



Incorporating the parishes of Christ the King, Kingstanding, Our Lady of the Assumption, Maryvale and St. Margaret Mary, Perry Common

Merging the two parishes of Christ the King and Our Lady of the Assumption into one single parish: a proposal

21st March 2026

Fourth Draft of the Merger Document

1. The Purpose of this Document¹

- a. This document, known as “the Merger Document”, has the following two purposes:
 - i. It sets out the issues which have to be resolved in order that a Merger Petition can be completed and presented. It is recognised that the complexity of those issues requires detailed analysis. Hence the Merger Document, of necessity, cannot be a short or superficial piece of writing. It is intended primarily for the bodies of ecclesial co-responsibility within Christ the King [“CTK”] and Our Lady of the Assumption, [“OLAM”]. However, a copy of each draft will be uploaded to the website of CTK and OLAM. For better communication within CTK and OLAM, a Bulletin called Merger News has been developed of which there have already been 3 editions. Each edition is attached the weekly Newsletter for the Sunday on which Merger News is published.
 - ii. It acts a record of how the Merger Consultation within CTK and OLAM has progressed.

2. Summary of developments since 18th May 2025

- a. The 1st draft of this document was produced at a time when the two parishes with which this proposal is immediately concerned (Christ the King [“CTK”] and Our Lady of the Assumption, [“OLAM”]) were under the pastoral care of Fr.

¹ Sections 1,2 and 3 of this 3rd draft are completely new text introduced by the 3rd Draft dted 11th January 2026.

Thé-Quang Nguyen, who had been formally inducted after appointment as parish priest of both CTK and OLAM. Our sister parish in this Cluster (St. Margaret Mary ["SMM"]) has long been entrusted to the care of Fr. Simon Ellis who has been formally inducted after appointment as parish priest of SMM. The 1st draft was produced to facilitate discussion at a General Meeting of the Cluster held on 18th May 2025. Following the departure of Fr. Thé-Quang for Taiwan on 14th December 2026, all three parishes have now been entrusted to the pastoral care of Fr. Simon Ellis and all three have begun to live the Catholic life as a single united Catholic Community.

- b. On 21st April 2026, Fr. Simon Ellis will be formally inducted as parish priest of CTK and OLAM alongside his current responsibilities. This will formalise what has already been experienced within the New Cluster since 15th December 2025. It will also provide an opportunity for the whole Cluster to gather in prayer, to celebrate what has been achieved so far and to reflect upon its mission.
- c. The 2nd draft incorporated amendments reflecting an extensive review and discussion of the 1st draft at that General Cluster Meeting held on 18th May 2025. The relevant amendments are shown in the tracked text which therefore acted as minutes of that General Cluster Meeting.
- d. Fr. Thé-Quang entrusted the task of guiding the merger consultation to the point where a Merger Petition can be signed and presented to his Grace, the Archbishop of Birmingham to Deacon Gary who is both a fully qualified canon lawyer and one of the parish deacons of CTK and OLAM. It was a key recommendation of the General Cluster Meeting that Deacon Gary be supported by a group of the lay faithful who were not members of the Parish Pastoral Council. This would allow for synodal discussion of proposals before they are considered by the Parish Pastoral Council. Accordingly, the Merger Advisory Group has been established which now formally functions as a sub-Committee of the Parish Pastoral Council. The Chair of the Merger Advisory Group is Jackie Scott who is a Parish Pastoral Councillor. The secretary of the Merger Advisory Group is Wendy Gasson. The mandate of the Parish Pastoral Council has not expired with the departure of Fr. Thé-Quang. The Merger Advisory Group has continued and will continue to meet unless and until a resolution of the Parish Pastoral Council states otherwise. Fr. Simon Ellis has confirmed that he will renew the act of delegation to Deacon Gary formally once he has officially been inducted as Parish Priest. In the meantime, he has instructed Deacon Gary in conjunction with the Merger Advisory Group to continue with work which arises from steps already taken as part of the Merger Consultation, provided they cannot be characterised as innovation.
- e. In September 2025, a comprehensive consultation was undertaken in OLAM and CTK. The consultation was preceded by the publication of the 3rd Edition of Merger News No.3. The focus of the Merger Consultation was (a) possible new names for the new parish which would be created by the fusion of CTK and OLAM; and (b) proposals for the proper accommodation of the congregation

