

# CROSSING THE THRESHOLD

“We are a community of love, unconditional love, which we must reflect in the way we live. If we try and do this people will see the real face of Christ in the Church, in you and me.”  
The Most Rev Peter Smith, Archbishop of Southwark



## PARISH-BASED PILOT PROJECT

**An initiative of the Department for Evangelisation and Catechesis, Catholic Bishops’ Conference of England and Wales, co-run in the Nottingham Diocese by the Bishops’ Conference Home Mission Desk and the Diocesan team.**

### Introduction

‘Crossing the Threshold’ (CTT) is the name of a project of the Bishops’ Conference Department for Evangelisation and Catechesis, which exists to support ministry and outreach to non churchgoing (lapsed) Catholics. It is coordinated nationally by the Bishops’ Home Mission Desk, in partnership with a national Core Group, which is made up of representatives from:

1. Alpha for Catholics
2. Archdiocese of Southwark
3. Caritas Social Action Network (CSAN)
4. Catholic Evangelisation Services (CaFE)
5. Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle
7. Diocese of Nottingham
8. Diocese of Portsmouth
9. Home Mission Desk, CBCEW
10. Keeping In Touch (KIT)
11. Landings UK
12. Maryvale Institute
13. National Board of Catholic Women (NBCW)
14. RCIA Network

The project has been initiated in response to the reality that at least two-thirds of the baptised Catholic community in England and Wales is non

churchgoing - approximately four million people. This makes a significant constituency of people who, in most cases, self-identify as Catholic but never or rarely attend Mass.

How can Catholic parishes respond to this pastoral reality? This booklet summarises the fruits of a parish-based pilot project that was offered in Nottingham Diocese, as an initiative of the Department for Evangelisation and Catechesis.

**“91% of project participants said their understanding of New Evangelisation had increased.”**





# 'Go Make Disciples'

## Mt 28:19

### Department for Evangelisation and Catechesis Eight Project Phases Completed

Eight 'Crossing the Threshold' project phases have already been completed by the Department:

- 1) Forming a national Core Group (March 2010)
- 2) Running a national day for diocesan representatives in Westminster (March 2011)
- 3) National Tour - offering six free resource days in every Ecclesial Province of England and Wales involving all five archbishops, around 7-8 bishops and 1500 people. The tour overall was over-subscribed. (Nov 2011 – February 2013)
- 4) Publishing (in stages) a national resource online by collating the materials offered on the national tour.
- 5) Supporting a parish-based diocesan pilot project (in Nottingham Diocese) to enable local churches to begin reaching out to non churchgoing Catholics.
- 6) Sacrament of Reconciliation - completion of a national survey to encourage people to receive the Sacrament and the creation of an accompanying online resource area.
- 7) Research - publication in autumn 2014 of a research paper focussing on non churchgoing Catholic parents.
- 8) Creation of multi-media and digital materials, with a focus on seasonal outreach and testimony sharing.

For an overview please see:

<http://www.cbcew.org.uk/home-mission>

#### Nottingham Diocese

In 2013 it was discerned that a parish-based pilot project was needed to explore how best parishes in England and Wales might be supported to plan and initiate local evangelisation. The Department is very grateful to the then Bishop of Nottingham, and now Archbishop of Liverpool, The Most Rev Malcolm McMahon (photograph left), who agreed to host such a project with his staff.



#### Pilot Project Aims

The aims of this project were for each participating parish to:

1. **Raise Awareness - of their unique calling and role in the New Evangelisation.**
2. **Deepen Understanding - of the Church's teaching on the New Evangelisation.**
3. **Form An Evangelisation Team - recruit a team made up of ordained and lay members in each parish to help animate and coordinate parish evangelisation.**
4. **Form A Prayer Team - recruit a prayer team / intercessors to support the efforts of the CTT Team and to pray for all the needs of the parish (e.g. involving the housebound and local religious houses).**
5. **Equip - participants to move forward with confidence to initiate ongoing evangelisation initiatives in the form of a mission plan.**
6. **Outreach - enable each parish to run two outreach seasons (e.g. Christmas and Easter).**

**“Working with enthusiastic like-minded people makes me feel more confident to share the faith.”**  
*Pilot Participant*

## Pilot Project Locations

It was initially proposed that two parishes would be recruited to take part in the pilot - one urban and one rural. However, after 'feelers' were put out in the diocese a number of parishes asked to be shortlisted. It was subsequently decided that the pilot should be expanded to include five parishes which were:

- 1) **City of Nottingham churches** – St Barnabas' Cathedral, St Augustine's, Our Lady & St Patrick's in the Meadows, Our Lady of Perpetual Succour, Bulwell, Divine Infant of Prague, Bestwood Park, St Paul's, Lenton Boulevard & St Mary's, Hyson Green
- 2) **St Mary on-the-Sea**, Grimsby with St John Fisher, Scartho
- 3) **Our Lady of Victories**, Market Harborough with St Mary, Husbands Bosworth

## Lead Personnel

The Most Rev Malcolm McMahon, the then Bishop of Nottingham

The Chair & members of the Department for Evangelisation & Catechesis, Bishops' Conference  
 Clare Ward - Home Mission Desk,  
 Bishops' Conference - Secretariat  
 Members of the National Core Group for ministry and outreach to non churchgoing Catholics

Julia Palmer - Adult Formation Department, Nottingham Diocese  
 Canon Geoffrey Hunton (Cathedral Dean)

Canon Owen O'Neill (Market Harborough)

Fr Gerry Murphy (Bulwell)

Fr David Palmer (Lenton)

Fr Joe Wheat (Grimsby)

Approximately 45 lay Catholics took part in the project.



**“I have grown in confidence being part of an evangelising team. T-E-A-M: together everyone achieves more.”**  
*Pilot Participant*

## How much did it cost?

The salaries of the key support staff were covered by the Bishops' Conference and Nottingham Diocese respectively. The cost of travel to offer parish training was similarly covered.

The costs related to the provision of meeting venues were subsidised by the Diocese.

Poster, flier production and printing – was covered from the budget of the Bishops' Conference Home Mission Desk.

