

SACRED HEART and St JOHN STONE in the Archdiocese of Liverpool

Parish Vision Statement

Jesus Christ is uniting our community of HeartStone

in its Vision and Mission so that all might find a place of welcome, prayer and loving outreach when in need.

PARISH PRIEST'S REPORT

AT THE LAST FORUM discussion helped me change back in our Reconciliation services; made me want to continue discussion about what helps and hinders personal faith lives. A request for a complaints procedure has been taken up by the Vision Team and will be spoken about at the Forum.

SINCE THE LAST FORUM life has gone on apace! Recently we celebrated the 25th anniversary of St John Stone's church: a beautiful, contemporary, enduring testament to great vision and community effort that is an invaluable inheritance for the future.

CHANGE is all around. Climate change, change of PM, changing relations with the EU, automation, technology, ways of employment. Pope Francis persists in renewal and challenge, service and inclusion of the poor, relationships with the young, concern for the planet, love and mercy prioritised in living up to faith and ethics, Synodality as the new way of the Church of the Third Millennium.

SYNOD 2020 is the way of change called for by Archbishop Malcolm. We have to change, and this is the way we **find out how to change**. The scandals in the Church, the open disputes among Cardinals and top Vatican officials, the vicious hostilities on websites among Catholics of different outlooks, falling numbers in European churches and priests all getting older: many such things demand we change.

But also there is the action of God's Spirit still, within our Church:

- how to join in with the good things changing in the world: respect for women, increased education and health standards, fewer wars though still too many!
- for us to learn what the fresh outlook called Synodality looks like
- to carry on with the reforms of the Vatican Council, 50 years on and counting
- to redeem the efforts of British Catholics at the 1980 National Congress
- the inspiration of Pope Francis calling us to value and grow in the faith
- the Archdiocese new lay staff as CEO, Safeguarding and Finance

Archbishop Malcolm has his own challenges to us all:

"In convoking the Synod I am calling us to be bold and creative in the task of rethinking the goals, structures, style and methods of evangelisation in our Archdiocesan community with its various parish and ecclesial, religious and social communities" (Proclamation at Inauguration Service in Cathedral, Feb '19)

We have begun with the Learning and Listening Phase of Synoding. Everyone is invited to feed into the Archbishop on the 4 questions:

1. *Where, in your everyday life, do you experience love, truth, goodness, hope and joy?*
2. *When you reflect on your life now, and as you look to the future, what causes you concern or worry?*
3. *What is the purpose of the Catholic Church in the world today?*
4. *What topics would you like to see on the Synod 2020 agenda?*

When the Synod co-ordinators have received, collected and discerned this feedback they will propose for us:

Themes for Discussion at Southport Pre-Synod in October 2019

Our discussions of these Themes will then be used by the Co-ordinators to formulate Proposals for Decisions to be made at the Synod Assembly

In June 2020 our five Synod Members will join others for training in this phase, then all are invited to debate the Proposals. Then the Proposals are voted on at the actual Synod Gathering on Saturday 17th October in Aintree. The decisions of Synod then become Church law, the Spirit's inspiration, which the Archbishop, People and Priests are committed to carry out as the Church's mission.

This will be celebrated in dedication at the Cathedral on Sunday 18th October 2020 and then in all parishes on Sunday 25th October 2020.

CHANGE and SYNODING IN HEARTSTONE

I decided that we must participate fully in the Synod. This decision was not taken lightly – past disappointments at church renewal are known by me, many other priests, and many of you. The National Pastoral congress of 1980 in Liverpool was apparently sat on by the Vatican many have said; the long-windedness of Leaving Safe Harbours and the failures of Southport to put published plans into practice; the remoteness of church officials and lack of transparency – these and much else are challenges to good will and trying again! But I have been helped to try it all again by

- a very honest Forum discussion last year when people said there is something different this time
- the year of prayer at the start of this new round of "consultation"
- deciding to trust the Archbishop that he means what he says
- the frank and wise counsel in the Parish Vision Team and other leaders.

So let's do it: heartfelt prayer and participation, to serve the Archdiocese, but also use the process well for discernment and renewal in our own parish.

TIME FOR RE-IMAGINING HEARTSTONE'S VISION

How will Synod 2020 change the way of life in Sacred Heart and St John Stone? What will the life of faith and community among us look like after Synod in October 2020?

