

CROSSING THE THRESHOLD

“There is not a crisis in the Church but the Spirit is calling us to do something... We should get back to preaching the Gospel.”
 Bishop Kieran Conry, Chair, Bishops’ Department for Evangelisation and Catechesis



PARISH 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’ is the name of a project of the Bishops’ Conference Department for Evangelisation and Catechesis, 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:

7. Diocese of Portsmouth
8. Home Mission Desk, Catholic Bishops’ Conference of England and Wales
9. Keeping In Touch (KIT)
10. Landings UK
11. Maryvale Institute
12. National Board of Catholic Women (NBCW)
13. 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 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.”

“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



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
6. Diocese of Nottingham



'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 (Nottingham) to enable local churches to begin ministering 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) Publication in autumn 2014 of a research project focussing on non churchgoing Catholic parents.
- 8) Creation of multi-media and digital materials with a focus on seasonal outreach and testimony sharing.

Pilot Project Aims

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

1. **Awareness** - raise awareness of their unique calling and role in the New Evangelisation.
2. **Understanding** - deepen understanding of the Church's teaching on the New Evangelisation.
3. **Team** - recruit a team made up of ordained and lay members in each parish to help animate and coordinate parish evangelisation.
4. **Prayer Team** - recruit a prayer team / intercessors to support the efforts of the core group and to pray for all the needs of the parish (e.g. involving the household 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).

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, Malcolm McMahon (photo left), who agreed to host such a project with his staff.



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

Pilot Project Locations

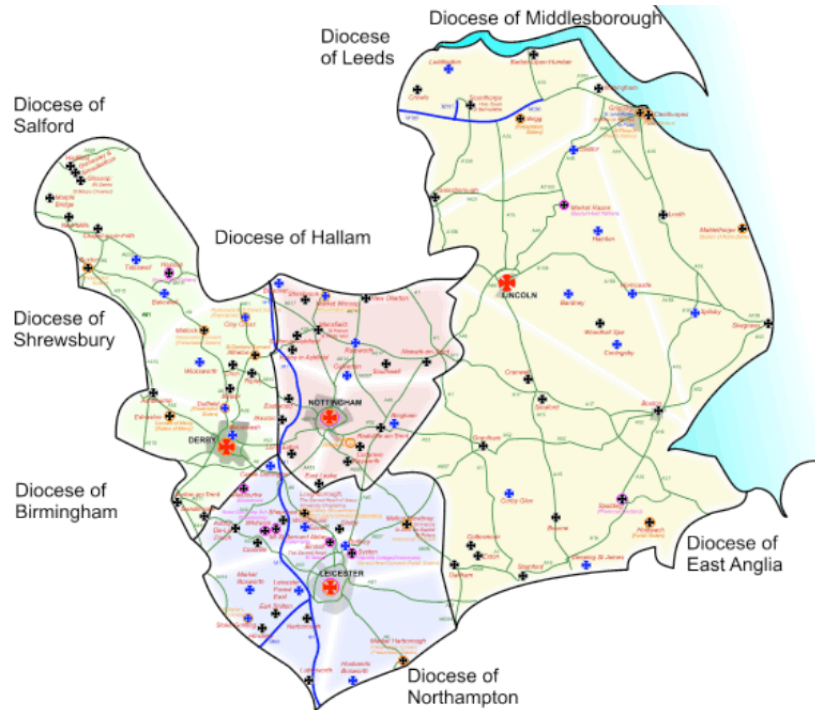
It was initially proposed that two parishes would be recruited to take part in the pilot - one urban and one rural. However, after 'feelers' were put out in the diocese a number of parishes asked to be shortlisted. It was subsequently decided that the pilot should be expanded to include five parishes 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 in Bulwell, Divine Infant of Prague in Bestwood Park, St Paul's in Lenton Boulevard & St Mary's in 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

Rt Rev Kieran Conry, Department Chair, Bishops' Conference
 Rt Rev Malcolm McMahon, the then Bishop of Nottingham
 Clare Ward - Bishops' Conference Home Mission Desk
 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 Harbrough)
 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 was 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 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 a 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



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

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

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 TEAM TO ENCOURAGE EVANGELISATION

- A team provides a forum for ideas, offers a focus, purpose and profile for encouraging evangelisation in the parish
- 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 activity, Christmas and Easter
- 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

PARISH FORMATION ON EVANGELISATION

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

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 awaiting 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.

What have we learnt?

Parish

As is apparent from the survey analysis, an enormous amount has been learnt. Some of those 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** - 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 the night up 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



Effective 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 positively respond 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 putting on.
7. **Power of signs and symbols** - some of the most successful outreach initiatives are visually focussed.
8. **Simplicity** - people respond to simple events done well which offer an experience of Catholicism.
9. **Language** - use everyday language
10. **Culture** - events that celebrated ethnic and cultural diversity were well-attended and helped to foster a sense of belonging.

Lenton - 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

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 is being launched in Middlesbrough Diocese on 13 September 2014 and East Anglia Diocese in Spring 2015. Other dioceses in England and Wales are also exploring a possible launch.

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' Home Mission Desk, which is an instrument of the Department for Evangelisation and Catechesis please see: 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 team activities. Each team wrote an end of year activity report. These will be made available later in autumn.

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. It is hoped it will inspire and support other parishes to start an evangelisation team.

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).

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