



The Catholic Parish of Saint Gregory the Great Northampton



PART OF THE ROMAN CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF NORTHAMPTON, REGISTERED CHARITY NUMBER 234091

OUR
VISION

**“A truly thriving Catholic community
confidently and humbly proclaiming the
Good News of Jesus Christ.”**

OUR
VISION

St Paul writes on Evangelisation

Last week we followed Pope Francis speaking of St Paul as an evangelist, and inviting us to look into our own life with regard to our personal relationship with Jesus. We saw how it was this relationship that was the power behind Paul's missionary activity.

This week we again follow the teaching of Pope Francis, now looking at the writings of St Paul. As always, he begins with a reading from the Bible:

Therefore put on the full armour of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with whatever will make you ready to proclaim the gospel of peace. (*Ephesians 6:13-15*)

In using the analogy of armour, St Paul is recognising that there is a battle — a spiritual battle going on, and the battlefield is first of all within ourselves. In his former life, as a persecutor of the Church, Paul recognised that he was using his God-given zeal for a misguided purpose. He then used that same zeal in the service of the Gospel, and much of his letter to the Galatians is engaged in his persuading those with whom he once agreed that they are mistaken. The belt of truth; the truth that is Jesus; 'the Way, the Truth and the Life', (*John 14:6*) the belt that holds our clothes in place. The breastplate of righteousness; the protection from any possible truthful accusation of hypocrisy, as we seek to live in accordance with the message of the Gospel. Finally, we come to that part of the armour that Pope Francis wants us to consider today; our spiritual footwear.

In speaking of footwear, Paul is picking up on a metaphor from the Old Testament:

How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation, who say to Zion, "Your God reigns!" (*Isaiah 52:7*)

This passage from Isaiah, like that in Ephesians, speaks of the proclamation of good news, and the relationship to feet is a reference to movement — being willing to travel with the news, the Gospel of peace and salvation.

Napoleon may have said that 'an army marches on its stomach', referring to the necessity of feeding the troops, but equally it marches on its feet, and needs the right footwear. The origins of Northampton as the centre of the boot and shoe trade lie in the (embarrassing) fact that in 1649 Oliver Cromwell signed a contract with Northampton bootmakers for 2,500 boots for his army going to oppress Ireland.

Soldiers need good quality footwear; they have to be able to move quickly and frequently over difficult terrain. Our spiritual footwear must be equally of good quality, and used for a better purpose! That footwear is the zeal, the enthusiasm to proclaim the Gospel.

"Like a mighty army moves the Church of God" wrote Sabine Baring-Gould in 1865, and Pope Francis takes up the idea of movement. We need to be willing to move out of our buildings, of churches and 'safe places' to proclaim the Gospel of Christ. As Christ told the fishermen to 'put out into the deep', so we must be willing to move beyond our comfort zone. But Jesus did not send out his disciples one by one, but in pairs, and no one person on his/her own is an army, so the Church moves together in the proclamation of the Gospel. In that we have the power of the Holy Spirit and the company of the faithful.

The militaristic images of the Church are less popular these days, but in the first century the sight of Roman army legions marching would have been a common sight, so it is not surprising that St Paul uses such imagery. However, they are metaphors, and our proclamation is of a Gospel of peace, not of war. Our battle is against evil, and particularly against the evil that is within ourselves.

"Never flag in zeal, be aglow with the Spirit, serve the Lord". (*Romans 12:11*) St Paul describes the footwear as 'whatever makes you ready to proclaim the Gospel of peace'; and it is this zeal, this enthusiasm, this excitement for Christ that 'makes us ready'. It is like the way in which the Israelites were told to eat the first Passover: "In this manner you shall eat it: your loins girded, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand; and you shall eat it in haste. It is the Lord's Passover. For I will pass through the land of Egypt that night". (*Exodus 12:11-12*)

Pope Francis ends his message with these words:

It is important to have this readiness for the newness of the Gospel, this attitude that involves momentum, taking the initiative, going first. It means not letting pass by the opportunities to promulgate the Gospel of peace, that peace that Christ knows how to give more and better than the world gives.

