thomas, London, to the parish of

St John, London, and I am sure that you will be pleased to hear that

the new curate of St Thomas, London, will be Fr Peter, who has been

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**Catholic Parish of West Malling and Snodland  
St Thomas More Church, Lucks Hill, West Malling**

**Parish Office:** The Priest's House, More Park, Lucks Hill,  
West Malling. Kent. ME19 6HN  
**Telephone:** 01732 843302  
**Email:** westmall@rcaos.org.uk  
**Website:** [www.westmallgrc.org.uk](http://www.westmallgrc.org.uk) **Reg. Charity No.** 235468

STATEMENT FROM Fr. PETER SOPER

The news that the Diocese intends to make St. Thomas More Church, the St. Thomas of Canterbury Centre and Pre-School and the Priests & Bishop's House available for sale this coming Spring have been a devastating blow for us. The church is the centre of our Parish and means so much to us. The St. Thomas of Canterbury Centre and Pre-School is the result of many years of work, giving and sacrifice to convert the stable block to a really good facility. And the House has many memories especially for myself as Parish Priest here for the last 20 years.

While many of us accept that the House, with all its problems and the massive cost of repairs, and the Centre & Pre-School which is an integral part of the property, have to go, we have strong feelings that the church should not be sold as it is so much the centre of our community.

I am greatly heartened, encouraged and thankful for the on-line petition opposing this which was put out last Sunday (22nd December) and reached nearly 1,000 signatures by Christmas Eve and continues to grow and for all the support shown by many people. I am very grateful for this.

It is right that we should be able to express our genuine  
Sorrow, anger and feelings about this, which I myself  
feel very much. But we now need to look at this calmly  
and practically if we are to find the true way ahead.

We need to show the Diocese how big and strong and vibrant  
our Catholic Community is and, to this end, I ask those of  
our community who are not coming regularly to our services  
and being involved in our church community to come back  
and help us <sup>with</sup> this. This will help us to truly speak to the Diocese.

I am planning to hold a Parish Meeting in the first part  
of January where we can calmly look at this and prepare  
practical suggestions on the way forward and especially why  
the church must be kept on (and the building up of our church  
community that I'm asking for above will be a vital part of this)  
and the way that this can be done to fit in with the property  
that is to be sold - which we can then bring to the Diocese.

Arrangements are also being looked into to see if we  
can accommodate the Pre-School in our More Park Parish  
School from this coming September and we have an  
assurance from the Diocese that the Pre-School will  
continue in the St. Thomas of Canterbury centre until  
this July even if the site is sold (they will lease it  
back from the Developers)

We are a strong community and I think those who  
have and are making it so and we are not afraid to  
take this on and work out the right way ahead -  
and become even stronger through this - and we ask  
your prayers & support.

Thank you - & God Bless,

Fr. Peter

Fr. Peter Soper - Parish Priest

27th. December 2019

Dear Parishioner,

You are invited to a meeting to discuss the future of our church and parish community on Thursday 16<sup>th</sup> January 2020 at 7.30 p.m. in the church.

This meeting will give you opportunity to express your feelings and views on the Archbishop's proposal to sell the church, The Hermitage, pre-school and surrounding land.

#### **AGENDA**

- **Opening prayer**
- **Introduction**
- **Open forum**
- **Response to the Archbishop's letter**
- **Suggested action on proposals to the Archbishop's letter**
- **Formation of a working/co-ordination group (6 – 8 parishioners representing the whole community)**
- **AOB**
- **Closing prayer**