which currently meets for Mass at OLAM given the state of repair of the OLAM place of worship on Old Oscott Hill, Birmingham B44 9SP. The consultation was conducted during Mass. 375 responses were received from parishioners over the age of 16. The results were presented to a General Cluster Meeting on 18th September. Attendance at that meeting was limited to less than 20 people. Accordingly, the Merger Advisory Group made a proposal which was approved by the Parish Pastoral Council that Deacon Gary feedback the results of the consultation by preaching at all Masses over the weekend of 18th January 2026. **That was done.**

3. Issues resolved since the 2nd Draft of the Merger Document

- a. Since the Meeting of the 18th September and the last meeting of the Merger Advisory Group, the following matters have been resolved:
 - i. The Archdiocese of Birmingham has granted a formal lease of the Community Café to New Heights and has extended the New Heights Lease of the St. John's Centre to 2039.
 - ii. It has been announced that a priest will be in residence at the Presbytery of CTK. Alongside his primary role as a Law Lecturer at Newman University, he will assist with the priestly ministry in the Cluster from time to time during the University terms.
 - iii. A report from the Diocesan Director of Education has clarified that the proposal from Cardinal Wiseman to acquire the place of worship on Old Oscott Hill and convert it into a 6th Form Centre with chapel which the Cluster could use for Sunday Mass is not feasible.
 - iv. The 7 Sunday Masses within the Cluster have now been reduced to four. Weekday Masses have likewise been readjusted. In particular it is no longer possible to guarantee a Mass at the Convent on Mondays and Wednesdays at 8 am. Furthermore, unless there is a Funeral Liturgy, there will no longer be any liturgy of any kind of Thursdays **except by special appointment.**

- b. The effect of these resolutions is that extensive amendments to the 2nd draft of the Merger Document are required. To facilitate ease of reading of this 3rd draft of the Merger Document, text now superseded by events has been deleted with a footnote to indicate where the omitted text can be found in the 2nd draft. Reference can then be made to the 2nd draft if it is considered necessary. **The 3rd draft was a complete reworking of the 1st and 2nd draft. Where text had been deleted, this was indicated in the footnotes. Those footnotes have been included in this 4th draft. This 4th draft reproduces the text of the 3rd draft which was published prior to the preaching on the weekend of 18th January. Text in red represents further refinement of the 3rd draft as a result of the discussions prompted by the phases of the consultation noted in the next section.**

4. Summary of changes since 11th January 2026 (the date of publication of the 3rd Draft)

- a. A parish meeting was held in Maryvale Community Centre on 7th February 2026 to address three specific issues:
 - i. The place of OLAM in the Cluster;
 - ii. Next steps in the resolution of the challenge regarding Our Lady of the Assumption's parish church;
 - iii. Specifically, how all net proceeds of sale are accounted for under civil and canon law.
- b. Explicit reference was made to narrative comments made by parishioners of OLAM during the September consultation. Answers were given so far as possible. The meeting was minuted.
- c. The particular output of that meeting was that a marketing exercise was necessary in order to make a definitive analysis of any proposed resolution. That exercise has now begun.
- d. A second consultation exercise was undertaken regarding the proposed name of the new parish. That was conducted on the weekend of 7th March. The outcome was reported back to the parishes and published on the websites.
- e. The eventual shortlist will be included in the draft petition.

5. Theological Foundations for the Merger

- a. Under canon law, a "parish" is defined as a stable portion of the community of the faithful to whom a priest is sent as its proper pastor (its "parochus"). That understanding is crucial: the stable community of the faithful remains even if the manner in which the pastoral care is provided has to change.
- b. In considering what is said in this Merger Document please keep in mind two points:
 - i. By baptism everybody in the stable community is called to be a full participant in the mission of the Church by worshipping and praying wherever the community gathers; by sharing the Word of God amongst themselves and being formed by it; by building up the community through love and service. This is what is meant by the shorthand that baptism conforms us to Christ and enables us to participate in the ministry of Christ as priest, prophet and king. That's the spiritual background.
 - ii. An integral part of building up the Christian community is investing in it in accordance with the principles of Christian stewardship. That's the material background. Sharing in the ministry of Christ and support through Christian stewardship are the foundations of the doctrine of the common priesthood of all the baptised faithful which the Church

has taught faithfully ever since the First Letter of St Peter was written. That letter provides the classic biblical grounding for this teaching.