The aim was to keep the cost of the project minimal so as to reflect the limited amount of resources that

any given parish has available. It was agreed that little would be served in running a project that cost thousands of pounds per parish. It would mean that the majority of parishes in any given diocese couldn't then try to run something similar post the pilot period. The delivery process had financial realism.

Each parish received a grant of £600 from the Bishops' Conference Home Mission budget to support their Christmas and Easter outreach activities.



“What is interesting is that those who are asked, who have left, who have gone, comment quite often that: ‘Nobody seemed to notice whether I was there or not.’ Also at the same time, people who have been asked say that they are open to a request, they are open to the suggestion that they might want to talk about how this happened. 95% of people say they would welcome an approach which addressed this issue in their lives.”

His Eminence, Vincent Nichols, Cardinal and Archbishop of Westminster  
Crossing the Threshold Resource Day, April 2012



## Measurability

It can be difficult to measure the efficacy of any work of evangelisation. Each person’s journey of faith is unique and although someone might be invited to return to the practice of their faith one day, it could be that they eventually respond some months or years later. It was therefore important that all those involved in the project had clear and realistic expectations about the number of people who might respond to their activities.

It was stressed to each pilot team member at the beginning of the project that previous parish evangelisation experiences suggested that one or two people may respond after a season of outreach; that stated, it was hoped that more people would respond to the activities offered.

**Key markers of success were:** that a parish was able to recruit and form an evangelisation (Crossing the Threshold) team; that the team created a five point year-long evangelisation plan, and that they successfully actioned it.

A participants’ survey was conducted at the end of the pilot as a conduit for feedback about how participants felt the project’s aims (page 2) were met.

## Timeline

There were three seasons of planning, formation and activity: April - July 2013, September 2013 - January 2014 and February - June 2014.

**“During the past year I have become aware of the opportunities for evangelisation that I wouldn’t have previously been aware of.”**  
*Pilot Participant*

# Nuts and Bolts

## What did the project look like in practice?

It was discerned from the outset that one of the quickest ways to 'kill' enthusiasm, was to ask people to attend too many meetings. It was therefore proposed that, after an initial period of introductions and formation, an outreach activity would be tried as soon as possible. The best way to learn how to evangelise is to do it - through trial and error.

The pilot was divided into three seasons with a focus on the teams not doing all the outreach themselves, but the thinking and planning so as to involve as many parishioners as possible.

### SEASON ONE: MARCH - JULY 2013 INTRODUCTIONS, FORMATION AND PLANNING

#### Step One – Leaders Meet (March 2013)

Julia Palmer (JP) and Clare Ward (CW) met informally with the parish priests, including some lay parishioners who had already said that they already wanted to be involved. The project was introduced and they were encouraged to think about who might be good to invite to join a parish evangelisation team.

#### Step Two – Appeal to the whole parish

(March onwards - after the initial meeting above)

An appeal was made at the Sunday Masses in each parish to introduce the project, asking for people to come forward to participate and attend a parish evening or day about evangelisation. This included an appeal for prayer supporters. Everyone who came forward was given some kind of role.

#### Step Three – Formation day (April)

JP and CW organised a parish formation day about evangelisation for those thinking about becoming team members. Emphasis was placed on the fact that every person present on the day had been called and chosen to be at this event.

The teams were invited to think about when they might want to begin, perhaps with some kind of team commissioning (blessing) during a parish Sunday celebration of Mass.

#### Step Four – Fellowship, prayer and planning evenings - 2 or 3 (May / June)

The teams were commissioned (blessed) and follow up evenings were diarised with the suggestion that each team needed to have 8-9 members. This allowed for fall out because of unforeseen circumstances during the year ahead; e.g. childcare, illness, shift work changes etc.

**Formation materials** were provided by the Home Mission Advisor (Desk) drawing on the insights received from the national Crossing the Threshold tour (2011-2013) which included, among a number of other resources:

- **Importance of prayer as a starting point**
- **Understanding evangelisation**
- **Understanding non churchgoing Catholics**
- **Mission landscape: Identifying threshold points;** e.g. Sacramental preparation, local Catholic school, the church building.
- **Discerning evangelisation priorities and planning**

Every team member was invited to do a **listening workshop** which was affirmed as a core skill for evangelisation & to reflect on ways of making the parish more welcoming.

This was followed by a planning evening(s) to encourage the teams to create a year-long five point evangelisation plan. Three of the points on the plan were pre-set for the teams to nurture confidence:

- 1) Form a prayer team to support their mission
- 2) Plan and action a Christmas outreach activity
- 3) Plan and action an Easter outreach activity



# Nuts and Bolts

## What did the project look like in practice?

Plans were then agreed for the year so as to provide a focus. Teams were encouraged to do a limited number of activities well, to keep things achievable and realistic. A team motto was:

### “SIMPLE THINGS - DONE WELL - WITH LOVE”

Every meeting began with a prayer and teams were advised that meetings should last no longer than 1.30hrs. Blessed Newman’s ‘Radiating Christ’ & ‘Some Definite Purpose’ were used prayerfully with the groups. A suggestion was made too that each team member should be partnered with another so that they could pray for each other. It was also suggested that everyone should know each other’s birthday date to nurture fellowship and friendship.

#### Step Five – Doing time (May / June)

During this period they actioned what had been agreed as tasks for season one of the project. The support staff (JP / CW) gave the teams space to begin actioning their plans, visiting them once a month. Where necessary the teams recruited additional parish volunteers to deliver their activities. All the parishes created a prayer card, making it available to the whole parish as a tool of engagement in parish mission.

#### Step Six – Review and next steps (End of June)

Every team was invited to have an evening of prayer, review and feedback ahead of the summer break. There was also a discussion about gaps in formation and skills, to assist planning for the next season of activity.

Every parish successfully recruited a team, formed it, commissioned it and created a five-point evangelisation plan during this first season of activity.

They also completed the first point on their action plan which was to encourage prayer in the parish for their work of evangelisation - all of them created prayer cards, with some specifically seeking to involve the housebound in this apostolate.

### SUMMER BREAK

(MID-JULY – SECOND WEEK IN SEPTEMBER)

### SEASON TWO: SEPTEMBER 2013 - JANUARY 2014

### FELLOWSHIP, FORMATION AND OUTREACH

#### Step One – Fellowship, prayer and formation (Mid-September)

A launch day was offered, to reconvene the teams after the summer break, offering formation on a practical evangelisation skill - sharing your faith testimony.