It is clear that the Archbishop has set out the two major aspects of what we are looking for in "becoming the Church God is calling us to be":

- fresh Vision from God: being motivated in what our priorities are
- being more missionary: loving outreach to the world, evangelisation

Let's be clear: what we mean – and don't mean – by words like "evangelisation" and "missionary" is a big part of why we need honest learning and listening. Such opportunities are being made available by the Archdiocese for the Autumn.

SO: it is a good time for us to Review and Renew the Vision and Priorities of HeartStone as part of participating in the Archdiocesan Synod process.

From January 2015 we began extensive listening and meetings which brought to birth our current Vision Statement, Missionary Priorities, shared leadership through the Parish Vision Team. Pentecost 2016 is when this all came together, and thank you, and thank God, for such grace and fruits of effort and comradeship since then – not without faults and failures, complaints and limited competence: but hey! how blessed we are! we are still here! we are still faithful! we are still trying! and we can encourage each other in a fresh effort to renew and review what God is asking of us for the future.

How much of the Brexit debate in the country was a generational debate?

How much is the diversity of views and desires based round the age of the people involved? In our Church listening, how much do the problems and possibilities come from different outlooks because of the age of people? We cannot resolve this by cutting out the voice and experience of the adults, nor by ignoring the enthusiasms and challenges of the young! We must find a way to bring them together for the future of HeartStone!

I am glad to list now some of the gifts we enjoy in HeartStone, and resources we are using to look ahead, to look outward, to look in hope "to become the Church God is calling us to be".

1. OUR PASTORAL ASSOCIATE:

On 27th June the Archdiocese will complete the first 6 months of the daring, new experiment for providing fresh, qualified ministry for our church. 5 Paid Pastoral Associates have begun this very exciting new way of Catholic ministry across our Archdiocese, and as you know by now, Eleanor Lalley is ours. Her "job spec" is to join in our Parish Vision, with especial emphasis on "taking the torch of faith into today's world".

After the first 3 months getting to know parish life and us, she and I and the leader of the new ministers have decided on her priorities of service more closely:

- ❖ Reaching out to attract new Catholics, new parishioners, new participants in God's life through the Church
- ❖ Supporting the faith development of Southport's young people, especially through service with Christ the King High School chaplaincy with Dennis Jones
- ❖ Developing presence and service in liturgical and spiritual opportunities

I think Eleanor has done a great job so far, and we are so glad to have her, included as part of the Parish Vision Team, and our parish co-ordinator of Synoding. Some of her work is done ecumenically, hopefully some will grow into being as a Pastoral Area.

What do you think? Do you have suggestions, observations?

Do let me – and her – know and there is a chance at the Open Forum to share reflections on Eleanor's ministry so far.

2. OUTREACH TO INVITE NEW ADULTS

Eleanor's ministry is crucial to this challenge, and she is learning through

- the Archdiocese support for the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA)
- ecumenical links, including Alpha, Methodist Bereavement Care,
- experience of the Living Christ Retreat, Cursillo, RCIA retreat day etc

She is gradually discovering what we have learnt so far in HeartStone about our advertising, the Sharing the Good News sessions, the Come and See process for accompanying new Catholics, and the ways of the annual cycle starting with Home Mission Sunday, this year on September 15th

On Thursday 18th July at 7pm in St John Stone, Veronica Murphy is coming to help us in our COME AND SEE CONFERENCE: this is an invitation, wider than HeartStone, to share with us in trying to learn fresh ways of inviting and attracting new people.

Archbishop Malcolm will come and talk at a retreat day at St Joseph's Freshfield on Saturday 9th November, 10am-3pm

We have a fine, welcoming community to include new people in when they come. We have marvellous members of the Come and See group to accompany, teach and support new people on the journey to Easter reception.

But how can we improve the contact, the invitation, the advertising, the attracting...?

What must we do to be doing the work of God in reaching out to welcome new people?

Thank you to our team for perseverance and faithful service so far: Debbie Gerrard, Gina Steed, Anne Pickup and Pat Eastaway and others who have helped.