And for this reason I exhort you to be evangelizers who are moving, without fear, who go forward, in order to bring the beauty of Jesus, to bring the newness of Jesus who changes everything. "Yes, Father, He changes the calendar, because now we count the years beginning with Jesus..." But does He also change the heart? And are you disposed to let Jesus change your heart? Or are you a lukewarm Christian, who is not moving? Think about it: Are you an enthusiast of Jesus, are you going forward? Think about it a bit.

Indented paragraphs are quoted from the Papal Audience of 12th April 2023

Notices of Interest

Car Park Safety: Please remember that Parents/Carers are responsible for children in their charge whilst using the car park. Neither the Parish nor the Diocese are responsible for the safety of persons (adults or children), cars or their contents while in the car-park.

Repository: The Repository is open after every Sunday Mass wherever possible! We need more helpers prepared to stand for a few minutes after Mass - all stock is marked, so an easy task!
There is now a small display of items for Communion and Confirmation. Contact Kath.healey.789@gmail.com.

Diocesan Pilgrimage to Walsingham:

10th June 2023:

A coach will leave from St. Gregory's at 8am on Saturday 10th June, leaving Walsingham at about 5.00pm. Cost £25 per person (payable in advance). I understand that this is considerably more than in previous years, but the cost of coach hire has also increased dramatically. Please see poster for full details. To book, please speak to Caryl in the Office, or add your details to the list in the Lobby area and see one of the Clergy to pay.



Church Heating: Weekday Mass is now back in the church; Thursday adoration is in the Sacristy. We heat the church and hall on Sundays, but the extra cost of this will be more than the saving on weekdays.

Thomas Becket Catholic School have a number of job vacancies, please look on their website for details.

Fire Safety – Important notice. Some years ago in response to instructions relating to the fire risk associated with votive candles, we had trays made to go under the racks where the candles burned to prevent the possibility of a naked flame falling on unlit candles below. Unlit candles **MUST NOT** be placed on these trays in any circumstances & must not be stacked one on top of another. This has been happening in recent weeks, and must not continue.

SACRAMENTAL PREPARATION

Baptism Preparation: The next session will be at 7pm, Mon. 24th April in the Sacristy. Please note you will need to phone Deacon Michael on 07999808997 before you attend, to book a place.

First Holy Communion 2023: Congratulations to all children who have enrolled on the First Holy Communion programme. You will now have all the dates of sessions. Please try to attend them all, and please enjoy the course!

Confirmation in 2023: Those interested in Confirmation preparation should have spoken to Helen and will know the plan for the coming months.

Pro Life Chain: On Sat. 29th April, SPUC Northampton is holding a Pro-Life Chain on St Peters Way Northampton. This act of silent witness is to remember the millions of lives lost to abortion since the Abortion Act 1967. It will take place between 11am & 1pm. Please consider joining us at this important event. We will stand together to proclaim the pro-life message. Abortion is a tragedy for babies, Mothers, Fathers, and society as whole. We have a moral duty to speak out against the horror of abortion. If you can join us or want more information, please contact William on 07393965643(text is fine) or wpcurrie@btinternet.com. Our Lady of Guadalupe, pray for us.

Are You Interested in the Diaconate? If so, there will be an information morning as follows: Sat. 13th May, 10am - 12.30pm, St. Mary's RC Church, 82 West Street, Dunstable, LU6 1NY. Entitled: 'Opportunity to find out more about the diaconate in our Diocese.' Please contact Fr. Tony on 01582 662710 for more details.

Tots @ St Gregory's has restarted: tots and their carers welcome, 9.30-11.30 on Tuesdays during term-time £1 per adult!

Thursday Holy Hour & Adoration: Holy Hour is now Holy Two Hours, from 9am until 11am. This will continue while there are sufficient numbers to sustain it, and remains in the Sacristy for the time being.