#### Step Two – Fellowship, prayer and planning meetings

(Late September - December)

The focus was planning for Christmas outreach (publicity, contact points, follow up in January). The support staff for the project met with each team monthly to offer a sounding board, guidance and resources when asked.

#### Step Three – Engaging the whole parish

(Early October)

Teams were encouraged to speak at parish Sunday Masses to invite every parishioner to support and get involved with the forthcoming Christmas outreach activities.

### DECEMBER 2013 – DIOCESAN DAY

A diocesan Crossing the Threshold day was offered with a keynote given by the Chair of the national Department for Evangelisation and Catechesis. Some members of the team spoke on this day and shared their experiences to date of the pilot initiative.

#### Step Four - Christmas Outreach

The teams offered their activities as planned. Throughout the autumn they were encouraged to include in their planning the organisation of follow up activities to be offered in January 2014.

### CHRISTMAS BREAK – CHRISTMAS WEEK AND NEW YEAR





## SEASON THREE: FEBRUARY - JUNE 2014 FELLOWSHIP, FORMATION AND OUTREACH

### Step One – Planning evenings

(Late-January / early Feb - March)

The team reconvened after a break and they began planning their Easter outreach activities.

### Step Two – Lenten Retreat

A free retreat day was offered to all team members. The theme was “Radiating Christ”. It was led by Michelle Moran.

### Step Three – Easter Outreach

There was a repeat of some of the activities done at Christmas but this time with an Easter focus – gearing up to inviting people to come to the Easter services.

### Step Four – Post Easter Follow up

(Mid-April – early May)

The teams were encouraged to offer follow up evenings to build on their Easter outreach efforts.

### Step Five – Completion of their plans (May / June)

Teams were encouraged to complete remaining items on their five point plans.

### Step Six: Year review and planning for the year ahead (May / June)

Every team member was invited to complete an evaluation survey, to assist reflection about what worked and didn't work. It also helped to provide a space for reflection about future outreach activities.

### Step Seven – Parish Report (July)

Every parish was invited to prepare a report of all that they'd achieved during the year to show fellow parishioners and to share with other parishes. During this time too the support staff explored what the legacy might be for the Diocese.

### Step Eight – Team BBQ (July)

All the parishes involved in the pilot were invited to a team celebration at the Bishops' House to present their achievements and to receive certificates of thanksgiving. Archbishop Emeritus Kevin McDonald, was the guest speaker. Bishop McMahon had already been appointed Archbishop of Liverpool.

**Every activity offered was organised and delivered with the intention of serving parish evangelisation.**

**“We are all called to share in the Church’s apostolic mission, with the same zeal which led the Apostles to abandon themselves to Christ and to our forebears to proclaim Him here in the Diocese of Nottingham. As we begin this exciting initiative in Grimsby, Market Harborough and Nottingham... my prayers are with you as you commit yourselves to serve Christ in the proclamation of the Kingdom of God.”**  
**Bishop Malcolm McMahon,**  
**Pentecost Message 2013**



# Parish Activities

The five participating parishes engaged in a breadth of activities which broadly speaking covered:

**Prayer initiatives** - setting up prayer teams to support the 'Crossing the Threshold' outreach; involving existing parish prayer groups and the housebound; creating evangelisation prayer cards for distribution to every parishioner.

**Research** - doing a parish census to identify who is in the parish; making a numerical record of those who came to church; doing a visual observation of who visited the church and for what; identifying local 'threshold points' for new engagement with non churchgoers.

**Communications** - producing a parish magazine three times a year and updating parish noticeboards and websites; reviewing the breadth of parish communications with a focus on 'being more welcoming' including signage; working with local Media outlets in support of programming.

**Christmas** - inviting non-churchgoing Catholics to midnight Mass; distributing invitation leaflets during Advent and at Christmas services; having a carol service in Advent; organising follow-up by having welcome events.

**Easter** - inviting non-churchgoing Catholics to Easter services; distributing personal invitations; organising follow up events.

**Sacraments** - reaching out to those coming to the parishes seeking sacramental preparation for their children; offering parents fellowship and formation; organising Reconciliation Services; supporting and building up the RCIA group in the parish.

**Courses** - running specific courses such as the 'Why?' and Alpha courses.

**Charisms and gifts** - building on the Mary Potter tradition of the local religious sisters; identifying the specific skills of team members such as drawing and acting.

**Welcome** - developing and resourcing parish welcome teams.

**Ecumenism** - contributing to joint evangelisation initiatives with the local Churches Together network.

**Events** - using public events in service of parish evangelisation such as having a Catholic Faith or Prayer Stall at the Christmas bazaar and summer fete; running the 'Night Fever' initiative; hosting a Shroud of Turin Exhibition and Flower Festival.

**Cultures** - developing and celebrating cultural differences within the life of the parish and local area through offering parish 'international events'.

**Service** - seeking ways of serving one another as team members and those in immediate need in the parish and local community.

**Public Witness** - organising Walks of Witness or faith processions; getting involved in street evangelisation.

**Schools** - strengthening links with local Catholic schools and offering events for families such as faith and craft days.

## Grimsby - Christmas

"We offered Christmas Carols by Candlelight on Wednesday 18 December and it was brilliant – standing room only. Mince pies and mulled wine were served at the end. A whole range of people came including lots of families and I got the impression that a number of those present hadn't been to church for a while. The event certainly reached people who were non churchgoing and we also gave out loads of invitations for a follow up event in January, which included an invitation to Midnight Mass." Chris

## Bulwell - Schools

"We've really got involved in the local Catholic schools, not least because we have three headmistresses on the team. Through the school we have promoted all of the church services and the children's carol service was held in the church this year. At this, Fr Gerry welcomed all those present and invited them to visit the parish again. Parishioners are also being encouraged to support school events where possible." Gabrielle

## Market Harborough - Ecumenical Witness

On Good Friday we set up a prayer station at Our Lady of Victories from 10am to 3pm as part of an ecumenical initiative in the town. Around 160 visitors visited our church from all denominations. Visitors were all gifted a beautiful, laminated fold out Stations of the Cross prayer card. They were also invited to: light a candle, leave a prayer at the foot of the Cross, sit quietly and contemplate the last words of Christ. The team was on hand for those who wished to talk to someone." Margaret



# Team Member Survey: Analysis



- encouraging leadership
- affirming the gifts of team members and allowing them to grow
- the team were supportive of each other

Areas of challenge were team building, keeping the team focussed and personality differences.

