

Dei et

Sedis



Apostolicae

Gratia

***Paul
Episcopus Lancastrensis***

To the priest in charge and parishioners of St. Catherine, Penrith and the Chapel of East of St. Wulstan, Alston

DECREE MERGING THE PARISHES OF

- **Saint Catherine, Penrith, and the Chapel of Ease of Saint Wulstan, Alston**
- **Our Lady of Appleby, Appleby, and the Catholic community of Kirkby Stephen**

Having received a formal request for merger from the pastor responsible for the two above-named parishes and having consulted with the required parties (canon 50), (this includes hearing parishioners, whose views were made known at respective parish meetings), I now decree, in accordance with canon 512§2, that for the just cause of the more effective pastoral care and for the good of souls, the two named (currently twinned) parishes above will be *merged by an extinctive union*.

The name of the new parish will be:

Saint John Boste

and shall comprise of the territories of the two parishes named above, which will become extinct when this decree comes into force. All members of above-mentioned parishes will belong to the newly erected parish. The new parish priest will be Father John Winstanley, and the church of Saint Catherine is named as the parish church. Each church will retain its current titular dedication, as will the school in Penrith. The parish priest and deacons automatically have their faculties extended to the boundaries of the new parish.

The intentions of the founders and donors regarding the temporal goods and patrimonial rights proper to the extinct parishes are to be respected. In addition, the assets, liabilities, patrimonial goods, rights, and obligations of the extinct parishes are to be allocated to the newly erected parish in accordance with the norm of law (canons 121 and 122).

All the parish and sacramental records of the extinct parishes are to be properly preserved and safeguarded by the newly erected parish, in accordance with the norm of law. It is permitted to continue to use the existing registers for each titular church (if applicable).

This decree is to be effective from noon on Thursday 29th February 2024.

I order that this decree be communicated to all concerned and those who wish to appeal it must do so, in writing, to me, within the time limit of ten useful days from the legitimate notification of the decree and in accordance with the norm of law (canon 1734 §2).

Given at Lancaster on 6th February 2024

+Rt Rev Paul Swarbrick
Bishop of Lancaster



Rev. Paul Embery
Chancellor

Reasons for Merger

Having considered the views of those consulted, it is my belief that the pastoral care of the souls in this part of my diocese will be better served by a single parish under the leadership of one parish priest (assisted at the present time by permanent deacons).

The new parish sits well in the geographically largely rural area in eastern Westmorland & Furness, and a single parish priest can effectively run all three churches/chapel, with the support of the lay faithful and deacons.

After the last priest who lived in the presbytery at Appleby left in September 2022, the two parishes of Saint Catherine & Saint Wulstan, and Our Lady of Appleby have been 'twinned' and run by the parish priest of Saint Catherine's from Penrith, as both parish priest and priest-in-charge. Early on, it was envisioned (without prejudice to canonical process) that a useful way forward for future pastoral provision might be a greater collaboration between parishes, and possibly a future merger. This would be preferable to a possible church closure, when no resident priest is available to serve the community in Appleby and nearby town of Kirkby Stephen, where mass was celebrated in the local Anglican church for many years by means of a sharing agreement.

In accordance with canon law, separate consultation meetings were held in each of two parishes involved, to discuss possible merger. I have taken the views of each group of parishioners, the diocesan finance council and of the Council of Priests into account before reaching my decision. Two separate decrees are issued, one for Saint Catherine and one for Our Lady of Appleby.

I recognise that the people in the Kirkby Stephen area had a strong sense of community and appreciated the mass celebrated at the local Anglican church. However, I no longer have the priests available for this to continue. Some have claimed that Kirkby Stephen was a canonically erected as a parish, distinct from Appleby; however, a search of the diocesan archives has found that there was only ever one parish serving Kirkby Stephen and Appleby. The presbytery moved from Kirkby Stephen to Appleby when the new (current) church at Appleby opened.

The finances of the newly formed juridic person are stable at the present time. However, the finances of Our Lady of Appleby parish were precarious prior to 'twinning' and now, merger. It would not be possible for the small community there to maintain a priest or meet any substantial repair bills. That there is no longer a resident priest in the presbytery at Appleby means that, following alterations, the possibility exists for letting this property as a family home – this will help provide additional income to the new parish.

In addition to the existing resident parish community in Appleby, the town hosts an annual event for Travellers, many of whom do not belong to a stable parish community at all (*vagi*). Pastoral care of these persons, through the new parish, will continue.

An extensive merger will allow the communities who comprise the newly erected parish to better collaborate, and it will also protect the provision of pastoral care for the good of their souls in a large geographic area.

[End.]