Food Parcels: Please contact Gregory Care (07434 669011) if you or anyone you know would benefit from receiving a food parcel.

Bl. Cyprian Tansi Prayer Group continues to pray together online via Skype and by telephone.

Choir notes: Practice Thursday (18th May, Ascension Day) after evening Mass: 7:45 – 9:00 pm. Come and join us as we strive to make our liturgy more inspiring. *Alec*

Missio / Red Box: Father Andrew has mentioned how wonderfully generous you were in the last calendar year & the one before that by your donations &, hopefully, prayers for the Missions. Donations for this year have been coming in regularly: God bless you all for that. New supporters are more than welcome. Some free magazines, envelopes & red boxes are available at back of church. Current magazine features encouraging news about large numbers training for the priesthood in 5 seminaries: India (88), Kenya (329), Malawi (110), Nigeria (837) & Sri Lanka (190). On Maundy Thurs, a lady gave my daughter a weighty bag of coins but there was no name on it. This gift was inside a cream carrier bag originating from "Spring Lane – A Sure Start Children's Centre". For my records, I would like to know WHO made this offering if only to return a pair of black woolly gloves that were inside the bag but don't really fit me! *Alec*

Parish Finances: Much the easiest way to support the parish financially is through a standing order directly from your own bank account. The information required for this is as follows:

Bank; **NatWest**
Sort Code; **60-06-11**
Account Number; **46898093**
Account Name; **Northampton Roman Catholic Diocesan Trust**
Payment Ref; Parish Name/Area: **(St. Gregory's, Northampton)**

The Universe Catholic Weekly Online Newspaper: In order to keep high standards going and maintain a strong weekly Catholic voice at a time when it is much needed in the world, please consider taking out a subscription. Order your Digital 2 weeks free introductory offer by emailing michelle.jones@universecatholicweekly.co.uk.

Prayer for our Country: We are invited use the three day leading up to the coronation of King Charles III as a special time of prayer. While it is recognised that not everyone is a supporter of the monarchy, and many do not see themselves as British, the reality is that we live in this country, and in many respects the country is in desperate need of prayer. We have a cost-of-living crisis, our health service is in a mess, there is industrial unrest in much of the state-run services, our immigration service is overwhelmed. Three days of prayer for our country must be a good idea. This will be from Wednesday May 3rd to Friday May 5th, and will conclude with a Mass, either at St Gregory's or at the Cathedral (to be arranged).

Eucharistic Minister's training: The ministry of giving the Blessed Sacrament to the faithful is important, and is a ministry of service. It is not a reward for the exceptionally holy. We all acknowledge that we are not worthy to receive Christ in the Eucharist, and the receiving is the greater honour than the giving. As we return to the normal practice of offering Holy Communion from the Chalice, we will need to recruit new Eucharistic Ministers, and for this there will need to be training in the practicalities of this ministry. Deacon Michael is compiling a list for this, and there is a Diocesan training course which will be run here starting in a few weeks, to be completed by Corpus Christi.

Prayers for Ukraine: Please continue to pray for an end to the war in Ukraine:

O God, author and lover of peace,
to know you is to live,
to serve you is to reign.
Defend against every attack
those who cry to you
so that we, who trust in your protection,
may not fear the weapons of any foe.
We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ,
who lives and reigns for ever and ever.
Amen

Scripture Readings 23rd April 2023, 3rd Sunday of Easter Year A

Today and next Sunday we hear parts of Peter's speech at Pentecost. Peter emphasises that Jesus' death was part of God's plan, quoting the prophet Joel's words about the wonders expected in the last days, when God's Spirit will be poured out on all peoples. Jesus, a descendant of David is this expected "Anointed One", "Messiah" in Hebrew, "Christ" in Greek, who now rightfully succeeds David as King of Israel.