*“My experience has changed from being a lone ranger evangeliser to working with a committed team... and it's made all the difference.”*

## 1) Awareness

All lay team members said they had increased awareness of their role in the New evangelisation through this project. This was achieved through:

- the formation sessions
- being part of a team and working together
- personal sharing of their faith and taking part in evangelisation activities

*“Through Crossing the Threshold I have been reminded that I was mandated through Baptism and Confirmation to evangelise.”*

## B) Understanding

The team members were asked: Do you think your understanding of the Church's teaching on the New Evangelisation has deepened during the past year?

91% of team members said their understanding of New evangelisation had increased. This was achieved through:

- identifying their own role in evangelisation
- taking part in the formation sessions provided & their own reading
- encouraging/empowering leadership

*“It was totally new and exciting”*

## C) Team

Team members were asked: How would you describe your experience of working in an evangelisation team?

Around 75% said they had a good experience of working in an evangelisation team. Identifying factors were:

## D) Prayer

Team members were asked: Have you experienced any new ways of praying over the last year? Eg. with the Bible, in front of the Blessed Sacrament, as a team?

60% said they had experienced new ways of praying including:

- using Scripture more
- praying as a team together
- having a prayer card with a team prayer that could be shared with others

*“I have now developed more interest in the Word of God and this has developed into having a prayer group in my house, and we enjoy praying and studying the Scriptures together.”*

## E) Equip

The teams were asked: How might you measure, as a percentage, the way in which you have grown in confidence as a Catholic evangeliser during the past year?

Half said that their confidence had grown by over 60%. The reasons were:

- working as a team gives confidence and achieves results
- personal formation was important
- through taking part in initiatives

*“The support of the parish community has given me confidence.”*

**Team members said that they most enjoyed the formation, experiences of outreach and being part of a team.**

## Team Member Survey: Analysis continued...

### F) Outreach

The teams were asked: Overall how would you describe your experience of parish outreach activities during the past year?

Around 70% said their experience good or very good. The main reasons stated were:

- the activities were rewarding and enjoyable
- they brought the parish together and had positive feedback
- the activities were do-able, starting with small steps and building up

*“It was good to have ‘threshold points’ to focus our evangelisation efforts like Christmas and Easter.”*

*“I feel that the various activities have brought the parish closer together.”*

### G) Experience

1. The team members were asked: Please share one thing that you have most enjoyed about the past year. The three main groups were:

- being involved in the activities
- discussing faith as a team and being in a team
- accompanying enquirers

*“Listening, talking and encouraging others to come and see!”*

**“In all its activities the parish encourages and trains its members to be evangelisers. It is ... a centre of constant missionary outreach.”**  
**Pope Francis,**  
*Evangelii Gaudium 28*



# Team Member Survey: Project Effects



## EFFECTS ON THE PARISH

- Encouraged a 'culture' of evangelisation in the parish, creates vision, provides a focus, plan and structure for parish evangelisation
- Encourages good practice in a parish; e.g. being a more welcoming, listening and prayerful parish
- Fostered better networking in the parish, between groups within the church and organisations outside the parish; e.g. school and ecumenical partners

## EFFECTS OF THE TEAM TO ENCOURAGE EVANGELISATION:

- A team provides a forum for ideas, the focus, purpose and profile for encouraging evangelisation
- The team is the link with the parish community and outside networks

## EFFECTS OF THE ACTIVITIES THEMSELVES:

- Mass attendance increase, in one parish a doubling at Easter
- Witnessing people return to the faith and welcome new converts
- Experiencing the success of events and initiatives

*"All Easter services were double in numbers."*

## CHALLENGES FOR THE TEAMS

- Hard to initially recruit a team, for some, and maintain enthusiasm
- Team meetings could be more organised at times and realistic priorities among team members made clearer
- Dealing with different personality types in a team

## CHALLENGES - ACTIVITIES

- Modest turnout at some events & getting the timing right
- In parishes with more than one Mass centre, getting everyone involved
- Sometimes it was hard to translate ideas into practice

## CHALLENGES - PEOPLES' ATTITUDES ABOUT THE FAITH

- Addressing the 'private faith' culture in a parish
- A weak understanding in parishes of mission and evangelisation

*"The 'private' faith culture of the parish."*

## THE TEAMS WERE ASKED ABOUT THE FUTURE

- All want to continue in some way and build on the work and profile created
- They recognised the need to recruit new team members
- Need for ongoing support and resources

*"We've had a magical start, a fantastic year, which I hope will bear much fruit as time goes on."*

## FUTURE IDEAS MENTIONED BY THE TEAMS

- Invitational Events: Carol concerts, Night Fever, Walk of Witness, Seasonal activity: harvest activities, Christmas and Easter events
- Outreach schemes: Home visiting; bereavement visiting and events; OAP luncheon club; outreach to the poor
- Faith formation: Home groups, prayer groups, Bible study groups; RCIA/RCIC; Alpha, Why? Course; Advent/Lent and spirituality talks; parish focus on vocation and faith testimonies, to promote a particular parish focus

## PARISH FORMATION ON EVANGELISATION

- More welcoming and listening workshops
- Training catechists to focus on evangelisation
- How to recruit and manage a team

## Survey: Project Effects continued...



### COMMUNICATION

- Continue the parish magazine
- Use advertising – banners and local newspapers
- Develop team communication & general parish communication

### LEGACY FOR THE DIOCESE

Mindful that the Diocese is waiting for the appointment of a new bishop, possible next steps could include:

- Training other parishes in the Diocese on the same model (maybe by deanery). Invite the CTT pilot team members to reach out to parishes to help them get started.
- Focus on encouraging every parish to have a team in the Diocese & every parishioner to be involved.
- Provide ongoing support for the existing teams; help develop new plans & provide resource days
- Sharing good practice – a mechanism needed to do that – newsletters / emails
- Be available to play a part in training offered to other dioceses as requested by the Bishops' Conference Department.

