

# Parishioners defy diocese over Mass in old church

A MASS celebrated against the wishes of Salford diocese at a central Manchester church has reignited the debate over the parish's future, *writes Richard Marsden.*

Former parishioners of St Michael's, Ancoats, gained permission to enter the church, which has been closed for three years, from the North West Development Agency, which is responsible for the building. More than 100 Catholics, largely from the city's Italian community, attended the Mass.

For three years parishioners have been at odds with the diocese over the closure, which they claim happened without consultation. Local Catholics gather outside St Michael's

every Sunday to pray that the church will be reopened.

Stella Newton, who organised the service, said she hoped the diocese could be persuaded to reopen St Michael's. But diocesan spokesman, Fr Michael Walsh, said there was no such plan. "It is no longer used by the diocese and no longer owned by the diocese," he said. "The service they had was not of the permission of the diocese and was not celebrated by a diocesan priest."

According to Fr Walsh, adequate pastoral provision for the parishioners has been made within the area including visits by an Italian priest who celebrates Mass for the Italian

community in another church on holy days of obligation. "There is a continuing protest against the closure and they have every right to do so," he said. "Some of the people who are protesting don't live in the immediate area. They come from all over the city."

Mrs Newton said appeals to meet Bishop Terence Brain to discuss the future of the parish had fallen on deaf ears. "To us it's a holy and sacred place and nobody can ever alter that for us. People who are willing to stand out there on the steps in the rain, hail, snow and blizzards shouldn't be ignored. They should be applauded."

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Closing date for applications: 31 March 2007

Interviews are likely to be held during the week beginning  
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Start date: Mid July / August 2007 by arrangement.

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