The psalm, attributed to King David, expresses total confidence in God, who will not let his soul die and will not let "your faithful one" suffer corruption in the grave. Both Peter, in today's reading, and Paul saw this as referring to Christ's resurrection.

Peter's first letter reminds us of the price Jesus paid for our salvation in his suffering and death, so that we might "have faith

and hope in God". We should persevere in hope, in face of attacks and attractions of secular society.

In the Gospel Jesus appeared to the women. Then he joins two disciples walking despondently to Emmaus, and explains the scriptures to them, before they recognise him "at the breaking of bread". The appearances of Jesus after the resurrection invite us to listen carefully: he was clearly bodily present, not just a spirit. Yet he was different, and could only be recognised with faith.

Psalm Response: **Show us, Lord, the path of life.**
(Acts 2:14,22-28; Psalm 15(16); 1 Peter 1:17-21; Luke 24:13-35)

Chris Oliver

Alpha continues on April 25th 2023 — This Tuesday

This week the focus is on prayer. St Ignatius of Loyola wrote: "The kind of talk that friends have one with another, or perhaps the way a servant talks to his master, asking for some kindness or apologising for some failure, or telling him about some matter of business and asking for his advice". (*Spiritual Exercises* §54) Prayer is not just asking for things, it is sharing with God our deepest hopes and fears, our deepest shame and our greatest triumphs. It is speaking to him and it is listening to him as he speaks in the Scriptures and in our conscience. It is spending time with our greatest friend.

First session:	March 14 th 2023:	Is there more to life than this?
Second Session:	March 21 st 2023:	Who is Jesus?
Third Session:	March 28 th 2023	Why did Jesus die?
Fourth Session:	April 18 th 2023:	How can I have faith?
Fifth Session:	April 25 th 2023:	Why and how do I pray?
Sixth Session:	May 2 nd 2023:	Why and how should I read the Bible?
Seventh Session:	May 9 th 2023:	How does God guide us?
Away-Day:	May 12 th /13 th 2023	Who is the Holy Spirit?
Eighth Session:	May 16 th 2023:	How can I resist evil?
Ninth Session:	May 23 rd 2023:	Why and how should I tell others?
Tenth Session:	June 6 th 2023:	Does God heal today?
Eleventh Session:	June 13 th 2023:	What about the Church?

Gregory Care

Don't be disappointed if your invitation from the palace hasn't arrived!

*On Monday 8th May
you are invited to join in the
Coronation Big Lunch
at St Gregory's Church.*

There will be a shared table and extra goodies, games for children and adults to join in. Also there will be a fancy crown parade which we hope lots of you will take part in (the only criteria is that these should be made from recycled or repurposed materials) Watch out for the posters to register your interest and anything you could bring for the shared table (they will be around next week) This is not a fundraising event, there is no entrance fee and all games will be free to enter. This is just an opportunity for our community to get together and have a good time. We just need to know if you intend to join us.



Diocesan Information Manager, 3 days per week, Start date: ASAP.

The Diocese are currently recruiting for an Information Manager to join the Diocese. Full information for the position and an application form can be found by visiting <https://northamptondiocese.org/jobs/> All candidates should complete an application form and email it to hr.admin@northamptondiocese.org The closing date for applications will be Friday 5th May. Interviews dates to be confirmed.

Other Coronation Events

MULTI-FAITH CORONATION CELEBRATION SERVICE

A service will be held for all faiths to celebrate the upcoming Coronation of King Charles III on 2nd May 2023 at 6.00 pm at the Cathedral of Our Lady Immaculate & St Thomas of Canterbury. The service will be led by Bishop David.

CORONATION TRAIL

From Friday 28th April 2023 to 9th May 2023 there will be fun Coronation trail for children in the healing gardens at the Cathedral Centre. The trail is free and papers can be picked up from the St Thomas Centre reception area.

Parish Finances — It's that time of year again!

The new planned giving envelopes for the coming year are now available. Many people have transferred to giving by standing order; this is very helpful for the parish, and many thanks for this. For those who are using envelopes, please collect yours from the table in front of the confessionals.

