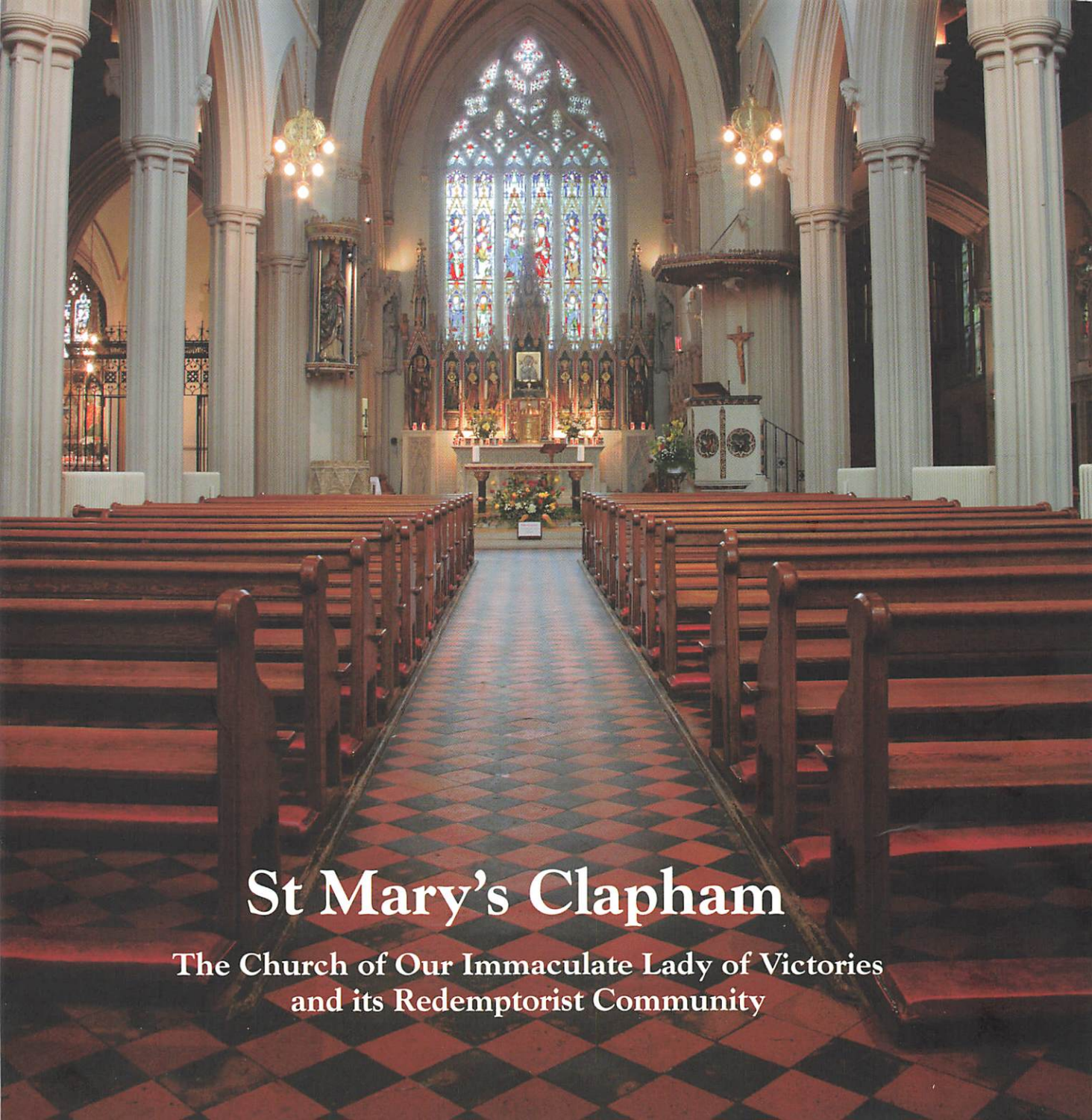




St Mary's Clapham

The Church of Our Immaculate Lady of Victories
and its Redemptorist Community

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Introduction by Fr Richard Reid, Rector of St Mary's

The Redemptorists have been in Clapham since 1848. Often I stand at the bottom of the garden and look up to the monastery and the church, with the spire towering over the neighbourhood, and I appreciate somewhat the story of this Redemptorist building and place. I allow my mind to go back many years, long even before I was born, and envisage the many Redemptorist Fathers and Brothers of yesteryear living their daily life here in Clapham. From the stories older *confrères* tell, from the writings in old chronicles recording both the humdrum events of daily life and the more memorable moments, it is easy to imagine a face at a window, to see someone pass in the corridor or someone in the garden, saying the rosary as they walk. Strange as this may sound, it is easy to do this as, in some ways, St Mary's has not changed much in the past hundred years.



Fr Richard Reid C.Ss.R

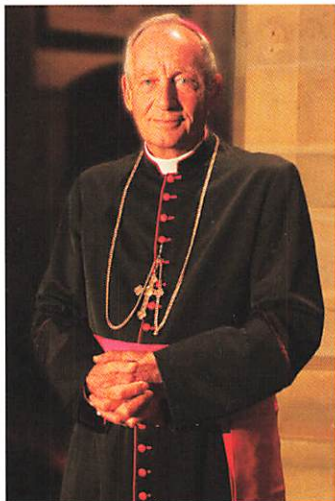
More to the point the Redemptorists are still going about their daily ministry, as were those of many years ago. It is also interesting to observe, that, as it was in its beginnings, our community is still made up of men of different nationalities and of a wide range of ages. At present, living, working and praying in this monastery, we are thirteen Redemptorists from England, India, Ireland, Scotland and Zimbabwe, ranging in age from twenty-seven to eighty-six years old.