**"This Crossing the Threshold day is a very significant moment in the life of the Church in this country. It will encourage Catholics to respond to the call to engage in the New Evangelisation – a new missionary impetus in the life of the Church."**

**The Most Rev George Stack,  
Archbishop of Cardiff,**  
Crossing the Threshold Resource Day,  
June 2012



# What have we learnt?

## Parish

As is apparent from the survey analysis, an enormous amount has been learnt. Some of the learning points are listed below:

1. **Prayer** - start with prayer as the foundation, the life breath of evangelisation. Prayer is also an unthreatening starting point for inexperienced evangelisation teams.
2. **Pre-disposed** - priest and people must want to do it - start an evangelisation team.
3. **Attraction** - make evangelisation relevant to parishioners' lives and families (lapsation). Also if the teams are evangelising and practising charity among themselves, it will overflow into their activities and outreach.
4. **Involvement** - work with an intention to involve every parishioner in some way. It's not necessarily about doing new tasks but re-focussing what is already happening in the parish to serve evangelisation.
5. **Research** - know your evangelisation landscape. Discern 'threshold points'.
6. **Seasonal outreach** - provides a focus and ready-made platforms for outreach.
7. **Support and accompaniment for teams** - is essential.
8. **Sacramental preparation** - provides largely under-used opportunities for engagement.
9. **Confidence** - there are a plethora of evangelisation resources. The gap is parishioner confidence, but ready-made programmes and resources help to build that.
10. **Outlet** - a team provides an outlet for gifts and talents to be shared.

### Cathedral - Outreach event

"If I had to sum up the night in one word... AWESOME will do for now! ... An estimation is that we had between 100 - 120 visitors over two nights. Among these were a group of three 'burly lads' (as described by one of the volunteers) who were passing on the way for a night on the town." Mary



## Attractive Outreach

The activities offered have helped to confirm some basic principles for effective evangelisation:

1. **Appeal to the aesthetic** - people respond to beautifully produced invitation and promotion materials, church decoration, candles and lighting.
2. **Personal encounter** - a one-to-one invitation and / or conversation is much more likely to elicit a positive response.
3. **Incarnational** - meet people where they are at both in terms of location and where they are on their journey of faith and life; e.g. local school.
4. **Pre-disposed** - there are certain times of the year when people are more likely to respond positively to an invitation to a faith and church related event. Christmas and Easter tap into the 'Catholic memory'.
5. **Authenticity** - if people are offered genuine friendship and fellowship in Christ it is attractive. People recognise love even if they can't initially name the source of it.
6. **Courses** - some people will attend a bespoke course about the Catholic Faith because they are ready for it. They are worth trying.
7. **Power of signs and symbols** - some of the most successful outreach initiatives were visually focussed.
8. **Simplicity** - people respond to simple events done well which offer an experience of Catholicism.
9. **Language** - use every day language
10. **Culture** - events that celebrated ethnic and cultural diversity were well-attended and helped to foster a sense of belonging.

### Lenton Parish - Courses

"We've just finished the Alpha Course and had five people coming along. Alpha did work. We held it in the local school - a threshold point - to encourage parents to attend. Our last Alpha meeting was really heart-warming. It was so encouraging to hear their positive feedback, especially those who don't go to church." Andriana

# Pauline's Story



**Pauline shares how the kindness she received from her local Catholic priest and parishioners in Market Harborough, when her mother died, prompted her return to the practice of her Catholic Faith after over 40 years away.**

Hi, I'm Pauline and I'm 58 years old and married. I was a cardiac theatre sister and I left to study archaeology. I love animals.

I was born in London and raised in Newcastle. My mother was an Irish Catholic and my father an English Catholic. I am an only child and was raised in the Catholic Faith, which included attending a Catholic primary school. The award of a scholarship meant that I attended a Catholic private school which was run by nuns for my secondary education. My parents were theoretically practising, but dad just went at Christmas and Easter.

I've got lots of faith memories. I remember going to church with Mum and sat on the end of the pew. The smell of incense was lovely and I remember really liking the Latin Mass. I don't have any unpleasant faith memories. The two nuns at school – Sr Carmel and Helena Marie were lovely. My friends had devout Catholic parents and would attend every parish event, but they were very uncharitable at times and I remember that was a huge factor in my leaving the Church when I was about 15. I couldn't reconcile the philosophy of Catholicism and the hypocrisy that I saw within it. Even my father wanted me to go to church and yet he didn't go and I just lost the feeling. In the Catholicism of my youth I wondered why Catholics seemed to mourn religion rather than celebrate it: Faith seemed much harsher to me then.

As a teenager I was strong-minded. At first I was looking for things that I didn't find in Catholicism – something more transcendent, mystical, more intense. I dabbled with philosophies and became agnostic, followed by a few years later becoming atheist. Buddhism

attracted me and at the time I was looking to religion for rational answers, when in fact I feel you should look to religion with your heart and soul. I explored Wicca too and that never seemed right. Judaism appealed at some point. I am not judgemental about other people's faith, as I know the Catholic Church isn't, but I was just searching.

I remember that Sr Helena Marie and Sr Carmel at school had said to me that God never gave us a bigger burden than we can carry and that stuck in my head. It stayed with me. Even when I said there was no God, something said to me you can get through this. So I was in a way gradually returning.

After I got married I went to Rome as an agnostic and I told my husband that we had to go to The Vatican museum and the architecture of St Peters was so lovely; I had to go to a side chapel while visiting it to pray.

Over the past six – seven years my husband and I have had some difficult times – due to family illness – and my mother sadly developed dementia, while my father-in-law had a stroke. It was a mess, so I found myself doing all the pragmatic things that were necessary – going up and down to Newcastle to see my mum, for example, and making sure that I rang her a lot, but it didn't seem enough. So I found myself going to light candles and praying in church, and I don't know why, but I pushed faith away. The more that I visited church the more I felt better, but I didn't acknowledge that. During the course of the last four – five years I started to realise the church's profound effect on me. I began to realise that if I honestly and truly prayed I had never not had my prayers heard and answered; not always in the way that I had imagined, but always answered. I always came away from prayer with peace, hope and strength. I started thinking to myself that this was huge and significant.

