

Part B - Reflective Questions

When Jesus was walking by the Sea of Galilee and called his first disciples (Mt 4:18), they must not have had a clue what they were getting into. Four fishermen became 'apprentices' to an itinerant leader, teacher and healer, overnight. In Mark's Gospel (Mk 1:21) the first thing they did was to accompany Jesus into the Synagogue in Capernaum, where he proceeded to break the Jewish law by healing a possessed man on the Sabbath.

There is something exciting about being a disciple, an 'apprentice' of Jesus. There is so much to learn and discover. Jesus walked around the countryside with his followers, both women and men; they were a community, a community on the move. The disciples were formed and shaped within this community.

Once Jesus died and rose from the dead, the disciples were terrified. They ran away (to Emmaus) or hid in an upper room or reverted to their previous job – seven of them went back fishing. Time after time Jesus came among them and reassured them. They were totally taken over by the Holy Spirit and began their work as missionaries; they are instructed to go out into the world and proclaim the Gospel.

We live in a very different world today. But as a result of our Baptism, we are called, gifted and sent. We too are sent into the world. We are missionaries within our local population, disciples among all the residents in our neighbourhood.

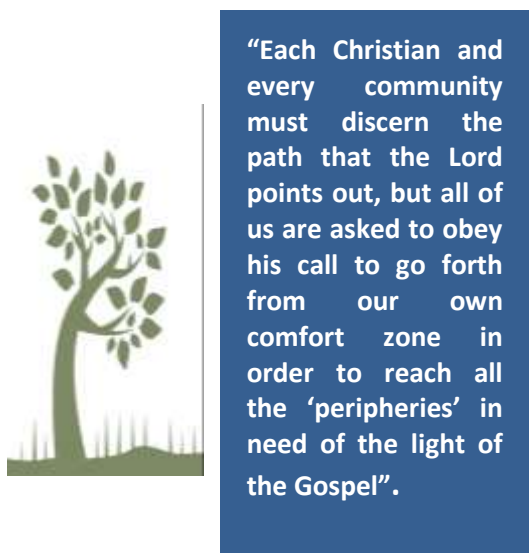
The local priest looks after the flock. We are immersed in the world; and we engage with each other, with those hurt by the Church, those separated from the Church for whatever reason and those beyond the institution of the Church. Every one of us has a particular pathway of discipleship to follow, and many of us discover it through the communities within which we live.

It is only right that we pray for more men to respond to the call of God to become ordained priests. It is also true that we all need to explore how God is calling us to make a difference in the world we live in. This calling (or vocation) may be to marriage, parenthood, the single life, nursing, policing... . God has an infinite imagination; there is a unique calling for each one of us. We become disciples when we learn to look at our world through the eyes of Jesus.

This questionnaire will help us to look at our community and discover how it can help each and every one of us become an apprentice of Jesus.

We have heard the facts and figures, the prospect of having 50 priests in our Diocese in 2030, the need for a wider variety of leadership in the Church and the very basic need to become more open to the guidance of the Holy Spirit who is leading us into the future.

Pope Francis gives us clear guidance when he says in *Evangelii Gaudium* (para 20):



“Each Christian and every community must discern the path that the Lord points out, but all of us are asked to obey his call to go forth from our own comfort zone in order to reach all the ‘peripheries’ in need of the light of the Gospel”.

With this call in mind, let us begin to explore the questions before

Note: Please use a maximum of 250 words in response to each of the questions.

1 The Christian Faithful

The Christian Faithful are the heart of every worshipping community. If it is to flourish, a community needs a core of members who are committed to the Gospel of Christ and are willing to make the community a priority, giving generously of their time, imagination, gifts and other resources. A viable parish needs a healthy number of active members.

a) How can your community look to sustain and increase the number of people worshipping with you towards 2030?

