

Press release

Cathedral Status for St Mary of the Isle, Douglas

Pope Francis has granted cathedral status to the Church of Saint Mary of the Isle, following Douglas being awarded city status as part of the late Queen Elizabeth's Platinum Jubilee celebrations in June 2022.

The Church will be a co-cathedral to the Metropolitan Cathedral of Christ the King, based 80 miles away in Liverpool city centre and will be the first Catholic co-cathedral in the British Isles.

Co-cathedrals are rare in the Catholic Church, but exist when two dioceses, each with its own cathedral, are merged or when a single diocese spans two distinct civil jurisdictions.

Monsignor John Devine, parish priest of St Mary of the Isle, said of the announcement: "I am delighted that St Mary of the Isle has been granted cathedral status, it is wonderful news for Catholics across the island.

"It is not just an honour for Douglas, but it acknowledges the unique faith story of the Isle of Man.

"It has been a year-long process to get to this point. I was first approached by Douglas Borough Council who pointed out that cities have cathedrals, the island already has an Anglican cathedral in Peel, but they enquired whether it would be possible to elevate the church of St Mary of the Isle, Douglas, to the status of a cathedral.

"The Archbishop of Liverpool, the Most Rev Malcolm McMahon, on the advice of canon lawyers, petitioned the Holy Father; a request supported by both the Anglican Bishop of Sodor and Man, the chief executive of Douglas Council and the President of Tynwald."

Archbishop Malcolm McMahon said: "It is with great joy that St Mary of the Isle has been granted cathedral status. The Isle of Man is a significant part of our archdiocese, it constitutes one third of its land mass and the island's Catholic community has increasing diversity with parishioners coming from many different parts of the world. It is fantastic that we can acknowledge this with the announcement of a co-cathedral – a status that is rare in the Catholic Church. It is something that everyone on the island will take great pride in."

Monsignor John Devine added: "Christianity in the Isle of Man traces its roots to the time of St Patrick and St Maughold in the 5th century. But there is limited appreciation of the unique history and traditions of the Manx Church in the rest of the archdiocese. However, rather than separating them further, the granting of co-

cathedral status to St Mary's will raise consciousness in Liverpool to the riches of the Manx church. "

Right Revered Peter Eagles, Anglican Bishop of Sodor and Man added: 'It is a source of great gladness to me that we have such strong ecumenical relationships here on the Island. It has often occurred to me that that St Mary of the Isle has a dignity and spaciousness that is as appropriate for a cathedral as for a parish church and I fully support the bestowing of co-cathedral status.'

A cathedral is where the bishop of a diocese has his seat or *cathedra*. Plans are in hand for an official ceremony during which Archbishop Malcolm will formally take possession of his seat to mark the Church becoming a Cathedral.

Ends

The petition made the following points:

- The Isle of Man is an independent self-governing jurisdiction and not part of the United Kingdom.
- Prior to the Reformation, the Church on the Island was the independent Diocese of Sodor and Mann. Since the Reformation this continues as an Anglican diocese. It is part of the Church of England with its own Bishop resident on the Island with its own cathedral in the historic town of Peel on the west coast of the Island.
- The post Reformation Catholic Church on the island forms part of the Archdiocese of Liverpool. Separated from Liverpool 80 miles across the Irish Sea, it constitutes one third of the land mass of the Archdiocese with a total population of 85,000. The percentage of Catholics among the population is rising with recently arrived immigrant workers from the Philippines, eastern Europe and many other Western European, African and South American nations as well as Catholics from India and Indonesia. They come to work in the Island's financial sector and in health and social care.
- The church is regularly visited by the Archbishop of Liverpool and his auxiliary bishops. It is the venue for ordinations to the priesthood, the diaconate and the sacrament of Confirmation.
- The present church of St Mary of the Isle, built in 1859, is situated directly across the main street from the Tynwald Parliament building.
- St Mary of the Isle is a regular venue for civic occasions such as the Isle of Man Government Christmas Carol Service and the annual Holocaust Memorial Service. These are attended by the Chief Minister and his cabinet along with the Lieutenant Governor and civic leaders and officials.
- Given the history of sectarian division on the Island, this is a significant approach from the authorities. For the last three years the Roman Catholic Dean was invited to serve as official chaplain to the Mayor of Douglas; a first. The Dean also plays a prominent role in civic occasions such as the annual open air sitting of the ancient Tynwald parliament. Last year there was an additional sitting of Tynwald to proclaim King Charles III as Lord of Mann. Once again, the Catholic Dean was invited to join those leading prayers.

- Commitment by the Catholic church over many years to ecumenical co-operation and partnership has borne fruit. The Anglican Bishop of Sodor and Man traditionally leads one day of the annual Novena to Mary Untier of Knots in St Mary's. He has personally dedicated a statue of Our Lady of Walsingham in one of our churches. Leaders of each denomination meet monthly as CAIM – 'Churches Alive in Mann'. They speak jointly on public policy issues such as euthanasia, abortion, overseas aid, the environment and climate change. They jointly fund a Manx Churches' Safeguarding Officer.
- The Anglican bishop and the Dean of the Anglican Cathedral along with leaders of the other Christian denominations were fully supportive of this request for co-cathedral status. Their letters of support were included in the request to the Holy See along with supportive statements from the President of Tynwald and other civil leaders.
- The raising of the church of St Mary of the Isle to co-cathedral status will give members of the Catholic church on the Island a sense of pride in their Celtic Christian tradition reaching back to the time of St Patrick in the 5th century. Yet the Isle of Man is often overlooked by the majority of Catholics in the wider Archdiocese of Liverpool. The installation of the Archbishop's cathedra or chair on the sanctuary at St Mary of the Isle will be a permanent reminder that he is their spiritual leader.
- The word 'cathedral' is understood by all. It gives clear recognition of the long-standing presence of the Catholic church on the Isle of Man.