- c. In recent years, Rome issued a document entitled “The Pastoral Conversion of the Parish in the Service of the Evangelising Mission of the Church”. The predecessor to the current Pastoral Parish Council of CTK and OLAM has devoted several meetings to studying this document in detail. It is important to stress that the reason for proposing a formal merger of CTK and OLAM is not financial. The overriding reason for merger is to respond to this document from Rome and organise ourselves more effectively for mission. It will be clear that we are going to have to raise more money for various purposes and those purposes will be spelled out in Section Two

6. Background Information on the parishes in the Cluster

- a. CTK and OLAM² have already had several years of collaborating as a mini-Cluster in its own right. Father Eamonn Corduff was the first priest to be appointed as parochus of both CTK and OLAM. That policy was continued with Fr. Thé-Quang Nguyen’s appointment. Even before the Archbishop’s recent decree, CTK and OLAM had a single Parish Council, joint meetings of the two Finance Committees, a single Newsletter and Deacons appointed to work across the CTK and OLAM interchangeably.
- b. The current profile of the Cluster clergy is as follows: Simon is the PP of SMM and pending formal induction as parish priest, the priest in charge of CTK and OLAM. He will in due course become formally the PP of all three parishes within the Cluster. Fr. Simon has been in post at SMM for 9 years and reasonably anticipates approximately³ another 20 years of active ministry before retirement.
- c. Fr. Leonard Cox is also in the Cluster. He is officially retired but is nevertheless active in assisting both at St Chad’s/Sacred Heart, Aston and at SMM. At the request of Bishop David Waller (the Ordinary of the Ordinariate) he is exercising some oversight for the pastoral care of the Sisters of the Blessed Virgin Mary now resident at Aston Hall, Stone. His main task is to organise their Sunday Mass provision and Masses for other key seasonal celebrations⁴. It is hoped that in the fulness of time, those retired priests who occupy the two flats at Aston Hall will be able to offer Weekday Mass provision.
- d. It was announced on 4th January 2025 that Fr. Jude Mbonu, a priest from Nigeria who is Law lecturer at Newman University would be taking up residence in the

² The “United Catholic Community” is no longer a valid phrase to describe just 2/3^{rds} of the Cluster.

³ This amendment reflects the passage of time since the 1st draft of the Merger Document was produced.

⁴ The Sisters were formerly resident at 99 Old Oscott Hill in the Maryvale Parish. Aston Hall, Stone also provides a home for Bishop Timothy Menezes who has also celebrated Masses for the Sisters from time to time when his other duties permit.

CTK presbytery from February 2026 and would assist as and when he can around his academic responsibilities with the priestly ministry in the Cluster.

- e. There are two current serving deacons: Dominic Fahey and Gary O'Brien. Both have extensive responsibilities outside the parishes of OLAM and CTK. Each Deacon reasonably anticipates a further 10- 15 years of active ministry. A member of the SMM congregation is in formation for the permanent diaconate. As and when he is able, Bishop David Evans presides at one of the Sunday Masses offered in OLAM/CTK. Since 15th December 2025, both Deacons Dominic and Gary have been exercising their diaconal ministry at SMM as well.
- f. The current Mass provision in the Cluster is: Vigil Masses: 12.30 pm CTK and 6.00 pm OLAM; Sunday Morning Masses: 09.30 am CTK and 11.15 am SMM. SMM have lost two Masses. OLAM has lost one. The preservation of two Masses at CTK is justified by the numbers going to Mass at that place of worship and the preponderance of young families at the Sunday morning Mass⁵.
- g. SMM has been entrusted to the Ordinariate of Our Lady of Walsingham. There are (including Fathers Simon and Leonard) 15 ascribed members of the Ordinariate in the Cluster. As a result of their ministerial and professional backgrounds, these formally ascribed members of the Ordinariate have taken a prominent role in the life of SMM, the Archdiocese and the Ordinariate nationally. SMM remains a territorial parish of the Archdiocese. There is an Agreement between the Archdiocese and the Ordinariate which governs the pastoral care of SMM and their mutual financial arrangements. Any change in the current provision has to be made on one year's notice. None of the Cluster clergy has the competence to amend that Agreement still less to bring it to an end. That can only be done by episcopal decision (+ Bernard [presumably, assisted by + David Evans] and + David Waller of the Ordinariate).
- h. On Sundays, Feast Days and Solemnities one Mass in the Ordinariate Rite is celebrated and that is guaranteed by the Agreement. However, on the 1st Sunday of the month, Sunday Mass at SMM is celebrated according to the Novus Ordo as happens every week and at all Sunday Masses at CTK and OLAM. Further information concerning the Ordinariate appears in Appendix One⁶.

