

At Your Service Tara Holmes

NINE times out of ten, my husband and I are too tired and too disorganised to march our young family out the door in time for early morning Mass. While we have untold admiration for those families who achieve this feat, it is the one day in the week when we prefer to recharge our batteries first thing rather than devote all our energy towards organising small children.

But every once in a while when we wake up to a clear blue sky on a Sunday morning, we may experience an irresistible desire to spring out of bed and make the most of what promises to be a hot summer's day.

This morning we are on the road shortly after nine and heading into the High Peak area of Derbyshire to a church which has shared our priest for the past year but of which we know little. Ever since our parish was amalgamated with the Church of the Annunciation in New Mills, we have been meaning to go and see how the other half worship.

In these days of dwindling congregations and clergy shortages, the bringing together of two otherwise diverse communities can be a painful experience not always guaranteed to succeed. One community will normally lose its resident priest and both sides will have, at most, three weekend services between the two churches. In this case it is those at New Mills who have been called on to make the greater sacrifice.

As the church swings into view, I am struck by the odd juxtaposition of the industrial and rural landscape. Factories are embedded in the rolling hills which surround this unusual Peak District town. While it is not a classic tourist spot like nearby Hayfield nor breathtakingly beautiful like the Lake District, it is rather pretty, and most probably underrated by those of us living on the other side of the border in Cheshire.

This is also the perfect place to worship for people worried about having their car stolen while in church. Whereas the Pioneers of the Mid-West used to wheel their wagons together when under attack, the parishioners at New Mills park their cars in a circle around the church. This strange phenomenon provides an excel-

★ A five star guide ★

VENUE: Church of the Annunciation, New Mills, the High Peak

PARISH PRIEST: Father John Cairns

ARCHITECTURE: A mid-19th century Victorian church with a spire built in a pre-Reformation style. Other notable outside features include an unflattering statue of St Theresa of Lisieux, an imitation Lourdes Grotto and a First World War memorial.

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SPIRITUAL HIGH: An accomplished music ministry, with a variety of instruments, including the guitar, piano and clarinet, whose members manage to revitalise

Colours of Day

★ ★ ★ ★ ☆

AFTER-SERVICE CARE: The orderly queue to greet the priest is reminiscent of a wedding reception but without the sherry. No refreshments available

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lent incentive to arrive early and avoid being stuck in a ten-minute queue of gridlocked cars afterwards. It is also an imaginative way of parking close to the church and worshipping communities without a car park may like to consider it too.

Inside the church, statues of saints are mounted on the walls alongside the pews and a huge life-size crucifix hangs above the sanctuary with Mary and the Apostle John kneeling at the foot of the cross. For a community which is served by a priest living at another church four miles away, New Mills is surprisingly vibrant.

I had been half expecting to find a subdued congregation with low morale. Instead I discover a church more akin to a parish in a heavily populated town in the south-east where finding a seat is always a challenge. The folk group leading the music is unexpectedly talented and takes me back ten years to my university days when a sound music ministry was guaranteed to pack the pews.