

## **SYNOD: TOWARDS OCTOBER 2024**

### **ST ALBAN & ST STEPHEN CHURCH: SENSE OF MISSION RESPONSE**

*In view of the tight timeframe imposed by the Diocese to seek a response to the Cardinal's invitation to reflect on mission, it was felt that the optimal way of reaching all parishioners was by means of a questionnaire. This was made available by every means possible: online through a dedicated link, in hard copy and by personal email. The congregation were urged to respond by the clergy, email, website and via the newsletter. Responses were received from groups and individuals, some of whom had discussed the topics with their non-Catholic friends and family and with those who had lapsed.*

*Below is the summary of the most popular views expressed, given in no particular order.*

#### ***Q.1: How do we witness as a Parish and proclaim our faith***

##### ***(a) to those who have never heard of Christ***

Individuals and parish activities demonstrate how to live the faith through examples/actions to support local and national communities.

Always a good response to appeals of this nature: e.g. the disadvantaged and migrants/refugees, natural disasters, helping and feeding the homeless, providing gifts at Christmas to the needy, etc.

Examples of witness of faith:

- Distributing cards in St Albans market giving details of services at Christmas and Easter and advertising these and other services in the local paper/newsletters
- Sharing the light whereby passers-by in the evening are invited into church to light a candle and reflect on the experience (*our church is on the commuter route from the station*)
- Prayer walks, St Albans Day and Good Friday processions through the city
- Visits to care homes, refugee centres etc.
- One-to one conversations
- Making parish facilities available at subsidised rates to certain groups re. AA, Al Anon

##### ***(b) to those who have ceased walking with Christ***

Responses remarked about the difficulty of knowing to whom this description applies. Some commented that too often the establishment equate no longer walking with Christ with no longer attending Church. However, possibly due to hierarchical language, attitudes and traditions, especially towards those not conforming to the perceived norm, some people do remain committed remotely.

Our schools, Sacramental preparation programmes as well as baptisms, first Holy Communion, weddings and funerals; schools are major opportunities for reaching out to those who have 'ceased' walking with Christ.

We need to provide an open/listening ear without being judgemental or dictatorial

Give encouragement and witness through example and actions

Church services and parish events are advertised, coffee mornings etc. remain open to all

##### ***(c) to those with whom we worship Christ***

Parish has many opportunities to come together as a community and show witness through:

- Worship, prayer and liturgy
- Group and personal practical activities both enhancing faith and supporting the disadvantaged
- The availability of a variety of courses and talks
- Social activities

Many though recognised that we should investigate ways of enhancing these opportunities to be more inclusive.

**Q.2: What concrete steps/formation opportunities would help our Parish to proclaim our faith more effectively, and how might we need to develop the way we are organised currently?**

**(a) to those who have never heard of Christ**

Speaking about our faith in simple non-hierarchical and ecclesiastical language expressing what it means to be a Christian/Roman Catholic in a well presented and straight forward manner is essential.

Whilst many thought the building development would enhance the welcome to our church –there also needs to be easy to understand printed material on what it means to be a Catholic, and the importance of the Eucharist, readily available to those who enter.

Signage and communication needs to be more prominent: e.g. more social media, press coverage, signage at back (*facing the station*) and front of church.

Training for laity on evangelisation is needed.

Open the Church and parish centre to everyone more regularly e.g. for drop in sessions, a wide range of speakers and social activities.

Work with other denominations in the city to raise awareness of Christianity.

**(b) to those who have ceased walking with Christ**

It was generally recognised that identifying individuals is difficult, especially when reaching out to the occasional attendees (Christmas and Easter) and those viewing solely online. Resources/literature on why to attend Mass similar to post-Covid exhortations should be advertised/available.

Essential to keep communication lines open in a friendly, non-judgemental way, some practical ideas include:

- Invitation to social events
- Offering liturgical events other than Mass
- Outside well-chosen speakers
- Trying to maintain contact with people following sacramental preparation, especially the young

**(c) to those with whom we worship Christ**

Our parish has many excellent practices and acknowledges that there is always a need to encourage parishioners to engage in parish life.

At services everyone should feel welcome and we need to find regular ways to do this e.g. introductions to each other, use of welcomers, availability of refreshments.

In services, need to encourage active participation rather than passivity whilst recognising that there is a diversity of individuals' relationship with God and the way people prefer to worship. Ideally more social events, greater availability of prayer groups, catechesis, and scripture study could help develop community.

Better communication is essential – use of social media, layout of newsletter, website, etc.

The Church needs to be more mindful of the needs of young people and accepting of those who differ from the perceived norm.

Better use of resources e.g. restructuring of parish network involving amalgamation and clustering of parishes which would provide a bigger volunteer base and better support the employment of catechists and youth workers. It is crucial to maintain feelings of welcome and connectedness, between people, as well as between what we do, celebrate in church and how we live our lives outside. One solution in a big parish such as ours, as with the creation of bigger parishes would be the use and revival of Neighbourhood Links which is aimed at connecting parishioners. One challenge of parochial restructuring would be to ensure there are enough places where people can easily gather and receive the Eucharist.