7. Reasons for Merger

- a. Context
 - i. In January and February 2024 on consecutive weekends, Deacon Gary preached at all 7 Masses then celebrated within the Cluster. He drew attention to the fact that within the next 7 years, having regard to the ages of the current serving clergy, 43% of the active priests within the Archdiocese would have passed their retirement age. Consequently, we had to organise ourselves for

⁵ In the 2nd draft, the Mass attendance was published. This information is no longer relevant to the question of Merger. In any case, Mass attendance will now be published weekly in the Newsletter.

⁶ Appendix One contains no changes and has not been reproduced for the purposes of emailing out this 3rd draft.

mission in a different way from that with which we have all come to know as Catholics. He explicitly stated that a vital part of that difference was that within 3-5 years, the current three parishes in the Cluster will have merged into one with just one single parish priest appointed to it.

- ii. These circumstances are not unique to the Newman Cluster. The parish of Blessed Carlo Acutis combines three parishes. In our neighbouring Cluster, Catholic Sutton Coldfield, it has been announced that by the time Fr. Neil Bayliss retires in 2028, the four parishes in the Cluster will be served by just two priests.
- iii. Thus the current proposal is the first step to the destination Deacon Gary outlined in his homily⁷.
 - b. Type of Merger envisaged
 - i. The type of merger envisaged is a fusion. It will not be a takeover of OLAM by CTK or vice versa. This is an absolutely crucial point to grasp. Both CTK and OLAM will cease to exist once the merger is formally complete and a brand new parish will emerge. For present purposes, we can call the new parish "Parish N".
 - ii. The unanimous view from all of the small discussion groups was that merger by fusion was the better option. It preserves a missional presence on both sides of what we hope will become 2/3^{rds} of a united Catholic Community. The benefits of merger by fusion were seen by all as worth working towards. A number of important issues which must be discussed further were identified. These are itemised below.
 - iii. Related to the reduction in the number of Masses is the question of whether one Sunday Mass per weekend will remain an Ordinariate Divine Worship Mass as per the existing agreement between the Archdiocese and the Ordinariate of Our Lady of Walsingham. Fathers Simon and Leonard confirmed that it was not an absolute requirement that the presiding priest at an Ordinariate Mass be an ascribed member of the Ordinariate. Bishop Timothy Menezes has celebrated a number of such Masses for the Benedictine sisters now resident in Aston Hall.
 - iv. Likewise, when considering which is the better option for rehousing the community which gathers for worship currently at OLAM, we need to remember that although OLAM is on top of a hill which makes it less accessible for those arriving at Church by bus, it does have a car park. Furthermore, the Maryvale Institute Chapel has a restricted capacity. CTK has no car park and those attending by car have to use the car park of the Kingstanding Inn (which for the moment is permitted) or park on the street.
 - v. Times of Masses have to take account of the practicality of times both for young families and the elderly.
 - vi. There was a consensus that we needed to restore the parish minibus service and for this we would need suitably trained volunteers.

⁷ Text deleted – no longer relevant.