3. YOUNG PEOPLE

The dream to have young and young families coming again to our churches has long been a deep wish and declared desire at the Listening in 2015. Several events have come together to steer me in the providence of developing this aspect of our mission in HeartStone:

- the new chaplain at Christ the King High School
- Eleanor's experience with youngsters
- my growing involvement as governor in the School
- the appointment of the new head for September: Mrs Erin Wheeler
- John Sullivan's experience in many levels of Education
- Our social centre being used for retreats and socials with the young
- the new confirmation procedures starting in September for year 8
- Faith in Action as active service supported by Animate ministries

So ministry to help the faith of young people in Southport has gone up in our efforts, use of resources and prayerful dreams! How much this must be a collaborative effort in the Pastoral Area is an urgent question. Past experience from Southport's Catholic Youth (SCY) may help new ideas. We need to recruit a Pastoral Area co-ordinator for the new Confirmation process; training for this role starts in September.

A few of us, with John Sullivan's expertise, have begun to discern how can we in HeartStone serve the faith of the young people of Southport through our links with Christ the King?

Who would like to help? e.g. adults support in school in some ways; ongoing youth meetings after confirmation; links with Impact Extra on Wednesdays in Ainsdale. Plans for ecumenical music ministry in school and Southport in July are promising.

4. FAITH DOING JUSTICE: PLANET

It is clear one of the meanings of "missionary" is that we Catholics must be visible in action for the good of others, and good causes, as citizens in shared society. Climate change is high on this list of necessary involvements, and it is clear this is precious to young people.

As well as our personal actions in re-using and recycling we are developing support and inspiration for prayer, liturgy and action together for Care of Our Common Home as Pope Francis calls it.

- ❖ Laudato Si is the Pope's encyclical which is the best inspiration around
- ❖ The United Nations are actively at work to reduce emissions and the Parish Agreement must remain a benchmark
- ❖ Government and Politics are part of our vocation as modern Christians, so CAFOD is a great help in organizing the Petition for a law in Britain to reduce emissions to zero by 2045, and the Mass Lobby at Westminster on June 26th

- ❖ Christian Aid are active in this area also, and we plan to link up with them ecumenically, e.g. the annual Walk as part of Christian Aid Week
- ❖ September 1st is Creation Day for Catholics, and the month following, up to the feast of St Francis of Assisi, is a serious focus of prayer, liturgy, action

On Saturday 2nd June from 10.30 to 12.00 at Sacred Heart we host our HEARTSTONE'S CARE OF THE PLANET session to draw up our calendar of actions and encouragements for the future. Everybody can spread the word and invite anyone.

5. FAITH DOING JUSTICE: REFUGEES

Our SVP is marvellous! Supported wonderfully with inspired energy and leadership by Kay Slater, our sturdy volunteers do great things. This includes the link with the SVP group in Liverpool that serves women and babies refugees, now gathered in the name of **REFUGEE WOMEN CONNECT (RWC)**. Kay visits them, making friends, weekly and takes the clothes and other gifts from her extensive network of generous helpers. We have hosted trips out for them at St John Stone and hope to do so again.

Social Integration: being welcomed and able to join in normally is a big challenge and for some involves a lot of healing from the traumas they have fled! The Archdiocese hosted a great day of helping this need, and the **Irenaeus Project** are among others who are now providing help with learning English, a huge help to social integration.

Asylum Link Merseyside (ALM) continues in St Anne's in Liverpool as experts now in welcoming and supporting Asylum Seekers, refugees, and destitute immigrants. They have a great campaign to raise money now to improve the building and facilities in the house, leased from the Archdiocese. Can we help them somehow? My efforts to hold a social night and information evening in June had to be postponed because of too many other priorities of ministry.

Sponsoring Syrian Families: I decided I cannot take on this one, as worthy as it is, but new information means I am willing to have another go at inviting others. NUGENT are doing the organization and backup in our Archdiocese for groups of people who band together to sponsor a family coming to Britain from the refugee camps. Five such groups are already active around the Archdiocese. Is there anybody out there who would like to look into it a bit more? We can invite Nugent to give more information if we want to, no commitment necessary at this stage.

