



ON BEING MISSIONARY PARISHES

Introduction to Parish Reflections and Discussions

INTRODUCTION

The Bishop has designated **2017** a **YEAR FOR MISSION** in the Shrewsbury Diocese, thereby inviting each of us to a renewed commitment to the mission of the Church in the world of today. This mission was entrusted to us first by our own Baptism and Confirmation. It is rooted, as Pope Francis tirelessly reminds us, in our personal relationship with Jesus Christ, and we live it out according to our own vocation.

As a member of Christ's faithful people, each one is called to be a coworker in the sharing of our Catholic faith. When speaking of the lay apostolate, the Fathers of the **Second Vatican Council** said it was *directed to the evangelisation and sanctification of all, and to the penetrating and the perfecting of the temporal order through the spirit of the Gospel.* (*The Apostolate of the Laity n. 2:4*)

On becoming our Bishop, Bishop Mark, declared the profound direction of that mission to be the **NEW EVANGELISATION**, at the heart of which is the **renewed proclamation of the Good News** (*Mark 1:15*).

The purpose of these short reflections is to enable us to deepen our sense of, and commitment to, the role our own parish plays in **evangelisation**. Its aim is to help us see how we can develop a sense of being **Missionary Parishes** as part of the local and universal Church in the world we touch – and which touches us! – every day. The Shrewsbury Diocese is presently engaged in a fund-raising initiative under the title 'Our Mission Together.' The choice of this title was deliberate, as its aim is to add support to both **the human and financial resources** we need to fulfil **our mission** today and in the years to come; the venture is already bearing fruit.

Hopefully, these reflections will encourage us to engage in new and dynamic ways of serving the Church who exists in order to evangelise (*Blessed Pope Paul VI*).

NEW EVANGELISATION

St John Paul II richly developed this expression in his Encyclical Letter **The Mission of Christ the Redeemer** (*Redemptoris missio*, 1989). Having spent 10 years travelling to many different countries since his election as Bishop of Rome, Pope John Paul II spoke of encountering three remarkably different though over-lapping situations. These represent precise challenges for the Church, and call for three different solutions.

The first situation is that of **committed Catholics** living a rich sacramental life; **pastoral programmes** are needed to enable them to deepen this. Hopefully, this is our own situation.

The second is that of **vast swathes of humanity** who may never have even heard of Christ; there, **an initial evangelisation** is still needed.

The Holy Father and his successors have found the third situation to be most challenging, and it touches our friends, family members and colleagues: it is that of **baptised Christians** who have little or no knowledge of the faith, and see little or no purpose for the Church in their lives. Here, something radically new is needed. We need **a new or a re-evangelisation**.

In his letter of exhortation, 'The Joy of the Gospel', **Pope Francis** has also urgently invited us to find **new ways of sharing our faith today, with new ardour and conviction, making use of the new means of communication, and giving an innovative, vibrant expression to the faith.** This is what the Church understands by **New Evangelisation**. It is an invitation and a challenge to all of us who live in ancient Christian lands.

How are we meeting this challenge?

BUILDING MISSIONARY PARISHES
Introduction to Parish Reflections and Discussions

THE STRUCTURE OF THE REFLECTIONS

These reflections are designed for small-group discussion in your parish. They consist of four chapters and address the following questions:

- I WHAT IS THE HEART OF A PARISH?**
- II WHAT IS A PARISH?**
- III WHAT IS THE LIFE OF A PARISH?**
- IV IS OUR PARISH APOSTOLIC AND MISSIONARY?**

Each meeting is divided into the following sections:

- Reflecting on material from sources and the commentary for each text
- Saying what, in this material, resonates with those present
- Discussing some of the suggested questions in groups, and feedback
- Making decisions after a time of silent reflection

Proposed Format for a 90 minute Meeting

Begin with an opening prayer.

- Start by reading the proposed quotes for the chapter; it will help if these have been read in preparation for the meeting.
- Let everyone be invited to say – very simply, and without further commentary – something which struck him or her in reading these texts (10-15 mins).
- Consider the short commentary given for the references.
- Share briefly something you found either interesting or helpful. It is important to be positive! (20 mins).
- Break into smaller groups and discuss the suggested questions (20 mins); then, back in the larger group, share one interesting point from each of the smaller groups (15-20 mins).
- Spend some time in silence, reflecting on all that has been said (5 mins). Take a few minutes to make a PRACTICAL decision about what you can do – personally or as a group – to help your parish's mission in the light of your reflections (15 mins).

*Finally, pray together the prayer **Our Mission Together**.*