- vii. Deacon Gary pointed out in answer to a question about cover if the parish priest were absent or ill, that there is very likely not going to be any. Hence the reference to cultural change later in this Merger Document. We would need to prepare the faithful for a greater use of the Divine Office (of the Dead) for anniversaries and possibly Liturgies of Word and Holy Communion (even on Sundays) to counterbalance the reduction of Masses. This links to the point about the theological basis on which this proposal is being considered. The lay faithful must be formed to exercise their baptismal vocation more fully.
- viii. The point was made that if we reduce the number of Masses and/or change the times, we are very unlikely to retain all the existing congregation. There will therefore be a reduction of income. How can we pay for three buildings if the income goes down⁸?
- ix. The point was also made that even if we move to the Maryvale Institute chapels with appropriately funded repairs to bring access etc., up to modern standards, if it would not accommodate one of the Mass congregations, is it wise to invest in it⁹?

c. Anticipated benefits

- i. enabling a better sharing and allocation of resources- material and liturgical: one key point of learning from the round of consultation carried out in September 2025 was that the growing families in the two parishes are choosing Christ the King for their place of worship and so it is from that resources that new lay ministers will primarily be found.
- ii. breaking down a residual us/them attitude which the Parish Council has discerned: it is agreed that this barrier must be overcome by gentle nurturing;
- iii. creating a more energised foundation for the parish's mission to Maryvale Catholic Primary School and Cardinal Wiseman without impinging on the current work carried on between Christ the King and Christ the King Catholic Primary School;
- iv. enabling us to form lay ministers working across our United Catholic Community- not just about liturgical ministers and lay leaders of worship but also health and safety officers and premises managers; catechists and community organisers; safeguarding representatives and future parish pastoral councillors with an understanding that they are ministers of governance; lay missionaries and ministers of hospitality and welcome. We need to accept there that at the very least investment in training courses is going to be needed and possibly more employment contracts.

⁸ Once we have had a period of time to assess attendances and income, we can return to this question.

⁹ This question was pertinent when a Mass was celebrated at 11.30 am at OLAM. With an average 130 congregation it could not easily fit safely in the Maryvale Institute chapel. The only Sunday Mass now at OLAM is the Saturday Vigil and its regular congregation can certainly be accommodated there.

- v. enabling a better sharing and allocation of resources- material and liturgical: one key point of learning from the round of consultation carried out in September 2025 was that the growing families in the two parishes are choosing Christ the King for their place of worship and so it is from that resources that new lay ministers will primarily be found.
- vi. breaking down a residual us/them attitude which the Parish Council has discerned: it is agreed that this barrier must be overcome by gentle nurturing;
- vii. creating a more energised foundation for the parish's mission to Maryvale Catholic Primary School and Cardinal Wiseman without impinging on the current work carried on between Christ the King and Christ the King Catholic Primary School;
- viii. enabling us to form lay ministers working across our United Catholic Community- not just about liturgical ministers and lay leaders of worship but also health and safety officers and premises managers; catechists and community organisers; safeguarding representatives and future parish pastoral councillors with an understanding that they are ministers of governance; lay missionaries and ministers of hospitality and welcome. We need to accept there that at the very least investment in training courses is going to be needed and possibly more employment contracts.

Merger is necessary to achieve these laudable ends so that the financial investment required can be appropriately targeted at the area of greatest need. A single finance committee and a single parish pastoral council will be able to offer better advice and counsel to Fr. Simon on these issues.

On present thinking, our newly merged Parish N would continue to have two places of worship: the present Church at CTK and a place of worship on Old Oscott Hill. More is said about this in the next section. In considering this point, what was described as "the elephant in the room" was identified and brought out into the open. As and when the final stage of this process is complete and we have one single merged parish, how can we run three places of worship effectively with adequate financing? 2 buildings would be much easier for a single parish priest to manage.

- ix. In answer to a specific question, Deacon Gary noted that the Maryvale Community Centre, which is an important contributor to parish income, would remain an asset of the charity which underpins the Archdiocese and under canon law remains allocated to OLAM. On merger it would be an asset of the new parish. Merger as such would not change that. If a sale of the land would include the site of MCC, then that would require further discussion.

