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20 December 2019

To the Catholic Community of West Malling

Dear Friends in the Catholic Community of West Malling

I write to you as your new Archbishop on a subject that I know will be close to your heart.

Since coming to the Archdiocese in July, I have been made aware of the challenges of sustaining the properties of The Hermitage, St Thomas More's Catholic Church and the adjacent nursery. I have visited the site and seen the situation for myself.

As you will be aware, a major maintenance issue arose earlier this year with the collapse of part of the parapet into the roof above Fr Peter's accommodation. This is obviously a serious concern. Following further investigations into the state of the building, it has become clear that there are substantial maintenance issues with The Hermitage, which will be extremely expensive to resolve. The cost of these repairs and the on-going maintenance of the property is now beyond the means which the Archdiocese and parish can reasonably afford.

Following consultation with Father Peter and representatives of the Parish, and after discussion with the Trustees of the Archdiocese concerning the future of the property, the decision has been taken to make the whole site (The Hermitage, St Thomas More Church and the nursery) available for sale in Spring 2020. Offering the whole site for sale will ensure maximum flexibility in any potential transfer.

I appreciate that change of this kind can be very unsettling. Given the financial situation, however, there does not seem to be any other viable solution to the difficulties we now face.

I would like to assure you that arrangements will be made for the celebration of Mass in West Malling and for accommodation for Fr Peter. Options for alternative arrangements regarding this are in hand and information will be forthcoming about this as soon as it is available. We will ensure that spiritual and pastoral provision is made available in the best way possible. In the interim, I would ask you to do all you

can to maintain a positive spirit within the parish community, working with Fr Peter to enable this transition in due course.

Thank you for your kindness and understanding.

With very best wishes and the assurance of prayers

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'John Wilson', with a small cross symbol at the beginning.

The Most Rev John Wilson
Archbishop of Southwark