

THE PHILADELPHIA ORDINARIATE POST

A NEWSLETTER OF THE CHURCH OF ST MICHAEL THE ARCHANGEL
AND THE BLESSED JOHN HENRY NEWMAN CATHOLIC COMMUNITY

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Dear Parishioners and Friends,

Last month I wrote to you about the possibility of St Michael's and Newman coming together at the Church of Our Lady of Mount Carmel in Bridgeport. The church is available as the result of the merger of Mount Carmel with Sacred Heart in Swedesburg last year. Members of both congregations gathered for a visit there on July 26th, and we are now reflecting on what we saw.

The goal in considering the move is two-fold: to get the two congregations together at a location that will work for both, and to find a place where we can settle permanently. The advantages of a merger are not hard to see: it will get us much closer to "critical mass," a larger congregation is more attractive to potential members, our financial resources will be greater, we would be better able to support a property of our own. One larger congregation will be more viable than two small ones.

This means there are really two questions before us: location and merger. They are related, in that St Michael's and Newman have different needs regarding location. St Michael's folk come from the city and from afar, and thus need a location with Septa access and expressway convenience. Newman folk are largely on the Main Line and have understood their mission in terms of the Main Line, and thus need to be accessible to the Main Line. So part of the discussion is about location: neither current location is good for both congregations. More on that in a minute.

The other part is about the merger. Statistically, church mergers are rarely successful, if one gauges success by a happy new parish with all or most of the people involved from the merging congregations active in the new. Of course, most mergers are the result of declining numbers and finances, which is not the case for us. Nevertheless, we need to be careful about how we go about it. Each congregation has things it specially values about its life, and would not wish to lose. We will want to be sure the best of each is carried into the new. We want the new to be more than the sum of the parts. Since the new will be just that – new – the change carries the inevitable fear of a loss of identity. Even where everyone is behind the merger, there is still much to be done. People need to get to know one another. Different ways of doing things need to be reconciled. New Pastoral and Finance Councils need to be put in place. And so on.



Our Lady of Mount Carmel

So there are two processes: considering locations and properties, and exploring the merger of St Michael's and Newman. It will be necessary for the people of the two congregations to get to know one another, and to start working together. Each community will need to understand what makes the other one tick: how its mission is understood, what is specially important in its common life, how it has been formed by its history, etc. There will be a number of steps in this process. As suggested in one of our recent meetings, a good place to start is with an informal social event where people can get to know each other better. With vacations and other conflicts, it seems best not to attempt it in August nor on Labor Day weekend. Hopefully everyone will be back by September 13th, when I invite you all to a pot-luck lunch at the rectory after the St Michael's Mass. I infer from the excellent turnout of Newman people for our site visit that this is a possible time, even though the distance is greater. Please come! Of course, you are also welcome to visit the other parish: Newman folk can visit St Michael's at 9 on Sunday morning at Holy Cross in Mount Airy, and St Michael's folk can visit Newman at Our Lady of the Assumption in Strafford at 6 Sunday evenings.

Meanwhile, on the property front: just to make life complicated (and interesting), it turns out that there is another available property which might suit our needs, St Gertrude's in West Conshohocken. This parish merged with three nearby parishes in Conshohocken last summer; St Matthew's is the surviving parish. St Gertrude's dates from the days when there was no bridge in Conshohocken, and ministered to the Catholics on the south side of the river. It was (apparently) never a large parish, and for some years recently

shared a priest with St Mary's in Conshohocken. One of the auxiliary bishops of the Archdiocese lived in the rectory. The school and convent were sold to the Borough some ten years ago, and were torn down to create a park across the street from the church. The property now comprises the church (with hall below) and rectory, with a parking lot. I'm grateful to Fr Thomas Heron, the Pastor of St Matthew's for letting us take a look at it.

As we did with Mount Carmel, we will visit after the Sunday morning Mass at St Michael's – about 11 a.m. at St Gertrude's – on August 9th. We had a very good turnout for the Mount Carmel visit, and I hope for the same for St Gertrude's. The church is on Bullock Avenue, just off Route 23 in West Conshohocken. Maps will be available at St Michael's, and I can provide navigational help for Newman folk if needed. (It was not needed for Mount Carmel!) The same discernment questions apply to St Gertrude's as to Mount Carmel, and we will be talking them over after the visit – August 9th after the evening service at Newman, and August 16th at coffee hour at St Michael's. I should note that St Madeleine Sophie remains a possibility, though it has not seemed to work for a number of the Newman folk, and so we have been looking for another location other than Mount Airy.

The basic question of course is what God is calling us to do. Our discernment of that question touches on many things: our mission in the Philadelphia area, the accessibility of the location to our present congregations and potential parishioners, how we can support the work of the Catholic Church in the Archdiocese as well as the Ordinariate, and (inevitably) financial realities. Even though this is summer, and people are away from time to time, I hope we can move the process along. Both merger and local decisions require time and consideration, and cannot be made instantly. I am grateful for the generous participation of everyone from Newman and St Michael's in this process of discerning and planning for our future.