Mum's illness got worse, and sadly I had to move her into a care home in Leicestershire. I couldn't lift and care for her as she needed nursing care. I found a place nice and near and they were lovely people. They allowed me to bring my dogs in to see her. My mother loved one of my dogs.

Mum's faith was very important to her and in asking the local parish priest, Fr Owen, to see Mum, he

## Pauline's Story continued...

struck me as a kind and genuine man. At the same time I started to meet randomly lots of members of the local parish community – by chance at the shops and at events. They struck me as amazing people – kind, non judgemental, wonderful. So I thought that I wouldn't push this away but would embrace it.

Sadly mum was only in the home for six weeks and she died in my arms. She had a peaceful and merciful death. Losing Mum was pivotal in making the final leap back to the Church. I took her to be buried alongside Dad in Newcastle and I became concerned that prayers for the deceased were said. So I got in touch with Fr Owen who said he would talk to me and I was having glimmerings of faith. He said some prayers and my husband and friends were there, and Father was so kind and warm and welcoming.

Mum's funeral was done the old-fashioned way and I did the readings. I thought to myself that I needed to take Holy Communion, which I hadn't done at my father's funeral, and I had a strong desire to take it at Mum's. When I realised that was what I wanted, I had to read the canons of the Catholic Faith and thought it would be dishonest to receive Communion without that shared sense of belief and faith. So in response to the prayers that I'd said over the years, and because of the lovely people that were suddenly in my life from the parish, as well as my being impressed by Pope Francis, I took a new step. I went to Fr Owen and booked an appointment for Confession. I was afraid about receiving the Sacrament face-to-face, but he was lovely and supportive and that allowed me to be frank and honest. Then my husband, who is not Catholic, started coming to Mass too and he comes with me now.

I now find all the things in the Mass beautiful and I wonder why it took me so long. Through my faith, I believe Mum is happy and safe. Once I started going back to Church I met all these wonderful parishioners and they were not formulaic Catholics but really genuine. I love the Mass and it's mystical on a Sunday, but the week day Masses are so intimate and joyous. Shaking hands on the week day Masses is beautiful - people shake your hands so warmly and it's wonderful.

Most recently I have begun attending sessions with Fr Owen for returned Catholics. Now I feel the faith deeply for myself. It has taken me around 40 years and it's key to be open. There have been other times in my life when I could have turned back but something stopped me. I was just in denial.

I have travelled a lot during my life and never thought I'd find such peace in a local Catholic Mass. Life is so much better and I am so much happier. I was like a scared little wounded animal in a dark forest, and God was in his little house in the middle of the forest inviting me in. Fr Owen was the person welcoming me in my home town to the feast. Every time I met a parishioner they were like little candles, little lights, leading me to a warm fire of love. The whole experience has made me feel so happy and welcome.



*Pauline is now a parishioner at Our Lady of Victories Church in Market Harborough.*

**"The New Evangelisation is not only for Europe but is especially for places where secularisation has changed people's experience and practice of faith."**

**The Most Rev Bernard Longley,  
Archbishop of Birmingham**

Crossing the Threshold Resource Day, Birmingham,  
February 2012



# Tunde's Story



## **Tunde lives in Nottingham and shares his story of return to the practice of the Catholic Faith.**

I was born in Nigeria and am the eldest of a family of eight – I've seven younger brothers. My mother was baptised Catholic and my father is Church of England. I was baptised Methodist. I've never asked why I was baptised Methodist. This is what they did at the time.

When my parents subsequently left for England to study, I stayed behind to live with my grandmother who was also Methodist. We worshipped at the Methodist Church.

In 1979 I came to England to join my parents and lived family life with them in London. We went to the Catholic Church as a family.

But as I grew up I decided that I wanted to leave home, and from then on I was finding my own way in life. By 1986 I was only going to church occasionally, but not like when I was living at home with my family. I had a gap of practicing my Christian faith for about six years when I was what's best described as 'wandering'. I was working, partying, not really planning for the future. I was living for the moment – drinking, smoking, and womanising. It's a miracle that I'm alive. I did go to Confession occasionally, but that was it.

In 1992 I just felt this desire to start fasting and praying – I just felt that I had to. I felt that I was being called back. I didn't forget my roots. I started going back to church and came in contact with the Catholic Polish Community. So I went to Mass at the Polish Church.

I met my wife, Marta, who is Polish, in 1995. She was a practicing Catholic, so we were going to church and Mass together, but I was just attending as a participant rather than as a signed up Catholic. My son was baptised Catholic and he went to the Catholic school and I started to go to the church more.

In 1996 I came to study at Clarendon College in Nottingham. From there I was going to go to De Montfort Uni, and but ended up at Nottingham Trent University.

My wife and I now have three children – two girls and boy – and still live in Nottingham.

During my time in Nottingham, my Aunty Cordelia has been a big influence and recently she encouraged me to attend the 'Why Course?' in her parish. I found the team organising it really supportive. The teaching given was bringing me back to life. Earlier this year I finally decided that I was ready to accept the Catholic Faith. It was a miracle. The team assured me I was on the right track. They gave me formation and Fr David and the elders in the parish, affirmed me when I decided that it was the right time to become a Catholic.

I am now a fully-fledged Catholic. It is just the right time. I am in the right place and everything has fallen into place. I wasn't pressured into it. I went to the services of my own free will. I wasn't forced. It's for everybody. There is a support for you. Becoming a Catholic has given me a chance to start again. It's a lifetime journey.

I feel more confident in myself. Calm. Peaceful. Happier. I think the quality of my life has improved. People do ask about what I have got that they haven't. You don't have to speak about it. Faith manifests itself. It is reflected in behaviour, in everything.

I am happy to stand up and be counted. I don't have to fear anything. It was a disjointed journey, but slowly it's coming together.

I've many people to thank in Nottingham for their support. My life has been one big miracle and I hope that I'll continue to spread that miracle. I'd say to anyone to leave the door of his or her heart open. For me, the jigsaw now fits.

*Tunde is now a parishioner at St Mary's Church in Hyson Green, Nottingham.*



# Natalie's Story



**Natalie lives close to St Mary on-the-Sea Catholic Church in the East Marsh of Grimsby and recently Crossed the Threshold, returning to the faith with her young son, Bjorn.**

I was baptised in February 1985, received my First Holy Communion in 1990 and was confirmed at Pentecost this year at the age of 30.

