

St Swithun Wells Parish

VISION OF THE PARISH (April 2024)

1.1 The vision of our Parish is summed up in one sentence:

Our vision is the awe in front of a Person, Jesus Christ, the fount of true happiness, who is present in the sign of our Christian community.

Our **community** is a place where everyone is encouraged to establish a personal relationship with Jesus Christ and to become one with Him, especially in learning how to love each other and take care of those in need. We believe that a community which fosters a personal relationship with Christ will be able to **reach out and become truly missionary**.

1.2 To be truly life-changing, **this vision needs to be embodied through activities, actions and proposals**, according to the circumstances of our local environment.

We need groups for young people, to communicate to them the joy of belonging to a Christian community, groups where they can feel supported and protagonists. We need to give special attention to all adults, both as individuals and families. We need to support and encourage those who are elderly, vulnerable, in need and alone. Finally, we want to create opportunities for everyone to see the beauty that Christianity brings to all aspects of life, whilst finding ways to deepen the knowledge of our historic Christian culture.

1.3 Our vision also wants to address **loneliness**, one of the most pressing issues of modern times. A loneliness that has been highlighted through the lockdown due to the pandemic. Loneliness is an increasingly crippling experience throughout our society. Due to rising individualism and social isolation, increasing numbers of people of all ages find it challenging to find true friends, people that want to share life together, within a community where they can feel at home. But even people with many friends may feel a gnawing inner loneliness. We propose that at the root of today's loneliness lays the inability to find a fulfilling meaning for life.

A Christian community is precisely the place where people are called together to rediscover again and again that God is the one who gives me a real purpose for life. That God alone is able to defeat loneliness.

1.4 Finally, our vision can help people to **live a holistic life, offering mental, physical and spiritual wellbeing**. Our contemporary society is fragmented. Individuals struggle to find the connection points for the various segments of their lives. It is difficult to find a core hub around which our life might revolve and discover a clear direction. We might have a deep interest in particular issues or activities, but we lack a vision for all of reality. It is our personal experience that when Jesus Christ is put at the centre of our lives, He unifies our experiences, He becomes the bridge who connects the different parts of our lives and shows us clearly the direction to take. Not only does Jesus Christ unify each person's life, but He also brings a fresh enthusiasm to all aspects of our human existence: working, studying, eating, culture, charity, holidays, free time and the like.

1.5 We are sure that a Christian community like this can make a **life enhancing difference**, not only for our parishioners, but also for everyone who lives in our area, whether children, young people, adults or the elderly.

1.6 Liturgy is an essential dimension of our relationship with Jesus Christ, our spiritual growth and our outreach to others. Special attention should be given to the importance of **Sunday Mass** and the Eucharist in our lives. Attention should also be given to our **sacraments** and other expressions of worship. These include Eucharistic Adoration and the many forms of personal or communal prayer at the heart of our Catholic tradition.

1.7 Looking at the situation of the Church and our community it seems to us that there are four priorities we should focus on: 1) Youth Groups, 2) Groups/Formation for adults and families, 3) Culture and 4) Charity. We believe that the New Parish Centre will be an important tool to develop these four areas.

YOUTH GROUPS

2.1 In the Parish we run three age-based youth groups: for primary school children we have **Stars of Abraham** (from school year 3 to 6), for young people in secondary school we have **Grail Seekers** (from school year 7 to 9) and for teenagers from school year 10 till sixth form we have **Student Youth**. The aim of these groups is to encounter Christ in a Christian community.

2.2 All children and teenagers are also invited to be part of our **Come and See Holiday Club** and **Easter/Summer Camps**. Through activities, walks, games and discussion, children and teenagers can spend time with each other and with adults, experiencing the beauty of Christian friendship and growing as human beings.

2.3 We believe that the relationship with local **Catholic schools** is extremely important. The Catholic school opens up opportunities for evangelisation. Furthermore, the fact that the children see the same adults at school and in the Parish is very effective. Children hear the same things at school and in the Parish, and this is a great help in our fragmented society.