We stand on the shoulders of those who have gone before us, and their story is told here with honesty, precision and great affection by Fr Brendan McConvery C.Ss.R. It is a story of adventure, of new beginnings, but always of faithfulness to the Lord and to the Redemptorist way of life. Turning the pages, one senses that these men are still alive and well and going about their priestly and religious work.

It should also be noted that something of the history of Clapham is to be found within these pages. As the story of the Redemptorists is told, so is the story of the people of Clapham, and as such, we are glad to have this book as a wider history of this wonderful area we live in.

This book would not have been written were it not for the major work carried out on our spire, which has been such a landmark in this area for the past 165 years. For all the people who helped us in so many ways, we are grateful. That gratitude extends to Fergus McCormick, senior architect in charge of the project and his colleagues, to the Heritage Lottery Fund, The National Churches Trust Fund and the good people of Clapham and our Redemptorist Friends who have given so generously.

Fr Richard Reid C.Ss.R
Rector St Mary's Clapham



Archbishop Peter Smith

Letter from the Archbishop of Southwark

I was delighted to hear of the forthcoming publication of this new book on the history of St Mary's, Clapham and of the great work and the commitment that the resident Redemptorist communities and the parishioners have achieved over the past 167 years.

I must admit to a special fondness for St Mary's, because I went to the primary school for boys in St. Alphonsus Road in the early 1950s. The Parish Priest in those days was Fr Lucas, who frequently dropped into the school and circulated round the playground during our break times. He had a great charism in relating to us youngsters and was much admired for his wonderful sense of humour, his kindness and generosity. For me, Fr Lucas epitomised the fundamental charism of the Redemptorist Order and I shall always be eternally grateful for those early formative years which gave me such a good education and enabled me to be accepted for my secondary education at Clapham College.

So it is a delight to be able to read of the history of St Mary's, from its beginnings in the 1850s, when the Catholic Hierarchy was restored following the Reformation in the sixteenth century, and from which began what Blessed John Henry Newman described as "a new spring" in the life of the Catholic Church in this country. Fr Brendan McConvery C.Ss.R has written a fascinating and insightful history of the involvement of the Redemptorists, the bishops and archbishops of Southwark, the eminent architects and artists who played such an important role in the development of the church building, and the commitment of the parishioners, all of whom, in different ways, have contributed to the growth of the parish. It is a story of the vibrant faith of Catholics who, despite considerable difficulties and sometimes fierce opposition, built the church, the schools and a flourishing community of faith which continues to this day.

+ Peter Smith,
Archbishop of Southwark

Letter from Fr Michael Brehl



Fr Michael Brehl C.Ss.R.
Superior General of the Redemptorist
Congregation

St Mary's Clapham is probably after Sant'Alfonso and the Alphonsian Holy Places, one of the Redemptorist houses best known to Redemptorists worldwide. For many, it has been a place of welcome while they pursued studies in London, or learned English. For others, it has been a place of refuge from war or persecution in their home country. For others, it has been a place of rest for a day or two before beginning the next leg of their missionary journey. The founders of some of our most flourishing provinces in Africa and Asia enjoyed its hospitality before setting out to bring the Redemptorist witness to new places.

The Redemptorists came to Clapham at a time that Blessed John Henry Newman named "the Second Spring" for the Church in England. Some of the members of its earliest communities were associates of Newman or were at least touched by his Oxford Movement – men like Fr Edward Douglas who made the construction of the beautiful church possible by putting his inherited wealth at the disposal of the Congregation, something he was to do repeatedly in his lifetime, or Robert Coffin, convert Anglican priest, initially member of Newman's Oratory, then Redemptorist and finally, Bishop of Southwark, or Edward Bridgett, gifted writer and preacher. The Redemptorists were also enjoying their own 'second spring' at this time. The Congregation was attracting members at a higher rate than ever before in its history and was in an expansionist mood. It had already spread to Belgium, Holland, Germany and the United States. England proved to be another fertile mission field.

The Church of Our Lady of Victories is surely one of the most beautiful anywhere in the Congregation. Over the years love and care have been lavished upon it, not just by the Redemptorist priests and brothers who have served it for well over a century and a half. Several architects and artists have dedicated their skills to

the glory of God. Nowhere can this be better seen than in the Lady Chapel. In this Jubilee Year of the Icon of Our Lady of Perpetual Help, it is particularly appropriate to remember how this corner of the church is truly a visual theology of the Mother of the Lord, our Mother of Perpetual Help. We must also remember the worshippers of Clapham down through the years. Rich and poor, old English and newly-arrived immigrants – Irish, Italian, Polish, West Indian, African and many others – have found it a place of welcome. Today St Mary's is still a flourishing parish with a regular round of activities both in the church and elsewhere.

I extend to the Redemptorists and people of St Mary's, Clapham my best wishes and prayers and I take this opportunity to thank them in the name of the world-wide Redemptorist family for their welcome to so many of us and their continued partnership with us in the mission of bringing the good news of "plentiful redemption" to the world.

In the Redeemer,
Michael Brehl, C.Ss.R.

