**Evangelisation workshop: short report**

St James the Great, Petts Wood

Saturday 16th October, 10.30am – 3.30pm

Held in the community centre and online via Facebook Live

Esther Theodore, Evangelisation pillar lead

The purpose of the event was to come together to imagine how we can bring Pope Francis' vision for evangelisation to Petts Wood.

Pope Francis said "At the heart of the Gospel is life in community and engagement with others". During the day, we talked about what we as a parish at St James are doing well but also what we may be getting wrong and what we can do better, with ideas on how we can help deepen people's faith and reach out to those who have drifted or are curious.

Prof Karen North, a lecturer and expert in evangelisation from St Marys University Twickenham, did a great job of facilitating the day for us. The day was full of fascinating insights and ideas and we were delighted so many engaged and shared so openly.

We had 20 attendees in the room and another between six and ten logged on throughout the day, joining in remotely (at least two of whom were couples) so we had at least 32 parishioners who took part in total (a few of the virtual attendees would describe themselves as virtual parishioners, who feel very much part of our parish even if they do not live geographically within our boundaries).

I will not transcribe Karen's presentation here which will be made available to the parish separately. We also have a video recording of the day in order that we can refer back to the discussion and comments in detail.

The main feedback and findings from the day are shared below and will feed into the Synod listening process for the parish as well as inform future plans for evangelisation in our parish.

The event was a great success and a real team effort - grateful thanks to all who took part and helped with the organisation particularly Liam Keane who helped in so many ways including publicity, Alston Antao on the technical side, Gaynor Whitley on catering, Patricia Willard with lots of help on the day and James and Emerald Delaney who helped with the planning.

*Please note numbers in brackets denote the number of participants who shared a particular view.*

**Main ideas from the day**

Fr David opened the session with a beautiful time of prayer and showed us the film of the opening of the Synod in Rome.

1. **Evangelisation: first thoughts…**

At the start of the day, the groups were asked to share what they understand by the term “evangelisation”. Here were thoughts captured from across the groups. It means to us:

1. First a classic definition in terms of kerygma (proclamation of the Gospel)

Sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ, spreading the Word of God/ the message of the Gospel (13), preaching the Gospel (1), helping to know Jesus (1), anything done to attract people to the love of Our Lord (1) communication (1) reaching out (1)

1. Second an emphasis on how we live a life of love and witness through love

Being Christ-like or showing love/ spreading love (4)

1. Third we had a sense of journeying with and accompanying others

Encounter/ being present (2), helping each other on life’s journey (2) meeting people where they are at (1) learning (1)

1. Lastly we had a focus on cultivating community and importance of welcome

Cohesion/sense of community/ belonging (2), invitation/ gathering (2)

1. **Evangelisation: mark two/ new angles**

At the end of the day Karen asked us to share what we now understand by the term “evangelisation” – is the same as earlier or have our perceptions/thoughts shifted?

1. First we had a sense of journeying, listening and encounter

Reaching out on our joint journeys (1), listen, encounter (1),

1. Overwhelmingly almost everyone shared it is by living out our faith in love

Living the Word/ living our lives as an example/ showing the way mainly by example (3), Growing in the love of God and of others (1), Living the Christian way according to the true meaning of Christ’s message as we mature into a life where we can co-exist harmoniously and inner acceptance of our experiences through our journey in life (1), a need to get away from the formality of language – it is living/ walking the walk (1), portraying what Jesus said into actions for other to be able to encounter Him (1), reflecting God’s love in our daily lives (1), witnessing in love (1), live love inside and out (1) *Note: this was written like this – simple but effective!:*

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1. Importantly, the need for us all to be part of this and not leave it to others

It is for all of us, not just a few people (1)

Karen then led us through a series of questions and discussion:

1. **Reflecting on the pandemic, how has participation in your parish been affected? In what ways? How does your parish successfully bring people together and what has worked during the pandemic?**
2. The main reflection was the bad impact on the parish social life

Social life of the parish badly affected/ little or no post-mass interaction (4), social distancing medically necessary but social life affected (1), as social interaction unavailable, participation in any previous activity not possible (1), physical restriction/community/ communication/ social restriction/ events suspended (2) , loss of community cohesion as unable to meet regularly/in person (1)

1. Also many commented about those cut off from the sacraments

Very difficult for the housebound/less able/especially those without internet – no computer = no mass (2), people without internet were cut off from community and sacraments (1) people’s mental health badly affected due to social isolation and financial issues, mothers at home alone and flat dwellers (1), unable to meet the very ill/dying (1)

1. Some people have fallen away from mass attendance/ lost touchstone

Mass attendance down (1), people are slow at returning to church services (1), some people got lazy - did not come back to mass (1), gradually re-engaging with care (1)

1. Some groups flourished online

Lot of interaction online (1) Bonding increased for some groups online eg CWL (1),

rich engagement in some initiatives eg Ignatian spirituality course, Lectio, Alpha (2), more helpers/ushers were recruited (1), First holy communion and confirmation continued online (1)

1. Fr David’s online masses are universally popular!

Online masses: Fr David much loved/ made it so welcoming – a good solution to an otherwise difficult situation (5), housebound been helped with mass streaming (1)

1. Some people are shopping around (they always did, but internet makes it even easier)

Consumerist behaviour – people shopping around for other masses online that might suit them better (1), streaming has given people more choice – different churches (1)