Communicate clearly that as a parish we value our young people. Support them in their 'spiritual development'; consider introducing younger Eucharistic Ministers in the 18-25 age bracket. Develop Community outreach programmes and build on the work already started with the Youth J&P Group - include FLAME within this aspect. Such 'actions / projects' need to be sustainable and not just 'a flash in the pan', therefore they will need leadership. That leadership will need to be sustained. Giving 'a voice' to the younger people by considering giving them a place on PPC (an under 25 representative). Engage younger people with 'jobs' of responsibility such as 'Greeters' on the door, it would be good to have a young and old mix. Give young people more active roles in ministries, such as the reading rota. Explore the possibility of Younger deacons and other ministry roles to serve the parish. Engage through appropriate designed courses in adult education programmes in Christianity / History of the Catholic Church / deeper understanding of our Catholic Faith. Develop a similar arrangement for learners not attending Catholic schools. Review how we approach 'formation' in Our Faith. Develop groups / services / prayer / bible study groups other than in a Mass setting. Create a 'parish ambassador' for St.B /STM as a link between secondary schools and the parish. Work on ideas of how we could bring more primary school families into church. A more structured 'welcome programme' for new and existing parishioners. This could include a 'Welcome Pack' linked to 'Who's Who' in parish life, to include the named person and the possible contact details (?) of people who may lead a group in different areas of Parish life. Encourage youngsters to bring a friend -making them feel welcomed. Let the young lead on Social Events from time to time.

2 Leadership

It is certain that in the future even more communities will be sharing a priest with other worshipping communities. Priests and deacons will be working more collaboratively with people. The prospect of having around 50 active priests in our Diocese in 15 years' time (2030) certainly sharpens the mind. While we must continue to pray that men will respond to the call of discipleship as ordained priests and deacons, we also need to look carefully at the development of other forms of leadership in the Church.

a) What lay leadership is currently viable and effective in your community?

The parish has both a good, functioning and effective PPC and Finance Committee. The Parish has a very able Chair of the PPC and Parish Treasurer who both have a clear grasp of a full range of issues that affect our worshipping community. Most recently leadership developments with our Youth Justice and Peace Group have given us models for future development of leadership roles across other parish groups. As a Parish there is a need to develop leadership roles that are sustainable. We see the role of Parish Priest and a fully functioning PPC as critical to Parish development

b) For what other areas of your community life could trained lay men and women assume responsibility?

We need to establish exactly what the laity can and cannot do. The celebration of Mass and administration of the Sacraments are the domains of the priest, all other aspects of Parish life and community will need to be in the domain of parish laity. The parish needs to build and develop on what we already have. Leaders for Liturgy, youth, young children, Eucharistic ministers, etc. will need to become larger teams that allow for succession planning in order to sustain ongoing development. The age profile of most of these groups needs to be lowered. Other groups, not yet determined, will need to be formed. Collectively as a 'whole' parish teams will need to take on more responsibility. Such groups will need training and guidance in the discharge of their respective duties. Some aspects will need to be promoted more than others as the perceived 'needs' of the parish change. For example, there will be times when more altar servers are needed and at other times Eucharistic ministers. An infrastructure needs to be in place to facilitate this and other challenges the parish faces. Planning for that infrastructure, creating teams and allocating people to those teams needs to start sooner rather than later. Using the present management structure this planning needs to take place under the 'umbrella' of the PPC which includes the Parish Priest as a member – Lay people are to manage mainly, but not exclusively, non-spiritual duties. Allowing the priest to focus on spiritual life of those who make up the Church should be a priority. Any committees established will feed back to the parish priest and PPC. The appointment and training of Deacons would be a major consideration for the Parish and for women to be considered for such an appointment. The role of married men who have 'a calling' to serve also needs to be taken into account. We have married priests in the Church. Could we have a non-ordained person conducting a funeral services? Other possibilities could be training for counsellors for, bereavement, marriage, (life!!), parenting and youth. Access to a trained youth worker would be a considerable advantage. The parish needs to audit personal skills and talents of volunteers to run various 'groups' within the parish. To this end organise a 'jobs fair' to match appropriate volunteers to appropriate groups. It is imperative that a given 'role' does not fall on the shoulders of just one person. There needs to be a number of people who support each other in that chosen role.

3 Active Involvement of People

In parishes where the same small, ageing group of parishioners has served the community extremely well over very many years, there may be some real anxiety about the future. As that small group retires and withdraws from active involvement, the community is at risk of floundering if younger parishioners are unable or unwilling to take their place.

a) How diverse and active are parishioners within the community?

