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From the Homestead: No 41: Christmas Newsletter No 39

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Fratres atque sorores omnes,

A somewhat different greeting from that of last year since we have been able to relax some of the COVID restrictions. This greeting will come from Douai where I returned at the end of October, thereby retiring from ministry at Ormskirk. I went there for a fortnight and have remained the best part of 13 (very happy) years. Ormskirk and Scarisbrick are lovely places with wonderful people, kind, supportive and friendly. I much miss them all and shall retain many happy memories. At the same time I am delighted to be make at home base at Douai. I wish you joy and maybe a better Christmas than we had last year.

With pleasure I can tell that none of the Community has died in the past year. The loss of two much loved members of the Community in 2020 (both between two weeks) could not be properly commemorated during the intensity of the COVID restrictions, but we have now been able to celebrate a suitable Memorial Mass for Fr. Louis and Fr. Bernard (in September this year). They and the death earlier of Fr. Nicholas lost a considerable past presence which has much missed. During the year our Junior, Fr. Gregory Maddison, was for health reasons unable to continue toward Solemn Profession. We wish him well as he receives treatment. Fr. Alban has been appointed Catholic Chaplain to Cambridge University and we thank him for his many years as Prior, Novice Master and Choirmaster. Br. Aidan continues his studies some of which are at Oxford.

Inevitably many old friends depart each year: I compile a list each time. For many the names will mean little, but I think it appropriate here to mention a few. I should like to give tribute to Derek Ayling, my mother's neighbour whose death came too late for my last year's detail. He was a perfect neighbour, totally supportive, loyal and true, and we pay this tribute to Patricia and Richard and Peter. Some of our past colleagues have died, notably John Campbell (Spanish) aged 96, Peter Moore OD and French teacher, Diana Benbow, olim House mother at Ditcham, Paul Westby OD, Physics Teacher and later Lab Assistant and Michael McLoughlin, olim Fr. Swithun, Maths teacher.

In Ormskirk, the continuing COVID restrictions prevented some work. The completion of the preparation has happened for the SYNOD, and much was covered by ZOOM. A great deal has been achieved and the proposals are now being considered and the future prepared. Some very clear directions have appeared, in particular the greater activity and proactivity of all the faithful. Such synodity, of course, is appearing in other dioceses. There is no doubt that the whole enterprise could have been juddered to a halt had there

been no ZOOM!. Intensive ZOOM meetings are exhausting and sometimes of limited value—when in small groups some do not turn up and others have nothing to say!!

Similar discernment is taking place in the monastic/religious life, in particular the Abbatial election next year and the EBC facing General Chapter. A clear path for the future needs to be found and we need to face new challenges with wisdom and faith. Prayers please! Liturgy and hospitality have opened up somewhat during the year, although strict COVID precautions remain, and this has limited some work, but we have been able to cover baptisms, marriages, funerals and some sick calls.. The numbers in Ormskirk at 10.30 have blossomed and the 11.00 at Douai is in full operation. Music is now available in these and in other Masses, if somewhat restrained. The limited numbers in some sacramental ministries have continued to provide very prayerful and personal celebrations, once again in particular at St. Anne's and St. Elizabeth's First Holy Communions. Visiting to Nursing Homes has renewed but entailing strict COVID checks and restrictions—but we have done it! St. Anne's hope to welcome Bishop Tom Williams for Confirmation in December.

Douai Society activity has continued with a fine turnout for the Memorial Mass for Frs. Louis and Bernard. In the same weekend we held the AGM and the Mass for past pupils: numbers were limited but viable and there was a celebration meal in the Pavilion after the AGM. On 1st October there was a splendid celebration at the SAVOY hotel in London to raise money for the causes for Douai Foundation, charity including the funds enabling some from St. Bede's in Ormskirk to make the Lourdes pilgrimage. Richard Ingrams made the speech as the Guest of Honour. The annual Fr. Basil Gwydir address was given by Chris Keeble.

In our parishes we number of well-known and loved people have died: Fr. John Fallon and Richard Walker (Alcester): Pat Horsfield and Brian Harrison (Stratford): Margaret Wright and Winnie Church (Scarisbrick): Jacques Bruneau and Paddy Pearson (Bexhill): too many to mentioned here at Ormskirk, but they are included in the fuller list.

At Ormskirk we celebrated a modest reopening from the COVID, with Mass for those who have suffered. Then we had a celebration weekend for the parish, with Mass and a fun afternoon, with refreshments and many came including the Mayor of West Lancashire. (Fr. Godric is the Mayor's Chaplain): on the Sunday we have a lunch for over 120 parishioners and the annual AGM, which went very well and efficiently. Finally I wish to thank all those who wished me well on my departure and who celebrated my 80th birthday, rising to a crescendo with a parish party where well over 120 came. Many lovely gifts and goodwill came and I resided (respected COVID distance!) rather like the Countess of Grantham plus a piano!! A further gathering followed the Sunday 10.30 Mass and I as left I felt really sad to leave so lovely a place and with such wonderful people. But now I am back amid wonderful people with love and care..

Bless you all for Christmas and 2022. Tempora mutantur nos et mutamur in illis

Do justice, love kindness and walk humbly with our God

Beniface