



## Parish Evangelisation in action

*This is a summary of one initiative which took place in Staffordshire between 1994 and 1995. It offers a lot of interesting information and insights into one way of reaching out to those who can be classed as 'non churchgoing' Catholics as well as others.*

*This can be read in more detail on pages 29-37 of 'The Challenge of Spreading the Faith, edited by Denis Richards, Family Publications 1997.*

### An evangelisation project in a parish in North Staffs – 1994-1995

The context of the project was as follows:

At the beginning of the decade there had been a universal invitation from John Paul II to a renewed focus on Evangelisation. With the approach of the coming Jubilee there was an awareness that the *Holy Spirit* had been preparing the Church for the new millennium.

There was an increased understanding in the parish of the need for repentance – the Holy Spirit was poured out because Jesus took on the sins of the world and there will be a new outpouring of the Spirit as we unite ourselves with Jesus & the Cross. This led to an increased awareness that the proclamation of the Gospel has to be done in the power of God, of the Holy Spirit and therefore prayer was a vital element underpinning the project.

To get a realistic picture of what was happening in the Archdiocese the following statistics were collated:

- Between 1983-89 reduction in Mass attendance in archdiocese of Birmingham
  - Reduced from 130,000 by 7,500
- Between 1989-95 – an average loss of 3000 people *each year*
- 1999 - mass attendance was 88,217
- 2000 - mass attendance was 85,694
- There is still a loss of almost 3000 per year
- Interestingly the number of the Catholic population increased from 287,080 to 290,769 – an increase of 3500

*This posed the question: Is this a situation that could be described as haemorrhage? It was clear that the people were hungry – yet were still going away. Thus it had to be considered, was it that they were not being fed?*

### The Stoke project took place in 3 stages

1. A Census to identify the Catholics in the parish
2. The training of Evangelisers
3. Visitation of the 'non churchgoing' and alienated

#### **Stage One - Census**

- Using electoral lists, 10,000 households were visited in 6 months
- Parishioners were trained to approach people on the doorstep with a simple questionnaire and a polite request asking if they would be willing to cooperate with the census
- The census visiting was underpinned with prayer and calling upon the Holy Spirit
- There were fears – but visitors came home rejoicing

#### **Stage Two – training (12 months)**

- The basic gospel message and knowledge of the Scriptures
- Learning to understand clearly but simply what the gospel of Jesus Christ is: what he came to do, the salvation we have received
- To look at the Cross and know that it is our salvation
- To know the gift of the Spirit
- Used Richard Pearce's *Small Group Evangelism*
- Helping people to become confident, to overcome difficulties, able to proclaim their faith and share it without fear of saying the wrong thing or heresy
- No need to speak about every doctrine of the Church's life but the basic message of the gospel
- Parishioners involved in the training  
*Teams practised by visiting parishioners*

#### **Stage Three – Visitation of 'non churchgoing'**

- Basic principle – no cold visiting. Letters were sent out to all prospective households who were invited to contact the parish if they did not wish for such a visit to take place.

#### **Visitation – some key elements**

Each team took with them a copy of the letter and people were asked 'do you remember the letter, we have come from ...May we come in?'

The trained teams had a definitive strategy. They:

- † Talked about family
- † Moved on to Church background – did you grow up here? Where were you baptised ...?
- † At the right moment they asked about what the peoples personal faith meant to them

It was understood by the teams that it was

1. essential to seek permission to share the gospel message
2. important to pray with the people before leaving
3. ask if they could come again and leave a memento

Here is a statistical summary of the visitation:

Visiting statistics June – Sept 95

Response to visit	Number of Households	%	Number of persons	%
A – Hot	8	18	10	21
B – Warm	18	41	19	41
C – Cool	15	34	15	32
D – Cold	3	7	3	6
Total	44	100%	47	100%
E – Others	7		7	
Total contacted	51		54	

A – Hot – have already returned to Mass and Sacraments

B – Warm – very receptive to the ‘Good News’

C – Cool – courteous and polite; took literature

D – Cold – rejection

E – Other – not ‘non churchgoing Catholics’ (C of E, Pentecostals or actively practising Roman Catholics).

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***John Paul II's Vision for the New Millennium***

1992 was the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of John Paul II's encyclical *Redemptoris Missio* (the Mission of the Redeemer). John Paul II emphasised that the power of the Good News to address the concerns of every human person, generation & culture. Our focus must be on Christ the Redeemer and we

are to be motivated by the concern that waning commitment to mission reflects a crisis of faith – the Incarnation, the Redemption and the Trinity.

In 2001 John Paul II wrote the Apostolic letter, *Novo Millennio Ineunte* (at the beginning of the new millennium). In this he reflected on 2000 years of Christianity, the jubilee, and the new evangelisation. A beautifully crafted letter to all Christians, this letter takes you through the challenges we face in the modern world and invites us to contemplate the face of Christ in prayer and a deepening spirituality of communion.

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### ***Maryvale's Mission***

Maryvale Institute seeks to live out the vision and desire of Blessed John Henry Newman from his first home as a Catholic, Maryvale House. This vision of an educated laity is one very dear to the hearts of all the staff at Maryvale. Blessed John Henry Newman wrote that the key element in education is the formation of the heart – and not simply the informing of the mind. *Cor ad cor loquitur* (the heart speaks to the heart) was his motto.

Newman saw that the heart needs transforming, so that knowledge can be embraced and channelled in a way that would not only be beneficial to the individual and to society generally, but would also be instrumental in preparing for our eternal destiny. Without the transformation of the heart, mere increase of knowledge could lead to greater selfishness and evil, and moral corruption.

It is this transformation of heart which forms the Maryvale courses as they seek to feed all the four aspects of the Christian life (Acts 2:42) and lead students to the living wellsprings of faith.

We invite all involved in parish outreach to become part of the Maryvale family of students through any of our formation courses, in particular the Certificate and Diploma in Evangelisation and Parish Ministry which covers topics such as:

- † the identity of the parish
- † the mission of the parish
- † knowing your 'fish'
- † knowing your culture
- † the Eucharist at the heart of evangelisation
- † prayer, evangelisation and the parish
- † working together in mission
- † parish planning for evangelisation
- † when people respond
- † 'put out into the deep'

For details please contact Teresa Kehoe, the Course Director on [evangelisation@maryvale.ac.uk](mailto:evangelisation@maryvale.ac.uk) or on 0121 360 8118.