6. SOCIAL LIFE

The past life of Catholic parishes was much helped by the Social Centres and many different times of socialising. Competition on options for entertainment has stripped a lot of this away, and most of the parish clubs also, but such social life is still a part of Heart Stone. This is due to the generosity, and skill of our Church Teams, Social Committee and hospitality volunteers. Bingo is also a big gift to the local people as well as parishioners. Socialising helps spirituality and community: the Joint Masses must include the social connections as well as the liturgical to make the most of them: the next one, 30th June at Sacred Heart is a great chance.

Among the great blessings of social life is **ST JOHN STONE'S PARISH CENTRE.**

We are blessed in Donna with a committed, creative manager who really gets our vision of the Centre being part of the mission to the community, not only for income. Our social team have done great things in fundraising for our charities, and now also must challenge to raise funds for the club itself: this has enabled us to buy new chairs and the new decoration, and keep updating for our customers. Costs and Archdiocesan policies mean that it is no surprise to anybody that some evening openings of the club are under threat if too much money is lost. The use of the club, and getting others to use it for functions is the only way to keep the opening times as wide as they are now.

7. ADMIN AND BACKUP TO THE MINISTRY AND MISSION

Succession Planning is not a big strength of the Catholic Church, but we must make a stab at it now in Sacred Heart and St John Stone.

Longevity: many of our volunteer leaders and staff are of an age when we must think ahead in case we can find some ideas for smooth and healthy transition when people leave, stop serving, retire, or die!

Our key leaders have been doing their vital work for a long time now: SVP. Music, Church Team, Church Cleaning, Bingo, Guild etc etc

I must try to anticipate future demands for taking care of :

- Premises – maintenance, gardening, security, cleaning
- Safeguarding – children and vulnerable adults
- Ministries – rotas and leaders and ongoing formation
- Charity and Justice – SVP and the causes we support

I am beginning now with the office staffing: succession planning for Administration.

Monica and I are working on a plan to begin in September for:

- a full hours contract for the parish administrator from LACE
- the job spec will cover the needs of current demands – finance, ordering, sacramental admin, record etc. but also make increased space for
- communicating the invitations from HeartStone's mission: within the parish, the church and the wider world
- this planning does not assume Monica will continue in this altered role but include her personal life planning

End of Life and Bereavement

Dr Karen Groves, Queens Court Hospice's Medical Director, will speak at Sacred Heart hall, 2-4pm Saturday 14th September. Karen's sensitive and faith-filled presentation will be of interest to Bereavement Team Members, Hospital Visitors, Eucharistic Ministers and anyone who is caring for those nearing the end of life.

Priestly Ministry: there will always be an ordained priest as part of Catholic ministry, but who knows what will happen with the Synod? How will HeartStone prepare for another priest at some time, to include and enable the next priest to serve the Parish

Vision and parish culture and ways that emerge now from Synod 2020 and the Review of our Vision Statement?

SO, LOOKING AHEAD:

- September 2019 - Parish Administrator succession planning
- October plus - Southport Pre-Synod on Themes
- Pentecost 2020 plus - Southport Pre-Synod with Proposals
- October 17th 2020 - Decisions for Archdiocese at Synod Assembly
- Pentecost 2021 - HeartStone's commitment to Renewed Vision, Statement and Missionary Priorities

Please be assured all this is merely trying to be prudent, thinking ahead. I personally have no plans or desire for changing ministry or assignment, and Southport's priest level has constantly declined anyway. We are blessed with enormous talent and commitment in our leaders....

BUT...

yes it is the BUT...

I think it is just as well we put on the agenda as we continue our Synoding, and reviewing in HeartStone alongside that, for imagining and dreaming

WHAT WILL THE CHURCH GOD IS CALLING US TO BE LOOK LIKE IN SACRED HEART and ST JOHN STONE FROM PENTECOST 2021?

Mission in our Time and Place

God of the Universe, we give you thanks for all that we share,
for the faith and the community that sustains us.
God of our lives, you are challenging us to follow you into the future,
inviting us to new ventures, new challenges,
new ways to care, new ways to touch the hearts of all.
When we are fearful of the unknown, give us courage.
when we worry that we are not up to the task,
remind us that you would not call us if you did not believe in us.
When we get tired or disappointed with the way things are going,
remind us that you can bring change and hope
out of the most difficult situation.

Bless to us, O Lord
the doors we open,
the thresholds we cross,
the roads that lie before us.

**Go with us as we go
sharing the journey!**