1. Some still found ways to engage physically

People still met for walks in the park (1), people visited those they knew were alone/ supported others eg shopping/ increased awareness of outreach (1)

1. **What has been less successful? Where are the gaps? From a missionary perspective, what are the local needs in your parish and community?**

**What are the means by which different voices can be heard in your parish? Which groups and individuals are least included in your parish? How do families and young people effectively participate in the life of your parish? What do you do to support them?**

1. Overwhelmingly the main gap is around engaging young people/ families

Young people who are not interested in faith/active any more/ no social groups and lack of Catholic schools continuing primary ethos (1), Catholic education (1) need to engage children – similar in early all communities (1), Engaging children and young people (1), young families (1), youth/ confirmation (1), Communication/ young people gap needs to be addressed and as participants they could contribute to how their group/ events need to be organised (1)

1. Rebuilding social life and connection key

We need to rekindle our social life, combat loneliness (1), Not as much interaction community-wise (1), Intergenerational mixing – used to happen during coffee after mass (1)

1. Possible model discussed at various points in the day

House groups/ neighbourhood groups/networks – identify/address needs and consolidate belonging (1)

1. Fr David’s surgery had to cease

Fr David’s surgery stopped (or was only in the garden) (1)

1. **How does your parish effectively identify and use the gifts of its people? How does the life of the parish, in terms of catechesis, adult formation, liturgy etc aid in the formation of parishioners as missionary disciples?**
2. Identify the gifts through:

advertising for volunteers (1), specific appeals for specific tasks (1)

recognising skills (1), Fr David knows parishioners’ strengths and gifts and knows who to ask to volunteer (1), Fr David has meetings with all ministries to keep things fresh and up-to-date (1), sometimes asking individuals (directly) (1), personal invites eg to choir (1)

surveys (1), pillar survey (1), survey of talents (1), parish booklet (1), in times past we’ve had a parish ‘register’ which included a reference to talents, could be refreshed, new parishioners meeting (1), form for people who are new to offer gifts/talents (1)

pillar groups (1), parish fair of the different pillar/groups (1)

what draws me in? – understanding whole picture of what’s involved eg maybe shadowing in a parish role/ ministry (1)

1. Formation of parishioners/ opportunities to grow in faith through:

The sacraments (1), homilies (1), Fr David’s surgery (1)

Adult formation in art/music group and talks (1)

Being welcomed and introduced to others/ two way dialogue (1)

Bigger role for confirmation sponsors (1), Mentors (1)

Catechists’ course (1), Need involvement in catechesis – this aids parishioner formation for mission (1)

1. **How is your parish set up for evangelisation? How does your parish reach out to a) those who are here/ engaged already, b) have drifted from practice and c) those who have never heard The Good News?** *(it was noted that some ideas would work for both those who have drifted and those who are unchurched)*
2. Reaching those part of the community – various levels of involvement/ commitment

Courses: Ignatian spirituality course, Bible Timeline/ courses (2 groups mentioned), Alpha course

Pastoral care: welcome, hospitality, being inclusive, ongoing communication

(3 groups mentioned)

\*Social life\*

Pilgrimage/ retreats

Establish home/ neighbourhood groups in people’s homes for friendship and prayer and home masses (all 4 groups suggested)

Invite them to volunteer to engage them more, encourage mutual engagement, giving whole picture ‘come along’ observe, shadow others? (3 groups)

Regular appraisal/ discovery of gifts, recognition of capacity (ie a task is not necessarily for life!) (3 groups)

1. Reaching those who have drifted from practice

Alpha course (2 groups suggested)

Journey in Faith

Neighbourhood/ home groups

Personal invitation – gently!, invitation, ‘word of mouth’, organise and invite them to social church events initially (3 groups spoke of invitation)

People who have drifted can feel unworthy/ they don’t belong – introduction to new way/ new evangelisation

Those who feel vulnerable/bereaved – funerals can spark something, search for consolation, peace – they are “fertile” and receptive, births and key rites of passage

‘Briefly’ newsletter promoted – printed copies available

Always welcoming, accept and tolerate differences, listening properly

Find out why they have drifted away, open question: it might be on account of the church? Could try an anonymous survey?

1. Reaching those who have never heard The Good News/ never crossed the threshold of a church

Alpha course

Could we put simple Alpha banner outside the church to show we are running course? (I saw one outside a Catholic church recently and thought how good it was)

Role of neighbours/ friendship/ witness/ word of mouth, personal invitation – gently!

One to one eg ‘bus stop chat’ type encounters, lead by example/ a good neighbour scheme, inviting anyone who wants to learn more about our faith (4 groups mentioned)

Advertise local church events – leaflets, libraries, local magazines, notice board on periphery of church, Place an ad in the Petts Wood Gazette (3 groups mentioned)

Offer relevant social/ personal benefits eg dementia café, film club

Neighbourhood/ home groups

Service for bereaved parents

November mass for deceased

And a question for us all to ponder further… (If you are reading this and feel moved, please contact Fr David to explore helping in some way going forward…):

1. **Where is the Holy Spirit calling you to mission and service today? How can the call to holiness and the call to mission be reflected in different aspects of parish life? How can participation be strengthened moving forward into the future?** To be continued!...