7. Implications of a Merger

- a. For name of parish and dedication of the constituent Churches

- i. Parish N will have a brand new name. The one that was used for the sake of illustration at the Annual General Meeting was “Sacred Heart and St John Henry Newman”. The name of Parish N is something on which the United Catholic Community can present a consensus to the Archbishop when his formal approval to merger is sought.
- ii. The name of Parish N is NOT the same as the dedication of the constituent Churches within it. Within the United Catholic Community are the dedications: Christ the King and Our Lady of the Assumption. These can only be changed with the approval of the Apostolic See which we are not going to divert time and energy into seeking.
- iii. Thus the Notice Board outside the places of worship in the United Catholic Community would read:

Archdiocese of Birmingham

Parish of N

Christ the King Catholic Church/Our Lady of the Assumption Catholic Church

- iv. Again a useful place to look is the parish of Blessed Carlo Acutis, Wolverhampton where the dedications of the constituent Churches are noted above the times of Masses there¹⁰.

b. For buildings

- i. OLAM has the Church and Maryvale Community Centre which is a good source of income. Preserving that source of income whether or not there is a merger is a high priority. The former OLAM presbytery is now occupied by Bishop David Evans under a formal agreement.
- ii. Within the parish boundary of CTK, there is the canonically erected Convent of the Sisters Minor of St Francis. Two weekday Masses per week are usually celebrated in the chapel of the Convent. Following the departure of Fr. Thé-Quang, this will be subject to the availability of Bishop David Evans and Fr. Jude to offer the Mass. In addition, there is a monthly half day of recollection there.
- iii. CTK has the Church, a Presbytery which at one time housed three priests and is occupied by Fr. Jude alone. Behind the worship space but as an integral part of the Church building is the Guild Room which can be used for meetings. The St John’s Centre which forms part of the Church premises is let to the New Heights charity under a formal FRI lease expiring in 2039. Subject to agreement with the Project Manager of New Heights, the St John’s Centre is available free of charge to the parish for use as a Church Hall and especially on Sundays between 8 am and 1 pm. Day to day dealings between the parish and New Heights are carried out in accordance with a soon-to-be-completed Memorandum of Agreement.

¹⁰ It was accepted that more work had to be done in consultation with all three parishes to produce an acceptable short list of names. See section 4 for what has been done in that regard.

- iv. ¹¹Within CTK and along the road from it at 108 Warren Farm Road is the Community Café. There are offices on the first floor. This is also operated by New Heights. Again following discussions between CTK and the Trustees of New Heights, the a 10 year renewal of the current tenancy has been agreed with the Archdiocese subject to a provision that the Trustees can bring the letting to an end on 3 months' notice. This was requested by New Heights as protection if their funding should run out.
- v. ¹²SMM has the Church and the Presbytery. The Deanery understands and has noted that for as long as Fr. Simon has any responsibility for SMM or any other part of the Newman Cluster, he and his family will remain resident at 59 Perry Common Road. Obviously, if he receives an episcopal mandate to take up another responsibility that of necessity requires a residential move, then that will be a different matter. However, absent such a mandate, a residential move will not be happening¹³.
- vi. Parking arrangements in the Cluster are as follows: CTK has no dedicated parking other than three spaces in the Church forecourt. Cars driven to Mass at CTK are either parked on the surrounding streets or, by kind arrangement with the proprietors, in the car park of the nearby Kingstanding Inn. SMM adjoins a public recreation space and therefore has the benefit of the adjacent public municipal car park. OLAM has a dedicated car park which is more than sufficient for all ordinary needs with some overflow spaces at the Maryvale Community Centre.
- vii. Against that context, the particular problems associated with OLAM's Church have to be considered. The Church on Old Oscott Hill has many problems which make it unsuitable for modern use. There is a consensus on that from the Parish Council. It is unlikely to be cost effective to undertake the repairs identified in the Quinquennial Report because the building is far too large for the actual congregation even allowing for reasonable growth and, in any case, it is almost impossible to heat adequately. Furthermore, it is not possible to have a full participative and communal experience of Mass when there are whole benches in between each individual worshipper.
- viii. At the time of the 2nd draft, the Archdiocese had two possible solutions under review with the aim of reaching a definitive conclusion by the end of 2025. They were:
 - a. Allow Parish N to occupy as its own dedicated place of worship the ground floor chapel at the Maryvale Institute. With this would also come custodianship of the Sacred Heart chapel on the floor above. The specialist property investment advisers retained by the Archdiocese, Savills, have suggested that by designating the chapels and ancillary offices as under the care of Parish N, the remainder of the site would be easier to market.