We not only need to build on what we already have and sustain it but also 'develop our people' both for and in specific roles that have yet to be determined. We need to encourage people to participate with greater effectiveness and this will require an element of training. We need to review and incorporate succession planning for each group in the parish. Such a consideration would need to include lowering the age profile of active participants

b) How can the parish community invite and prepare more people to support it?

The challenge is to engage the 80% of the community. Consider a 'time and talent event' (see jobs fair section 3b). Where there is a person allocated a role, encourage an 'apprentice' or 'understudy' for that role. Develop the idea of a 'buddy system' for new parishioners along with a 'welcome pack'. Advertising events such as our Youth Masses to our secondary schools encouraging a stronger link between the two. Formation of a group dedicated to visiting the sick and housebound that is not just Eucharistic Ministers. Develop a team to organise and run Social / Weekly Groups / Lunches bases in the church hall. Develop a PR team for outreach work and visiting new people. Organise a team to

run set times to open the Church for potential visitors 'off the street'. These would need to be prepared to talk about the Catholic Faith as well as showing people around the church. This could be done annually. Review what 'groups' are on offer to our young and include sports activities. Develop an 'education' format to find out more about 'our faith' through projects, debates and scenarios. Is the parish able to make use of youth leaders at Walsingham House? What groups do we have within the parish that come from ethnically different backgrounds and how do we support them?

4 Worship and Spiritual Life

A flourishing community has worship at the centre of its life. The ultimate goal is to make Jesus Christ known and loved. This is why Jesus Christ is at the heart of every worshipping community. The Eucharist is the principal means in which we celebrate this. The Holy Spirit may well be leading us to discover a variety of forms of worship and devotion in the future. For this very reason a living community makes every effort to encourage parishioners of all ages and backgrounds to participate fully in prayer, devotion, worship and study.

God loves us individually. We respond to God's love in our own ways. When we come together for worship we all need to have a sense that our relationship with God is strengthened and affirmed.

a) Are there aspects of your community's regular worship together at Mass that are working particularly well and deepen the spiritual life of those present?

Communion and a quiet period of time for reflection during Mass were important. The vast majority of responses focused on the Homily. A significant number of people are able to connect to what is said and relate it to their daily lives. People said we have a good priest who is down to earth, has a sense of humour and has a personable manner. A small number of people think the Homily should be shorter. My personal favourite single comment was: *"The priest's Homily is crucial to my developing a deeper interest of the readings / bible/ my religion. It can change the way I live my life."*

b) Is there anything your community can do to encourage a deeper prayer life and engagement with Scripture?

To review what we already do and offer. Consideration needs to be given to the availability of age appropriate material, such as Youth Bibles, a printed version of the 'homily' summarised, suitable for younger people. A suitable course / formation to explore 'prayer' to include: 'what is prayer?', the relevance of set prayers to our daily lives and 'take away' prayer sheets for a month e.g. morning and evening prayer. During Mass relating scripture /prayer to our lives. Set up opportunities for debating, discussing and engaging with our faith. Older members of the parish community sharing their 'faith journeys' with younger members - "Grill a Granny". Older members working with younger members – questions and discussions on a specific focus. Use of the 'internet' and 'suitable/ appropriate' religious sites and Apps. linked to online forum - quotes linked to daily life, framing / asking provocative relevant questions. 'Way of the Cross' (as at Great Wakering) *Good Friday Morning* shared with Anglican and Methodists is witness to our faith. Organise parish retreats /reflection days –sharing life stories with the objective of deepening an understanding of our faith. RCIA 'type' courses open to all the people of the Parish –a chance to deepen an understanding of Catholic life. Talks about what is coming up during the year – Lent, Advent, Easter, Christmas. Perform a passion play /miracle play as drama

is a good way of engaging with young people. A weekday Mass / Communion Service before /after work?

5 Education and Continuing Formation

A flourishing community will be able to show that the Catholic faith is handed on to children, young people and adults by means of regular programmes of religious education and Christian Formation.

a) What good experiences has your community had in the past and what opportunities would you like to see for 'continuing formation' in the faith for members of your community?

