

MEDIA RELEASE



The Catholic Diocese of Lancaster
11 January 2015

BREAKING NEWS: BISHOP SAVES HISTORIC PRESTON CHURCH FOR INDIAN (SYRO-MALABAR) CATHOLICS

The Bishop of Lancaster recently received a request from Indian Cardinal for a church and presbytery in Preston and so has offered St Ignatius' church and presbytery, Preston. The Cardinal has accepted.

On 31 December 2014, Bishop Michael Campbell of Lancaster, was delighted to receive a letter from the Major Archbishop Cardinal George Alencherry requesting a church and presbytery in Preston for the particular and exclusive use of the Syro-Malabar Catholic community and under the charge of his appointed priest Father Mathew Jacob Choorapoikayil. Bishop Campbell has subsequently indicated that he – together with local Parish Priest Canon Anthony Walsh - would be pleased, in principle, to offer St Ignatius church and presbytery, Preston for this purpose and the Cardinal Major Archbishop has subsequently accepted. News of this development builds upon the close collaborative work of the Diocese and Syro-Malabar priests and people over the last decade.

The Syro-Malabar Catholic Church has now more than 4 million members worldwide and traces its origin to St Thomas the Apostle, who is said to have reached the shore of Kerala in 52AD. The Syro-Malabar chaplaincy in the Diocese of Lancaster originated in 2004, at the invitation of Bishop Patrick O'Donoghue, and has until this point relied on various Catholic parishes in Preston and further afield, to host their liturgies, social gatherings, meetings and prayer services.

Currently there are 107 Syro-Malabar young families involved in the Syro-Malabar community in Preston, 92 youngsters attend regular Sunday school catechist classes. There were 12 First Communion in 2014 and 10 Confirmations in 2013. Recently 8 family units have been formed as basic Christian communities to support prayer and faith formation in the family.

Bishop Campbell hopes that Catholics of the Diocese of Lancaster in the Preston area will be encouraged and excited by this development. He is thrilled to have been able to save a beautiful and historic church for Catholic worship, pastoral care and evangelization in the city of Preston just as he has for St Walburge's last year – also in the city of Preston.

The Bishop comments on this development:

“I have readily welcomed this request from Cardinal Alencherry, Major Archbishop of the Syro-Malabar Church, as I believe that St Ignatius church and presbytery will be a wonderful and

vibrant centre for the St Thomas (Syro-Malabar) Catholics in Preston, and I look forward to working with the Major Archbishop, his staff and local Syro-Malabar Parish Priest Father Mathew Jacob Choorapoikayil in the months and years ahead. Both Canon Walsh and I are committed to making this initiative work for everyone concerned.”

Appealing to the Catholics of Preston, the Bishop concludes:

“I am hopeful that local Catholics will genuinely rejoice in what is both an imaginative – and surprising - decision and will be proactive in their support of our brother and sister Syro-Malabar Catholics going forward.”

Notes:

1. The Syro-Malabar Catholic Church is in full communion with the Pope, the Bishop of Rome.
2. This arrangement is subject to formal legal agreements to be arranged by the Diocese of Lancaster and the Major-Archiepiscopal Curia of the Syro-Malabar Church.
3. St Ignatius Church has been closed since 2 December 2014.
4. St Ignatius church will be open for private prayer to all, but all future public Masses and liturgies there will be exclusively in the Syro-Malabar rite of the Catholic Church. Latin rite Masses (the Mass usually celebrated in English) will take place in the other churches of the new St John XXIII parish *i.e.* English Martyrs and St Joseph’s churches as has been the case from December 2014.

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