Coming back to the Church from leaving at the age of 12 was difficult!

On reflection, my belief in Jesus and passion for him has always been evident; for example, through the way that I have led my life in general and my involvement in a helping profession, as well as serving others.

I have found love and compassion from people in society. However, I have been affected by oppression, prejudices and racism causing internal pain and suffering to my spiritual growth and understanding.

In the final year of my degree a question posed on life's journey led me to consider what was to be my life and vocation.

This area of spiritual growth was visited in a module and my true belief system became clear in my present situation.

My life consisted of only work and study and I was in denial of my true vocation in relation to motherhood.

In a vocational change of course, I lost control of my life but found Jesus.

The pain of life's struggles worsened but I was stronger than ever in my faith and I found myself at God's mercy.

Friendship sprang from attending other churches where I became involved. However, these encounters did make me think and led me back to my Catholic beginnings.

After returning to church I felt a great need to renew my faith by returning to the Sacraments and

and receiving Communion. A great day of joy this year was my Confirmation on Pentecost Sunday when I received the gift of the Holy Spirit into my life and became a full member of the Church.

**Crossing the Threshold** has enabled me as an adult to renew the promises made at my baptism and to practice the faith into which I was baptised.

**It is never too late** and I would recommend it to anyone in similar circumstances to cross the threshold and receive the welcome Jesus has for you.

I gave birth to my first child, Bjorn, in 2012 and he was baptised in May 2013. Joyfully he attends church on a regular basis and is loved by all the congregation, a little child who is very much part of our Catholic community.

On a wet day not very long ago his tiny wellies were left behind in church but they were quickly identified as belonging to Bjorn and were safely returned to him - one of our youngest church members to 'cross the threshold' who enjoys playing and learning in the Sunday Mass children's liturgy group. He can also look forward to receiving the special education only found in our Catholic academies and giving him skills needed for his life in the future.

Thank you for letting us be a part of this amazing journey and for evermore.

*Natalie and Bjorn are now parishioners at St Mary on-the-Sea and St John Fisher in Grimsby.*

# The Future



## ROLL-OUT IN OTHER DIOCESES

As a direct fruit of this pilot and the preceding parts of the Crossing the Threshold initiative, the parish-based project was launched in Middlesbrough Diocese on 13 September 2014 and will begin in East Anglia Diocese in Spring 2015. Other dioceses in England and Wales are also exploring a possible launch schedule.

## RESOURCES

Materials from the pilot initiative will be made available later in autumn 2014. In the interim, for an overview of resources provided through the Bishops' Conference Home Mission Desk please see: [www.catholicnews.org.uk/home-mission](http://www.catholicnews.org.uk/home-mission)

## MORE PARISH STORIES

Also available are the three team newsletters that were created during the pilot year which provide an insight into the team activities. These will be made available later in autumn. The teams also wrote an end of year activity report.

## THANK YOU

The Department for Evangelisation and Catechesis is enormously grateful to Archbishop Malcolm McMahon, his Nottingham diocesan staff, priests and parishioners for hosting the pilot initiative. The input and support of the National Core Group for Ministry and Outreach to Non Churchgoing Catholics is also greatly appreciated. It is hoped that this pilot project will inspire and support other parishes in England and Wales to start a 'Crossing the Threshold' evangelisation team.

## Appendices

- Page 1 of a sample team newsletter.
- Article about the project in The Tablet - *Parish Practice* - written by Fr Joe Wheat.

**“I wish to encourage the Christian faithful to embark upon a new chapter of evangelisation marked by this joy, while pointing out new paths for the Church’s journey in years to come.”**

**Pope Francis,  
*Evangelii Gaudium* 1**

Crossing the Threshold is an initiative of the Department for Evangelisation and Catechesis, Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales. This end of project report was co-written by Clare Ward (Home Mission Desk, CBCEW) and Julia Palmer (Nottingham Diocese).

Catholic Trust for England and Wales, 39 Eccleston Square, London, SW1V 1BX. © CBCEW 2014.  
A company limited by guarantee and registered in England and Wales. Company No. 4734592  
Registered Charity No. 1097482. Contact tel. 020 7 901 4818. Report design: Home Mission Desk.

# 'Crossing the Threshold'

## News



### TEAM TALK

#### JANE

"Easter Sunday Mass was one of the most joyous occasions, with the church filled with families taking part in the celebration, the climax to family activities through Lent and Holy week. The experience raised our awareness of the need to develop further the link between school, family and parish."

#### GERRY

"This project has given me the opportunity to share the blessings that my Catholic Faith has given me. To hand out free resources and share my faith with people has been inspiring."

#### LISA

"The churches in our town held 'Prayer Stations'. It was really inspirational and thought-provoking to be involved in the organisation. Hopefully it will be repeated next year alongside our Good Friday 'Act of Witness'."

## "Make preaching the Gospel our primary task," says new Archbishop

Speaking at his recent Mass of Installation in Liverpool's Metropolitan Cathedral of Christ the King, Archbishop McMahon took his inspiration from St Joseph the Worker and preached on the saint's feast day:

"The secret of everything is to let yourself be carried by the Lord and to carry the Lord.

That is a secret which Saint Joseph also understood. He was carried by the Lord in his acceptance of God's plan for him, and he literally carried the Lord as the guardian, teacher and guide of Jesus.

It is thanks to his [Joseph's] kindness, his obedience to the will of God, his being a 'man of honour' that, from the moment of his conception, Jesus could be loved, cared for and kept safe.

This Jesus is my Saviour, our Saviour – my Lord, our Lord; how easily can we forget that? Our principal task as Christians is to make that message known, to make Jesus present in the world of today. To do this, we must be ready, like Joseph, to break with convention, and

do things differently. Joseph teaches us that everything we say and do in our personal and family lives, our parishes and schools, our convents and chaplaincies, must have as its purpose and its end the proclamation of Jesus as Lord, for he is the source and the summit of our lives.

Taking risks to proclaim the good news of salvation is the task before us... Breaking with structures and conventions that give us comfort, that feed our complacency and dull our sensitivity to the demands of being a Christian, is what it means to be a missionary disciple...