We have two men in seminary training to be priests for our diocese at present

Next weekend we celebrate Good Shepherd Sunday. This is a day across England and Wales when we remember and pray for our Shepherds, Bishop David and our priests.

You will receive a prayer card this weekend containing our diocesan prayer for priestly vocations. Please pray this prayer, individually, as a family and in prayer groups. The second collection next weekend will go towards priestly formation, seminarian formation and promoting vocations. Please prayerfully consider a gift to support this vital ministry. Without priests, we do not have the Church.

Pilgrims of Hope

Northampton Diocesan Assembly

15th July 2023

The idea of the Diocesan Assembly originated in the report from the Synod conversations that took place last year. The Assembly will be at Thornton College (near Milton Keynes) when it is hoped to bring together 400 delegates from across the diocese to reflect our Synod listening and to discern our future together. Schools and young people will also be involved so that their voices are heard.

So that every parish is represented, up to four people can attend from each. The hope is that a diverse group can be asked to attend representing different ethnicities, ages and ministries within the Church. It is also important to recognise that this is part of our diocesan plan, and cannot influence the doctrine or discipline of the Church as a whole. Rather, it is focussed on the running of the diocese, and how we can best be the Church in our local area.

Inevitably with no more than four delegates from each parish, there will be many who cannot attend, but the Assembly needs the prayer support of the whole diocese. There is a prayer for the Assembly

Come Holy Spirit!
Fill us with the fire of your love.
Amaze us — Disturb us — Occupy our hearts.
Teach us to be pilgrims of hope.
Empower us to listen and speak graciously,
to discern your will for our diocese
as we journey towards our Assembly.
Inspire us to be the radical presence of Christ
in our homes, in our parishes
and throughout the world.
All this we ask of you,
in communion with the Father and the Son,
for ever and ever.
Amen



The Delegates

To help the delegates to prepare, there will be four sessions of formation, which will be based around Acts, chapter 15 (The council of Jerusalem)

Reading the signs of the times
Moving from dispute to silence
Discerning the Holy Spirit
Taking action

Part of the sessions will be prayer, spiritual conversation and faith-sharing. This is excellent training for anyone in leadership in parishes or in any ministry.

Delegates are asked to commit to the four sessions and to the Assembly day; there will be no on-going commitment beyond that. The formation sessions will happen fortnightly from late May and will be held in pastoral areas so no-one has too far to travel. There will also be a Saturday morning zoom option.

Since January, five working parties have been meeting to discuss some of the most contested and pressing themes from the listening, including: lay involvement in decision-making; our diocesan finances and resources; the life and vocation of the priest post-pandemic; women's ministry; and reaching the marginalised. These groups will publish reflection papers and host webinars in the run up to the Assembly.

On the Assembly day we will discuss the key themes and concrete suggestions arising from these working parties, and others such as mission and youth.

"We do not have to wait to see where this journey of the world-wide Church will take us. This is the moment we can embrace an authentic synodality in the way we live our diocesan life."

Bishop David Oakley, Pastoral Letter, Advent, 2022

Preparation for the Assembly begins with our launch weekend.

Please pray for our whole diocese to become pilgrims of hope as we respond to the Synod listening.

"The purpose of the Synod... is not to produce documents, but to plant dreams, draw forth prophecies and visions, allow hope to be nourished, inspire trust, bind up wounds... and create a bright resourcefulness that will enlighten minds, warm hearts, give strength to our hands."

Preparatory Document for the Synod

Pastoral Letter from Bishop David for the Third Sunday of Easter, 23rd April 2023

Pilgrims of Hope

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

The scriptures we have listened to today are full of new life. We heard something of what St Peter shared with the people of Jerusalem on Pentecost Sunday morning. Gone is the disciple who wept and hid himself because he had disowned knowledge of Jesus on three occasions. Now we hear the apostle Peter fearlessly convicted of the truth that Jesus who was crucified, is now risen again in glory. This message is confirmed by the words written in the first letter of St Peter. Through baptism into faith, we are invited to share this new life ourselves. And then we listened together to the Gospel of Emmaus. This powerful account of the resurrection is shown in the lives of two disciples of Jesus, Cleopas and his companion.