I need hardly add that charity as well as trust in God's loving providence is the essential foundation for our discernment. Each of us will (quite properly) form his own judgment about what is best for the congregations. These judgments need to be shaped by charity: the concern for what is best for others, even before what is best for self. With this approach we can produce “a veritable hotbed of charity,” as Screwtape calls it, and the process is bound to go smoothly.

August

A reminder that there will be no Mass at Newman on August 16th. That is the day of the annual celebration of Our Lady of the Assumption's feast of title. They will be having a special Mass at 1:30, to which we are all invited, followed by an outdoor festival, at which we are also welcome. During the summer, we are having light refreshments after the Newman Sunday evening Mass rather than a full supper, and no regular adult forum. We will be discussing the relocation and merger questions as needed. This will include a discussion after each visit to a possible site.

At St Michael's, there will be no coffee hour on August 9th (the Tenth after Trinity), because of the visit to St Gertrude's. On the 16th, we will take time at coffee hour to talk about St Gertrude's. On the 23rd, we will have an adult forum on the World Meeting of Families catechism, *Love is our Mission*. There will be no forum on the 30th, when I will be away. Fr Brannan will be supplying at St Michael's and Fr Phelan at Newman. Weekday Masses are also suspended while I am away – as noted in the Sunday leaflet.

The Solemnity of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary is August 15th. Since this falls on a Saturday this year, the faithful are not *obligated* to assist at the offering of the Mass. Nevertheless, it remains one of the principal solemnities of the church year, and I hope you will plan to be at Mass. The Mass at St Michael's is at 9:30 at the St Thérèse Chapel. If you are planning to worship at your local parish, note that only the morning Masses will be of the Assumption; the evening Masses on Saturday will be Vigil Masses of the Sunday.

World Meeting of Families

The World meeting of Families is soon to be upon us: September 22nd-25th, with the visit of Pope Francis to Philadelphia following on the 26th and 27th. You still have time to register for the Meeting: go to worldmeeting2015.org. The Meeting is at the Convention Center, which is easily accessible during the week. (The transportation issues kick in on the weekend when the Holy Father is in town.) This is a wonderful (and local) opportunity to experience the catholicity of the Catholic Church, and to grow in the Faith – especially the Church's teaching about the family, something which is increasingly counter-cultural. For our own good and that of others, we need to bear clear witness to this teaching. The Meeting is an important way of doing so, and to be encouraged to soldier on.

Across the Tiber

Part of being a member of the Ordinariate (and especially a priest) is fielding questions from Anglicans about the Catholic Church and life in the Ordinariate. These can often focus on the obstacles that people have to crossing the Tiber. What about the Marian dogmas? Infallibility? The validity of Anglican orders? The Papacy? Sometimes there is a particular question – and that calls for a discussion of its merits, theologically and historically. Other times, however, it is a more general concern about authority. The relation between the Christian and the church is fundamentally different for the Anglican and for the Catholic. The Catholic is subject to the authority of the Magisterium. There is no comparable authority for the Anglican. To be sure, Scripture has authority, and the Articles of Religion provide for the church's authority to interpret

Scripture. There is, or more accurately was, the Book of Common Prayer, as an authoritative guide to Scripture and the Anglican way of being Christian. But functionally, there is no concrete authority: dissent from General Convention is generally assumed and widely practiced; the bishops worldwide are not of one mind, and in any case do not claim to exercise authority over the whole of the Anglican Communion.

To put it another way, the Anglican has to decide for himself what and how much he accepts of what his bishop teaches, and of what General Convention legislates. Each judges for himself, a rather individualistic approach to religious truth. The Catholic assents to the authority of the Magisterium. To come into the communion of the Catholic Church requires an act of will as well as an act of the intellect. The mind forms the will certainly, but the will also forms the mind.

Speaking personally, when I crossed the Tiber, there were still some of the issues which in my own judgment I had questions about. But I made the act of will to assent to the teachings of the Catholic Church. None of the teachings is unreasonable, so far as I can tell, so it was not a question of trying to assent to something I believed to be false. In effect, I said, "I am not always right. I will accept the considered judgment of the Church." Since I had come to the conclusion, on the basis of Scripture and Tradition, that the Magisterium was the way God intended to order His Church, this was, and is, a reasonable thing to do.

One trusts the Magisterium not as a human institution, but because Jesus gave the charism of true teaching to His Church: one trusts the Magisterium because one trusts Jesus. All Christians want to trust Jesus. Trusting the teaching of the Church is one practical way that we learn to do it. It is also profoundly comforting not to be on one's own in matters of faith. The quest for truth requires the honesty to admit that we may be mistaken. There are substantial benefits from placing one's self under the teaching authority of the Church, but that is perhaps best left for another time. The point is that being Catholic is not just a matter of lining up all the teachings and deciding that the Church is right. It is more an act of humility which accepts our limitations and trusts Jesus as Lord of the visible Church.

Finally, I'd like to call your attention to the "Thrifty Irishman" clothing bin in the parking lot of Holy Cross. Donations of used clothing significantly benefit Holy Cross School. Please keep this in mind when you clean out your closet. We want to do what we can to support Holy Cross. Also, I want to thank Leslie Altena, Mark Shiffman, and Beth & Jonathan Ousley for helping with last month's food collection at Acme for the Holy Cross food pantry.

Faithfully,

Fr David Ousley



St Gertrude's