Holy Communion is the most important part of Mass for the majority of people. Individuals availing themselves of the Sacraments are also very important. As were quite moments for reflection during Mass. Preparation for the Sacraments were given a high priority: First Holy Communion; Confirmation and Marriage Preparation in particular. The priest's homilies are important and they are expressed in a way that ordinary people can relate to, and help with developing our faith. Hearing the priest break down the Gospel readings and relating them well to our daily lives was very important.

b) How can closer relationships be developed between the worshipping community, the school(s) the young people attend, and the families that belong to both?

Improve communications links between the Schools and the Parish. A designated person in the parish to act as a 'liaison' between schools and parish. A more contemporary approach to communications accessing Social Media, search out appropriate Catholic Apps. etc. (see 4b) Consider a Youth representative (under 25) on PPC. (see 1a) Finding ways to liberate greater time for Fr. Brett to do the things he enjoys relating to our community. Organise a Mini Mission as an annual /biannual event which could be held at the school. Flag up and celebrate achievements in the parish such as the work of the Youth J&P Group. Reciprocate the achievements of the schools to be flagged up in the parish. Inviting to parish events friends who may not be church goers. Schools and the parish to exchange each other's newsletters. Organise in the parish 'self help' groups e.g. young mothers, singles etc. The parish as a whole to organise sponsorship of young people so they can attend youth gatherings nationally and internationally. Some of the young taking on the responsibility of organising this for themselves with parish support. The schools and parish liaise for major annual events, e.g. sporting events, summer/ winter fairs. Where appropriate, a Youth representative in each parish group. Inexpensive family days and links /joint events with other parishes. Organised 'holiday' programme using school facilities. Consider a joint retreat or day of reflection between parish and school. Continue to build on the Lent Morning Meditation at School led by parish priest. Rekindle 'Ready, Steady, Go' group
Special 'one off' mass for new families at the school to welcome them into the community

6 Outreach

A flourishing community extends a spirit of hospitality and invites people to become members. It also looks way beyond itself to discover how the spirit of Jesus can be brought to bear on everything that concerns us in the world: our relationship with other Christian Churches, women and men of other faiths and all men and women of good will in our world.

Under this heading we include: hospitality; Ecumenism; Interfaith relationships; involvement in local social and political issues and much more. It explores the practical ways we have of becoming 'missionary disciples'.

a) What good experiences has your community had regarding our call to be involved with other Christians, other faiths, all men and women of good will?

The Parish supports /works with:

- HARP (a Southend charity supporting the Homeless)
- CAME (Catholic Anglican Methodist Evangelical)
- Churches Together
- Women's World Day of Prayer
- The Shoebury Foodbank

We are a generous parish. Last financial year in addition to the above we supported 16 different charities raising a total of £ 7,788 for them.

b) How can your worshipping community become more immersed in the local community?

A significant number of people thought that we need to get more involved with local ecumenical events / joint services. Maintain and possibly develop our food collection for local charities such as HARP and asked if we could offer night shelter in the Church Hall. Use our Youth J & P Group more. To be seen serving the community. Sharing with the poor, lonely within the parish. A regular phone call visiting parishioners in their homes or in the homes for the elderly. "Become less hidden" give a Catholic presence in local area. Getting involved with local issues. Contacting local councillors or MP, knowing those who are Catholic or Christian. Joint charitable exercises with other local churches.

7 Finances

A sustainable community must have an annual income that is sufficient to cover its expenses. There needs to be a reliable level of stewardship among the faithful who willingly give of their time, gifts and energy to sustain the work of the community.

a) How do you feel about the average weekly offertory donation in your community? Does this need to increase to enable your community to flourish in 2030?

53% thought it was not sufficient, with 38% thinking it was and 9% being "don't knows". People tend to be aware of the high cost of running the parish. From responses, it is evident that large proportions of people are not very clear on the state of Parish finances. This is difficult since our Parish Treasurer works hard to communicate significant points. He will give verbal explanations at the end of masses when the annual report is ready plus a simple easy to understand single sheet graphical representation of the parish income and expenditure plus he produces quarterly reports to the PPC which are available on our website.

b) If you are a finance-rich community, how do you feel about sharing some of your resources with very poor parts of the Diocese?

