

Message from the Norbertine Community

Like every family, the Pandemic was a time when our Norbertine community discovered more and more about our strengths and our weaknesses.

It was an incredible privilege to be able to visit the sick and dying in hospital during that time, especially on the covid wards. Broomfield Hospital were outstanding in doing everything they could to enable us to be there for people who needed a priest, even when sometimes families were not able to be there. It was a humbling privilege to be able to serve those who desired God's absolving love in the last moments of their lives.

The only way that we managed this is that we were all together in the Priory and together for the prayers and Holy Mass in the Priory Chapel. We know what an incredible gift we had in being able to be together, but also to be able to continue to offer the Holy Mass and to sing the Divine Office, when so many others were deprived of the sacraments and common prayer.

A central part of our vocation is singing the Office together each day and to live together in one heart and one mind following Jesus Christ. So, our public singing of the Divine Office together is not simply an added extra of our life, it is at the heart of our lives as Norbertines.

The Pandemic was the first time the priests and brothers had been able to celebrate a Christmas and an Easter together since we had come to Chelmsford. The demands of two parishes and three places of worship have meant this had never been possible. Oddly, the Pandemic meant we could do that for the first time in fourteen years. This and other aspects of our life together showed us what we have missed since our arrival in Chelmsford, even as we have been truly blessed to be here in other ways, not least because of your friendship and support.

As the heart of our life together is life in common and, most importantly, praying together, the experience of the pandemic has shown us an area of our life that we needed to ensure continues as life returns to normal. Sadly, we have seen that it is not possible to do that in our present home; the physical geography of having a separate Priory, and two parish churches does not allow us to live our Norbertine vocation to the fullest.

The Archdiocese of Southwark has asked us if we would be willing to take over a former Capuchin monastery and the parish of Peckham. It provides everything we have been looking for. It is one church, one parish, and an attached house with space enough for us to grow. After much careful thought, prayer, and consideration we have accepted this offer, and will be leaving the Diocese of Brentwood.

As you know, we have been praying for a new Priory, somewhere more suited to the needs of our life as Norbertine Canons. We have been praying every day to Our Lady of Sorrows, our Canonry is dedicated to Our Lady of Sorrows, and the monastery in Southwark we will be moving to is called Our Lady of Sorrows. When we pray, we then must accept what the good Lord may choose to send.

Our desire is to always be of service to people; if we stay in Chelmsford, it would be likely that we would be looking after more and more buildings. Our conventual life together means that we cannot do that; otherwise, there is no point in being a community of brothers together.

This means that we will be leaving Chelmsford, but we go filled with gratitude for your love and friendship. We are obviously sad to be leaving somewhere we have had the privilege of serving for fourteen years, but we also go with hearts filled with excitement about the future and how we may continue to be of service to God's Church in our vocation as Norbertines.

In the summer, the Bishop will appoint a new priest for the parishes, and he will be truly blessed in coming to you. We will take over the new monastery and the parish of Peckham at the end of June 2022, but we will still be looking after the parishes here until the beginning of September. Your new Parish Priest will take up his post in September when we will make the move to the new monastery.

You have played such an important part in our lives here in Chelmsford and our discernment of the future; so, thank you for all you have given us by your loving support. Please be assured that you will always be in our prayers, however far we might be apart. We will be praying for you and for whoever your new parish priest will be. Please pray for us.

With love, prayers and every blessing,

The Norbertine Community