Guided by the Holy Spirit, we must work together, as Bishop, priests and people, to continue to hand on the Deposit of Faith, to build up the Body of Christ, to worship God in spirit and truth, and to serve our brothers and sisters.

So let us dream together about how we can better proclaim Jesus as Lord in our own lives, in our parishes, and in our Diocese... even when it seems we are swimming against the tide."

Full text: <http://bit.ly/1owTqfX>

## PARISH PRACTICE

•UPCOMING EVENTS•

The People's Climate March will take place in London, Manchester and Edinburgh on **21 SEPTEMBER** and on **19 SEPTEMBER** in Huddersfield. Register for the London event at [www.theclimatecoalition.org/ClimateMarch](http://www.theclimatecoalition.org/ClimateMarch)

### Power in doing little things well

'Crossing the Threshold' is a project initiated by the bishops of England and Wales that evangelises by the straightforward means of giving people easier access to the established treasures of church life

JOE WHEAT

**S**T MARY on the Sea's parish church in Grimsby is locally referred to as a hidden gem. It is a church with a stunningly beautiful interior and an active congregation; but it is behind a high brick wall and thick screen of trees. So hidden is it that many in the local area thought that it had closed many years ago – and, in one respect, they were correct. The church was shut. Through a mixture of fear of vandalism and lack of confidence, the doors were only open for Mass four times a week.

Last year, the Bishops' Conference Department for Evangelisation and Catechesis initiated a parish-based pilot project called Crossing the Threshold (CTT). The pilot was co-run in the Nottingham Diocese by the bishops' conference home-mission desk and the diocesan team. The project did what it said on the tin; it helped the parish to discover "threshold points" – moments of encounter both inside and outside the parish setting, which encouraged every member of the Mass-going population to reach out to people.

A foundation principle was that parish communities have something wonderful to offer to their local communities. At best, they are places of welcome, fellowship and acceptance in the midst of a world where people may feel isolated and excluded. Our parish is in the middle of a deprived area with precisely the isolation and sense of exclusion that the Gospel challenges with a message of hope.

We began gathering a team together – not as simple as it sounds – but collaboration is essential to the initiative. After several information and formation meetings with the bishops' conference home-mission adviser, accompanied by the diocesan adult formation staff, we were invited to reflect about our local mission landscape. We began to identify threshold points and opportunities we could create for engagement with the community.

The task was to create a one-year, five-point plan for evangelisation. The first three were set by the project: to establish a team to pray for the project, a Christmas outreach and an Easter outreach. The last two were selected by us; we chose to work with the parish pastoral council to update the parish census and to apply to the local council for street signs pointing the way to the church. The simplicity and focus of just five tasks reassured the team this was not too daunting.

The outreach for Christmas took several

### To do

**FIND OUT** ways of keeping the church doors open so that people can enter the sacred space for prayer and moments of peace. What do locked doors tell them? **IDENTIFY** "threshold points" and make the best use of them for evangelisation. The Christmas and Easter messages define us: share the wonders of the seasons **KEEP** it simple and do little things well: invitations, advertisements, a good parish magazine, family events, walks of witness, all attract newcomers

forms. The long-defunct parish magazine was resurrected and with articles about parish and school life, it was distributed to everyone in the parish and primary school and placed in local public spaces. The Carols by Candlelight service was already well advertised and attended by the local community but the team extended the advertising in the form of a flyer. This resulted in a congregation of 300 people – an estimated increase of 50.

Christmas Midnight Mass was the central focus of the outreach. An appeal was made to nostalgia with the slogan "come back and celebrate Christmas how you remember it" and the romantic notion of a candlelit Mass and traditional carols. Posters were displayed in the area and a Christmas card and flyer went out to everyone in the parish and school. The local paper carried a front-page invitation with details of all the Christmas services, with the result that double the number of people attended the Chapel of Ease Vigil Mass and the Midnight Mass from previous years.

**THE CHRISTMAS** outreach was completed by "Leftover Sunday" on the Feast of the Epiphany. Parishioners were invited to bring any leftover snacks for refreshments after Masses and any unwanted gifts. The presents were placed in a sack at the beginning of Mass and those who had brought a gift along could take a lucky dip as they left.

Running alongside the Christmas activity were two other initiatives sparked by the project. The parish pastoral council undertook a renewal of the parish census so that the magazine and invitations could be sent out to everyone. A more substantial initiative was the development of the ministry of welcome. Already carried out by a few parishioners, it was given more structure with clearly defined

tasks for the welcomers, and the team of volunteers was expanded. It proved vital at all the Christmas services in ensuring that anyone who came was welcomed and put at ease.

Easter became the next focus. The second edition of the parish magazine included a wide range of articles, and an Easter card was distributed with details of all the Easter services. Two new events were prepared and led by the team. The local Good Friday Walk of Witness was restarted and the Catholic community was joined by other local churches. Over 80 people walked from the parish to the local market. Once the service was finished, passers-by were offered vouchers for a free drink and hot cross bun in the market cafe and they were given invitations to the Easter Vigil.

On the morning before Palm Sunday, a children's activity morning was run by volunteers from the parish and primary school, with craft activities and an Easter egg hunt in the school hall and church. During the morning, just under 100 children came with their parents and grandparents, many of whom were new faces or families from the school who were seldom seen in the church.

The final, and maybe most significant, decision that was taken was to leave the church open every day, all day for people to come in and sit in the silence and in peace in the middle of a noisy and turbulent area. A large sign that could be read from the road said, "Open, please come in and pray". The focus is always on inviting and welcoming people – especially those who might have lost touch with the parish or who never had a connection. There is power in doing little things well; and the benefit of using existing events and opening them to a wider constituency – making them moments of evangelisation – is clear.

The Crossing the Threshold initiative offers a simple process tailored to the abilities and gifts of a particular community. Home Mission Sunday on 21 September may be a good moment to reflect on how a parish can build on its existing activities to develop new expressions of evangelisation. Our experience of this project has certainly taught our team to be confident in offering to the community the riches of our faith and common life.

**Fr Joe Wheat** was until recently parish priest of St Mary on the Sea in Grimsby. For resources for Home Mission Sunday 2014, see [www.catholicnews.org.uk/hms14](http://www.catholicnews.org.uk/hms14)