

“Throw open the windows of the Church and let the fresh air of the Spirit blow through.” These words, spoken by Blessed John XXIII when he called for the Second Vatican Council in the early days of his pontificate, were a powerful prayer, which has led to many exciting new developments in the Church. As a result of that Council, the Church recognised her need to engage with the modern world, grew in her understanding of the need to share the treasure of faith in Christ with all people and came to define evangelisation as the purpose of the Church’s existence. Year by year since then the documents of the Church have articulated this ever more clearly, with a decade dedicated to growth in our evangelistic endeavours to conclude the last millennium and a Papal Synod, culminating in the recent Apostolic Exhortation “Evangelii Gaudium”, to explore how we can be more effective in our evangelisation in the modern world held only three months ago.

Out of these exciting developments Sion Catholic Community for Evangelism was born. In 1984, Monsignor Pat Lynch, a priest of the Diocese of Nottingham, read one of these documents, ‘Evangelisation in the Modern World’, written by Pope Paul VI in 1976. In it the Pope called all Catholics – lay people, religious and priests alike – to work in collaboration to share the faith with all those they met. Inspired by what he read there, Fr Pat brought together a Franciscan sister and three married couples to put this teaching, this exhortation, this call, into practice. In his book, ‘Awaking the Giant’, Fr Pat reflected what Pope Paul VI had articulated; that the Catholic Church is a giant with the best news ever – the Good News of Jesus Christ – to share with the world, but that in some senses she was asleep, being a resting labourer in the vineyard rather than an active one. Those eight initial members sought, therefore, to encourage and equip parishes – the presence of the Church in every local area – to become active workers in that vineyard, sowers of the seed, witnesses to their faith, and that is what Sion Community has been seeking to do for the subsequent 29 years. In that time we have grown from those initial eight pioneers to 26 full time members and 35 Associate Members, with a considerable number more having come and gone over the years. Reflecting the evangelistic vision for Sion’s foundation, our Purpose and Values statements read as follows:

Sion Catholic Community is drawn together by God to evangelise. Our Community is Spirit-led, organic, interdependent and committed to each other

and to prayer. We are called to proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ and to equip others for this task of evangelisation. In order to be a sign of hope and give an authentic witness, we are committed to living the Gospel in ways relevant to the needs of today. This Statement expresses that:



- (a) We are Roman Catholic.*
- (b) We use the charismatic gifts for building up the Body of Christ and seek to follow the leading of the Holy Spirit. (EN 75)*
- (c) We recognise that growth and development as a Community and in our approach to evangelisation is essential. We seek the guidance of the Spirit in this process which includes prayer, action, reflection, and assessment.*
- (d) We seek to be a sign of hope in the Church for the people we minister to and for our society. (EN 28)*

We value growth and change in order to be prophetic, innovative and effective communicators of the Gospel.

We value a collaborative model of Ministry, open to people of all ages and backgrounds.

We value the call to our particular expression of Community which empowers us for the task of evangelisation.

We value openness, empowerment and commitment as essential to the development of community and the individual.

We value an approach to our vocational work which is both professional and pastoral. This is maintained through and by ongoing training and formation.

We endeavour to live the Gospel we proclaim so as to witness to others with integrity.

We value the Sacraments, Eucharistic Adoration and Scripture as important aspects of our life and prayer.

Since we were founded, in light of these defining statements, our ministry has expanded to include, partnering with dioceses, both nationally and internationally, the development of Secondary and Primary School Missions on an ongoing basis, and Family Ministry, seeking to share the vibrancy of our faith with our young people and children, and encouraging and building up young Catholic families in order that they become more effective as what the Church calls 'the domestic church'.

“In our modern world (often hostile to religion), religious families are extremely important centres of living faith. They are "domestic churches" in which the parents are the first heralds of faith (Second Vatican Council) ...The home is the first school of the Christian life where all learn love, repeated forgiveness, and prayerful worship.” (Catechism of the Catholic Church: Paragraph 1656 - 1657)

Alongside these ministries Sion Community also works, wherever the opportunity arises, to share the beauties of our faith in Christ as Catholics and to work with others of like mind. As such, we have led missions in prisons, participated in ecumenical missions to whole towns and organised the Catholic evangelistic outreach that took place around the Olympic Games.

As we journey towards the celebrations of our 30th anniversary we pray, and ask your prayers, for our continued mission as part of the Catholic Church in England and Wales, and for the Church as the whole.

Blessed John XXIII, pray for us.

Our Lady, Star of Evangelisation, pray for us.

Fr Simon Penhalagan
SION CATHOLIC COMMUNITY
FOR EVANGELISM