Respondents had definite points of view on this question. There were some very pertinent suggestions but they were also constructively critical in their observations and comments. It was an overwhelming 'YES' by 81%, with a significant number not qualifying their point of view. The 'NO's were 14%. There were a very small number (5%) who fell into the 'don't know' category. As one such

person put it “a difficult dilemma for all” and another “needs wider discussion”. There was a dominant view expressed that the distribution of funds is the responsibility of the Diocese. A significant number of people though that the recipient parish must have financial management structures in place in order to say ‘yes’ to this question. Others thought that financial accountability is an important element.

8 Facilities

A flourishing community needs good facilities which need to be well maintained. It cannot undertake any building projects, renovations or improvements unless it has the resources to pay for them. It may be that in some places, there is a need for a plan for the community and a plan for the buildings, and they may be separate plans. It is also true to say that our buildings can be a witness to the presence of the Church in our world, or a drain on resources and energy.

a) What sort of use can your community foresee for any unused or underused parish facilities in the future?

None

b) How can the community develop the capacity to look after its facilities in the future?

The recent sale of St. Edmunds Church, Great Wakering, will off-set the parish financial obligations as set out in the Parish Quinquennial Report. This covers the expected maintenance costs for our buildings both in the short, medium and long term e.g. the latest report showed that the roof of the Blessed Sacrament Chapel would need replacing in the year 2017/2018. A recent leak has shown that this needs to be dealt with now so the assumptions can be taken as accurate. There is no access to immediate funds for any expensive emergency repairs not identified in the report and we would have to consider a fund-raising exercise if that occurred

9 Geographic Distance

A flourishing community may be influenced by its location. The proximity of neighbouring parishes can have a real impact on the vibrancy of a community. If several communities are in close proximity with large, ageing buildings that are only half-full, this will need to be taken into account when considering the future.

Our basic question is about how we can enable communities to flourish in order for us to deepen our sense of discipleship and service. Our parish churches are not private chapels maintained simply because the community has enough money to cover the expense.

a) How does your community feel about the possibility that the only way to ensure flourishing in the future is to become part of a new parish community?

Responses to this question were roughly balanced between a ‘not happy’ category and a ‘no problem’ category, BUT each response acknowledged and appreciated why this may very well be the case in the future. A high proportion of responses reflected the view that a meaningful connection ‘with our priest’ will be lost. People appreciated that this will take a ‘lot of planning’, mass times, locations etc. A significant number expressed concerns over the wellbeing and additional ‘stress’ priests will come under. This needs to be thought through if we are to retain priest.

b) Are there ways in which your community can serve and support neighbouring communities?

- Share 'expertise' with other parishes and vice versa
- Once this Diocesan exercise is over, evaluate 'economies of scale' across the Deanery and beyond in the delivery of various courses related to spiritual formation e.g. RCIA leadership etc.
- Where there is a group already established in a parish in a Deanery (or beyond) share their ideas /methods of origination /formation etc. with neighbouring parishes where that parish wishes to establish a similar group.
- "There is no community without commitment"

c) If applicable, what is the relationship between different churches or Mass centres within the parish or between linked parishes?

Within the parish relationships between Mass centre (St Gregory's) and main church (St George's) is fairly 'narrow'. Mass is celebrated twice a week in St Gregory's by the resident priest at St George's. Parishioners from both churches attend either church. The parish summer fair is held at St Gregory's, as is the firework party. Mass centre and grounds is maintained by parishioners from both churches.

d) Is/are there neighbouring parishes which would lend themselves to being linked to your parish or to becoming part of a partnership or "cluster"?

This needs to be reviewed as a "whole" picture after the completion of this Diocesan exercise and we need to take it from there, step by step, Deanery by Deanery.

10 Young People

Young people are not just the 'future' of the Church; they are very much part of the present. We all need to look at how actively young people are encouraged and affirmed in their contribution to the community throughout the year. The enthusiasm and energy of young people can sometimes be daunting to those who are older, but they are also signs of the Holy Spirit within us and among us.

a) What good experiences regarding Church life do the young people have in your community?