The first scene of the story presents us with something of the suffering and incredulity of these two disciples. They are broken-hearted. The risen Lord came to them and walked by their side. We had some experience of this in 2021 during our gracious listening and gracious speaking. This was the diocesan stage of the forthcoming synod about becoming a synodal Church.

We were invited to reflect on four questions:

What does it mean to be Catholic?

What are some of your experiences of the Church doing something well?

What are some of your experiences of when things have not gone so well?

What is your dream for the Church?

It was clear from listening to the listening, some find themselves in a similar place to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus. They struggle to make sense of the Church. They feel disheartened. They are yearning for a Church which is more outward-looking and full of missionary energy. Like the risen Lord, we need to find ways to accompany the many who would like to walk from grief to grace.

Since that time of listening, and throughout the next stage of the Church's synodal journey, we have been thinking about how we might respond to dreams and aspirations. We want to be a diocese that can proclaim in the bold language of the Acts of the Apostles, 'it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us'. In the Gospel of Emmaus, we heard of the dialogue between the risen Lord and his two friends. It is a conversation in which Jesus opens their hearts to the meaning of the scriptures. This is the place where we find the truth. Later Cleopas and his companion are able to say, 'Did not our hearts burn within us as he talked to us on the road and explained the scriptures to us?'.

After the initial conversations around the diocese, five working parties were established by our diocesan office of synodality:

the role and life of the priest in a post-pandemic Church

finances, properties and material resources of the diocese

lay engagement in diocesan decision-making

the role of women and their ministry in the life of the diocese

how we reach out to marginalised groups to hear their recommendations for better engagement

My Lenten Pastoral Letter was an opportunity to mention our forthcoming diocesan Assembly, Pilgrims of Hope. This will be held at Thornton College on Saturday, 15th July. There will be an opportunity for us to reflect on these five themes and more. We are very blessed that the Assembly is fully funded by a generous donor. Please join with me in praying that this gathering will be a real encounter with the risen Lord in communion, participation and mission. One thing is for sure. We will know our Assembly has been successful if it leads to the mission energy we heard of at the end of today's Gospel and in the Acts of the Apostles. We can easily sum up the themes of the five working groups in one overarching mystery of our faith. Being a Catholic means belonging to a missionary community. If this message is not communicated, we have seriously failed.

Yours devotedly in Christ,

+ David

Bishop of Northampton



What will this mean for the parish?

Truthfully, we do not know! No more than did the Apostles when they responded to the call from Jesus to “follow me”. No more than did the Israelites when they left Egypt with Moses. No more than most of us did when we were children. The future is an unexplored country.

So far as the parish and the diocese is concerned, there are some certainties. It is a certainty that the number of priests coming into service in the diocese is fewer than the number who are reaching an age when they no longer have the energy to look after a parish in the way that parishes have expected in the past. It is a certainty that the financial strength of the diocese is very limited. It is a certainty that we are living in an increasingly secularised society. It is also a certainty that the secular society is not bringing joy into the lives of many. But, above all, it is a certainty that the Christian Gospel has a message of hope for our generation, and every generation. The first of the formation sessions for delegates to the Assembly is entitled “Reading the Signs of the Times”. One of the Eucharistic Prayers says: “Grant that all the faithful of the Church, looking into the signs of the times by the light of faith, may constantly devote themselves to the service of the Gospel.” (*Third Eucharistic Prayer for use in Masses for various needs*)

There is a saying in business that ‘to fail to prepare is to prepare to fail’, and one fruit of the Assembly and the Synodal process is that we can prepare for the future so that this unexplored country can be entered with confidence, and a confidence that does not simply come from human devising, but has been guided by the Holy Spirit.

