

St Simon † St Jude

Roman Catholic Church Streatham Hill

Rev. Adrian McKenna-Whyte B.Th. M.Sc.

The Priest's House, 5 Hillside Rd,
Streatham Hill London SW2 3HL

Email: fr_mckenna@btinternet.com

Tel. 020 8678 9051

17 May 2010

An open letter to the schools and parishes in Lambeth Deanery

I recently had cause to write to some local headteachers in response to many of the parents in the Parish of St Simon and St Jude failing to obtain a place in a Catholic school for their child. This open letter is written in order to outline the particular difficulties experienced by parents within our Parish and to reiterate the strong support that exists for our local Catholic schools and to acknowledge the important role that the Priests of our Deanery have in maintaining direct links to the schools within their Parish boundaries.

Lambeth Borough, in addition to many other London Boroughs, has a shortfall in school places, with Primary School places being particularly under-funded. In respect of this, in November 2009, Lambeth Council was notified that it would be awarded an additional £9.002m in funding to assist the Council's primary school expansion plans. Some of these funds were to be spent on providing a new primary school in Norwood, and the expansion or refurbishment of several other primary schools. This confirmation of additional funding allowed Lambeth to commit to many, but not all of its school expansion plans, with the acknowledgment from the Council that there was a shortage of Primary School places in Herne Hill, Norwood and Brixton in particular.¹

The Parish of St Simon and St Jude falls directly within the geographical area that has a particular lack of Primary School places and has no Parish school of its own. Consequently, the children of our Parish are dependent on Primary School places being available for them in Catholic schools that have direct links with other Parishes. Such schools undoubtedly have to face the problem of an ever-increasing number of applicants trying to obtain a relatively small number of places. Our Parish acknowledges the vital work carried out by our local schools in providing a Catholic education and recognizes that the funding and facilities of the schools has not increased relative to the growth of the school-aged population around them.

Over the last twenty-one months our Parish numbers have increased and currently we have ninety-four school-aged children, equating to 27% of our Parish congregation, a figure which is proportionately higher than the 21% of school-aged children within our Council Ward.² Whilst recognizing the difficulties faced by the Headteachers and Governors of schools in trying to allocate places, it is becoming more apparent to the parents of our Parish that their children are disadvantaged in trying to obtain a school place. This inequity stems from the fact that there is no Catholic school within our Parish

¹ Lambeth Council, *Expansion of Primary School Places*.
<http://www.lambeth.gov.uk/moderngov/mgAi.aspx?ID=7422>. 5/17/10.

² Lambeth Council, *Streatham Hill Ward Data Table*. <http://www.lambeth.gov.uk/NR/rdonlyres/53B285B1-5CE2-41E5-9B09-7E58C92> in trying to C72EA/0/024705.pdf. 04.05.2010.

boundary and no school with which we have direct formally-agreed links for a set number of school places.

I respectfully bring to the attention of the schools and Parishes in Lambeth Deanery that our Parish believes we should appeal for the funding and provision of more places within our schools and for those places to be equitably distributed between the Parishes of the Deanery as a whole, so that the children of St Simon and St Jude have an equal chance of a Catholic education.

I earnestly seek the support of my fellow Priests in this endeavour to promote the need for further funding from Lambeth Council. This funding is necessary for an increase in school places and any subsequent expansion in classes or school buildings in order to house the increasing numbers of children in our Parishes. I have been in contact with Bishop Patrick Lynch over this issue and he has suggested that this be discussed at the next Deanery meeting with representatives from the local Headteachers.

Naturally this issue will not be resolved overnight, however, having corresponded with the Diocesan Schools' Commission regarding this matter, it has been recommended that the parents of St Simon and St Jude Parish write to Phyllis Dunipace, the Executive Director of Children and Young People's Services at Lambeth, to assist the Diocese in their discussions with the Council over the need for further funding.

I hope that we can work together in raising the awareness of the desperate need for a greater number of Catholic school places. Once again I reiterate the support that our Parish gives to all your endeavours in providing a high standard of Catholic education and the value our parents place on the impact such an education can make on their children's lives.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Adrian McKenna-Whyte', written in a cursive style.

Rev. Adrian McKenna-Whyte