It is evident that the Confirmation Group had a very positive experience at Walsingham House (WH). It would be advantageous to utilise the Workers at WH either to arrange for a visit to the parish or take a group to them. A day retreat / day of reflection. (see 5b) We need to give our younger people greater roles of responsibility during Mass e.g. readers, collectors, greeters. (see 1a and 2b) There is a need for ongoing 'formation' by bringing in visiting speakers and making use of people within our parish who would be prepared to share their own 'faith journey' with our younger people and be prepared to be questioned on 'Our Faith'. (see 4b) A discussion group focused on aspects of our faith in a modern world would appear to be of benefit. It is evident that our youth need financial support in order to fulfil ambitions to attend such events as International Youth Day or to go on a meaningful pilgrimage. The 'homily' to be geared to a younger audience during a youth mass (see 3b and 4b) Develop a possible link with Walsingham House with the objective of a parish based retreat and with a personal invite to people in the youth age range. (see 5b) Develop and build on the work already started with the youth J&P Group for example the sleep out, Christmas afternoon Tea party. Invite 'quality' and appropriate speakers to give talks to the youth group, for example Brian FitzGerald talking about his experience with refugees. Thought provoking topics linked with world view and an interactive

faith commitment. Facilitate the Youth group to attend such meetings held elsewhere if at reasonable distance. The Youth group place a high value on the opportunity to socialise with old friends and make new ones. The parish to explore ways for our youth to take on responsibilities and make meaningful contributions to parish life. Is there an opportunity to develop sporting activities for the young? St. John Bosco Camp, can they be invited down to speak to parish youth and family units about the work they do -Society of St. Vincent de Paul?

b) How can the presence and witness of young people be more encouraged and supported in the community?

The strongest 'theme' coming through in response to this question is "our young people are today's hope for tomorrow". We need to encourage them, support them and let them develop in the faith. Some raised concerns that as adults we sometimes lack understanding of our teenagers in a contemporary context. We don't listen to them. e.g. "Be more tolerant of differences especially relating to people's sexuality and to be willing to change with the times" and "Acknowledge the pressures of 'teenagehood' and not to stress them out." We need to identify their concerns as a worshipping community and face /address them square on. Within the parish what areas of responsibility could we develop for and with our young people?

11 What Else

a) Given all the findings you have explored in Part A of this questionnaire, what would you see as the priorities to ensure a viable and flourishing community in 2030?

- Sustainability, the development and formation in various parish roles with our younger people.
- Build upon what we have with adult formation in various parish roles.
- Develop greater capacity within our community to take on parish roles with appropriate skill sets
- Write a 'Parish Development Plan' to include both spiritual and temporal aspects of Parish life.

b) Do you have any other observations - particularly about anything we may have missed?

- The Parish 'duty of care' to a parish priest. Who wants' a job where there is a) no house security b) The 'pay' is variable and c) there is no pension to look forward to upon retirement? There is a need for a parish and diocesan 'mind shift' in addressing these issues which of course has a large cost implication.
- The wellbeing of our priests mentally and physically. As a Sacramental Church with fewer priests and more work for them the result will be early 'burn-out' or break down. Parishes need to 'build-in' a priest's recreation time, for them to recharge their batteries, which again has a resource implication i.e. cost of relief priests whilst parish priest is away and are there sufficient priests available to cover this need.
- Underused resources within our own communities. Over half our respective communities are women. We need Deacons, why can't women become deacons? The role of married men who have a 'calling' to serve needs to be considered when we already have married priests in the church.

- Explore the possibility of a 'shared' youth worker across the Deanery

12 Good Practice

There is no doubt that there are some really innovative things going on within our worshipping communities from Parish Fun Days which bring together the whole community to imaginative liturgies during Holy Week; from exciting Confirmation programmes to pilgrimages and vigils.

- a) Is there something your community is involved in which will be of interest to others in the Diocese? Please use as much space as you need.**

Thank you for completing Section B.
The final section is brief but does need serious thought.