No parish stands alone, but is part of the diocese, and has neighbouring parishes with which it must co-operate. We are already working together with Sacred Heart and Great Billing parishes in our First Holy Communion and Confirmation preparation programmes, and with the Cathedral in our care of those in need of material help. Co-operation between parishes will need to grow in the future, and the way in which this happens needs to be planned and prayed about, not be a ‘knee-jerk reaction’ in the face of a sudden and unplanned event.

The Synodal process has begun to teach us of ‘gracious listening’, of listening to the ideas and thoughts of other people, and seeking to understand how and why they think as they do. The second formation session for delegates to the Assembly is entitled ‘Moving from dispute to silence’. It is in silence that the Holy Spirit can speak to us in the depths of our heart; it is in silence that we can come to understand that what someone else has said has value and is not utterly stupid and it is in silence that the Holy Spirit can help us to respond to the words of others with charity and understanding. The parliamentary model of two opposing parties sniping at each other is no model for the Church. The word ‘parliament’ derives from the word ‘to speak’, ‘parler’ and does not include the concept of ‘écouter’; to listen!

None of this will be accomplished in a day, and the times ahead will bring new challenges and opportunities. This ‘gracious listening’ must become the norm for the Church and locally in the parish so that disagreements can be managed without disengagement, but rather, the different God-given skills and talents be used in the most effective ways for the building up of the Community of Faith and for the proclamation of the Gospel. If decisions are made more slowly, but carry the will of the entire community, they are more likely to result in God’s plan being fulfilled.

So the third topic in the formation of delegates to the assembly is ‘Discerning the Holy Spirit’, and this is fundamental to finding the right way forwards. We have three specific helpers in this discernment; the Scriptures, the Church and Prayer. Through reading the Bible in a prayerful way we can see the words of the prophets, the letters of the Apostles and above all, the Gospels helping us to see what God asks of us today. Through prayerfully considering the experience of the Church, from the time of the Acts of the Apostles onwards, and the various teaching documents, especially those of the Second Vatican Council we gain further inspiration, but it is only in prayer that we open ourselves to hearing the ‘still small voice’ of the Holy Spirit. We need the triangulation of the Scriptures and the Church to ensure that what we think we hear in prayer is indeed the Holy Spirit and not merely our own desires.

The process of discernment is important for us all irrespective of the present synod and present circumstances. Just as God called Samuel (*1 Samuel 3:4*) he has a calling for each one of us. Vocation is not just to priesthood, diaconate and the religious life; God calls each one of us to serve him in some way, and he gives us each our particular skills and abilities to work for him, and to work in the world to earn a living and support our children. Each one of us is created for a purpose, and it is through discernment that we find that purpose. Only when we are fulfilling that purpose can we find true contentment in life.

Finally we are called to action. Where that will take the Diocese after the Assembly remains to be seen, but in this parish we are already embarked on a major action which is the Alpha programme. However, this is not the end in itself; the real purpose is that of evangelisation; the obeying of the call of Christ to ‘proclaim the Good News’. (*Mark 16:15*)

Our vision is that we will become a ‘truly thriving Catholic community, confidently and humbly proclaiming the Good News of Jesus Christ’. Each one of us is called to action to fulfil this vision. To be ‘thriving’ we must be sustainable, which means to be growing. This can only happen if we are engaged in the mission of the Church. Sadly we have seen all too clearly that the children of Catholic parents do not necessarily become active Catholics themselves. They, as we all do, need the spark of faith to be awakened in them. Many have found that Alpha has been the way in which that has happened. To proclaim the faith ‘confidently’ requires that we really know and understand that faith. The articles in the newsletter and homilies week by week should be some help in this, as do publications like ‘Bible Alive’. To proclaim the faith humbly requires a level of confidence in that faith such that we do not need to shout it, but we do need to live it in an authentic manner.

If these are the character of our parish, we will be richly blessed by God in our mission here in Abington.