¹¹ Text deleted: no longer relevant.

¹² Text deleted: no longer relevant.

¹³ Text deleted: no longer relevant.

Savills are currently undertaking what is known as soft marketing. This means that instead of general advertising, they approach specific potential purchasers directly to gauge interest.

- b. Sell the current Church building at OLAM to Cardinal Wiseman who would use it as a 6th Form Centre. They would construct two additional floors. The place of worship would be on the ground floor with ancillary offices. The actual worship space would be designed for 200 people and so half the size of the current one.
- ix. A report received just prior to the date of this 3rd draft from the Diocesan Director of Education makes it clear that option b is no longer feasible and must be discounted.
- x. Parish N takes over the Maryvale Institute chapels then on the grounds of size alone, CTK would have to be the hub Church. Funerals and marriages would therefore, on that scenario, be conducted at CTK.
- xi. The current view of the Archdiocese seems to be that moving to the Maryvale Institute Chapels would be preferable since this would help to preserve them as a religious centre, especially since St John Henry New has been declared a Doctor of the Church. However, it must be acknowledged that with the parish community, there is a considerable anxiety as to whether this preference is financially viable given the scale of works needed to bring the chapels and ancillary accommodation up to appropriate standards for public worship. There was a body of support for Option (b).

(e) For finances

- i. Apart from potential training and salary costs mentioned earlier, either of the above solutions would require funds to be generated by the sale of the current building on Old Oscott Hill. Furthermore, additional funding for conversion works would also be required which implies a sustained programme under the care of a dedicated fundraising committee in conjunction with a hospitality/social committee. It was agreed that future discussion on finances would have to await a subsequent meeting at which Finance was on the agenda and appropriate papers would be needed in connection with that agenda item.

8. Cultural Change and Conversion

- ii. The changes envisaged above imply much more commitment from the Parish Council which will shortly be reformed as the Parish Pastoral Council operating in accordance with regulations issued by the Archbishop. The members of the Parish Pastoral Council will be operating as Ministers of Governance and will be seeking to involve many more parishioners in the projects. Whilst the parish priest of Parish N will ultimately have the final say (for he alone is answerable to the Archbishop), these changes must see the end of the cultural view that everything has to be left to Father and he must

take all the decisions. Furthermore, these changes offer a golden opportunity to entrench synodality in the life of our United Catholic Community.

- iii. All of us by virtue of our baptism are called to share in the work of Jesus as priest, prophet and king. We do this predominantly by our active participation in the Mass. Now through the merger we are being called upon to do more to contribute to the parish community. With Fr. Simon now responsible for the three parishes in the Cluster, it is not feasible or right for us to expect him to undertake everything alone. We need to step up and assist him by taking some of the burden. There are many ways to help out: hospitality, greeting those coming to Mass, becoming a Minister of the Word or an Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion taking the Blessed Sacrament to those who are housebound or in a nursing or care home; becoming a befriender, visiting those who are isolated for whatever reason. These are just a few of the ways we can become more involved in parish life. By working together for the common good we will be a more vibrant, caring community witnessing to the wider community the presence of God with us and within us.
- iv. Yet further cultural change is needed. With fewer masses being celebrated, it will no longer be possible for everyone to have a Mass celebrated in the Cluster to mark all such occasions. Other forms of worship must be explored most notably the Divine Office of the Church which is an integral part of Christ's mediatory prayer. Furthermore, following discussions within the Parish Pastoral Council and in consultation with the Vicar-General, arrangements have now been implemented to send Mass intentions to other priests at home and abroad. These arrangements have been notified to parishioners over several weeks.
- v. Moreover, since 1983 there has been provision for lay preaching at services other than Mass. Suitably qualified lay faithful can, under certain circumstances, act as official witness at marriages. Since 1990, in England and Wales, they can also conduct funerals. Thus there was already ample provision for lay leadership of services of worship other than Mass. Note: lay leadership – not male leadership. However, Pope Francis went further and by extending the office of Lector and Acolyte to both men and women, he opened the door to lay leaders of worship having a stable office within the Church.
- vi. Sponsoring and promoting the cultural change necessary for these developments to be accepted peaceably will not be easy. However, Parish N would be in a good position to make a start because of the renewal and impetus that a merger would inevitably bring.
- vii. Discussion on this section opened up a wide range of comments which have been grouped together thematically as follows:

9. Ambience of Masses at OLAM and CTK

It is accepted that currently there is a very different feel to Masses at each venue. If there is to be a fusion of the parishes will there also be a fusion of the styles? If we really want a single united Catholic community then there will surely have to be. Some changes we

can prepare for others we must see what develops and react. It is a difficult message to get across but the inevitability of the merger has been accepted by this meeting and needs to be underlined to both congregations. There was a view that the significance and size of the changes about to come upon us had not yet been fully grasped by the majority of the congregations.

10. Involving more people in the discussion

It was accepted that attendance at meetings at whatever time of day or whatever day of the week was not always possible for everybody and so we need to identify other ways of giving feedback. What we are embarking on here is the wholesale change of a mindset which has been accepted by many people as the only way to be Catholic.

11. Developing a stronger sense of community

This had two aspects: worship and involvement in governance. As far as worship was concerned, we had to look at different ways of worship and preaching. As far as governance was concerned, we need to engage, enable and empower. The two are related and to achieve these ends we need to hold a mirror up to ourselves. Deacon Gary confirmed that this was precisely what the Divine Renovation initiative was designed to do. The overall point under this heading was that if we want cultural change then we have to do things differently.

The observation was also made that developing a sense of belong from which flows commitment is the fundamental cultural change we need. The Gospel must be the foundation of everything. This is also a key message of the Divine Renovation initiative.

12. Involving more people in ministry

Is more firmness in our language required? At present there seem to be more barriers to greater lay involvement than solutions. It was recommended that we confer with other parishes where volunteer recruitment has been more successful. A suggestion was made that if we wish to receive a broader range of opinions and widen the group from whom feedback was needed then we had to be more specific about the agenda of any future meetings and seek to provide opportunities for feedback either within or just after Sunday Mass.

13. Catechesis for lay ministry

There was a consensus that more catechesis for lay ministry was required but a plea that it be not overwhelming. What follow up could there be, for example, to the recently run Sycamore course for the parents of the children preparing for sacraments? In answer to a specific question, Deacon Gary said that we could not simply rely on a continuing supply of priests from abroad., The immigration controls are such that it is not straightforward, and it would divert attention from the fact that we need to educate the lay faithful into different ways of being a Catholic.

14. Relationship of Parish N to full merger with St Margaret Mary

As previously explained, the creation of Parish N from a fusion of CTK and OLAM is but the first stage of a process that will end with the complete merger of Parish N and SMM. Once the parish name has been determined, there is no reason why the decree of merger cannot be issued. SMM must be included at the current stage on any discussions regarding name¹⁴. Following the establishment of Parish N by decree, further consultation can continue regarding the future of the place of worship on Old Oscott Hill. Eventually a second Petition will be required making a definitive proposal for the Archbishop's consideration. Finally, a a third and final period of consultation, a third petition will be necessary to merge SMM with Parish N. As and when the full merger of Parish N and SMM occurs, then, subject to the inclusion within it of more parishes, the Newman Cluster would automatically be dissolved because however Parish N and SMM are merged, they would become likewise one single entity. Following Fr. Simon's appointment, the entire Cluster is being managed administratively from the CTK parish office.

15. Final Steps

The draft petition will be exhibited at all public masses from the 21st March to the 25th March inclusive. Parishioners will have the opportunity to make final observations and pass these to Parish Pastoral Councillors and members of the Merger Advisory Group. Subject to those final observations, the petition will be finalised and presented to Fr. Simon for signature. It will then be sent to the Chancellor of the Archdiocese, canon Ray Corbett, and other relevant personnel.

¹⁴ Text deleted. No longer relevant.