Sacramental Preparation

2.4 Regarding the preparation to receive First Holy Communion and Confirmation, we believe that rather than proposing programs or a course with a beginning and an end, it is important to give children and teenagers the opportunity to be involved in something wider: an everlasting friendship with Jesus within his Body, the Church.

That is why if a child or a teenager wants to be prepared to receive First Holy Communion (and is at least in school year 3) or Confirmation (and is at least in school year 9) we will ask them to come regularly to one of the three groups according to their age. They will receive the First Holy Communion or Confirmation when they are ready (usually after one year).

The emphasis is not on the sacrament but on Christian life, of which sacraments are an essential part.

GROUPS/FORMATION FOR ADULTS AND FAMILIES

3.1 In our Parish we have children, teenagers, parents, elderly and sick. It is nice to see all of them together at Mass on Sunday. Everyone is in a particular and unique stage of their human journey, and we have to address everyone in a way specific to them. That is why the proposal for a child has to be different from the one for a teenager or an adult.

3.2 In our community we are blessed with many adults, most of them with family life, hard jobs, a lot of responsibilities and joys. As a Parish we want to give special attention to all the adults, we want to nourish their Christian life, both as individuals and as families.

There are many groups to help adults to encounter the Lord and to have a community life: **Gift, Fellowship Group, Prayer Groups, Afternoon Club** and others.

We also have a Catholic Movement in our Parish, **Communion and Liberation**, which organises weekly meetings called **School of Community**.

Two baby and toddler groups, called **Little Flowers** (one in Eastleigh, one in Romsey), help parents and children to meet other families and form new bonds.

All groups are open to newcomers.

3.3 In our society families face many challenges: it is difficult to find places where they can meet each other and be helped, the values that we receive from our society are often superficial or negative, the world changes so quickly that it is difficult to make decisions especially about children. To help our families we would like to offer first of all a Christian friendship. That is why one Sunday a month we have the **Parish Get2Gether Afternoon** in the Pavilion on the Park (Eastleigh). It is an event for all the parents, children, grandparents... During that afternoon we have some music and games for all of the families, and also a little discussion with the parents about some topics of family life like education of the children, prayer in the family and so on.

3.4 Our community is very rich in volunteers. They have a special place. Without them our Parish wouldn't be as alive and vibrant as it is. By cleaning the churches, arranging the flowers, helping the youth groups, visiting the sick, singing in our choirs and doing many other activities, they offer their service for the glory of God and His kingdom. All of them help the mission of the Parish and of the Church. We want to help them in their ministry and strengthen the relationship between clergy and laity. That is why we have a **Formation for all the Volunteers** of the Parish.

3.5 During the year we propose also **Parish Retreats** in Advent and Lent, open to everybody that will help all of us to prepare for Christmas and Easter.

Sacramental preparation

3.6 The couples who ask for **Marriage Preparation** are all different from each other, but they arrive with a very open heart. It is the opportunity that God gives us to help them to become familiar with Him. That is why we want to speak to them about Jesus, the Church and the Sacraments (in some meetings throughout the year) and help them to know our community better (we will invite them to the groups that we have for adults).

3.7 For **Baptism Preparation**, alongside the Baptism Preparation Session, there is the opportunity for the families to meet personally the priests and some adults of the Parish. They are also invited to share the life of the community.

3.8 The Sacramental Preparation for Adults (**RCIA**) follows the same logic.

CULTURE

4.1 In our society culture usually means what is specific to a country in terms of food, traditions, language, outlook, behaviour... But actually culture is something wider.

4.2 If we are in the Church it is because we have encountered Christ. At some point in our lives we recognised that Jesus is with us, that He is the Lord. We started seeing things in a different way, belonging to a community with the constant view of the living God.

This happened to us and happened to millions of people before us. From the resurrection of Christ many people, because of their faith, have started having a deeper vision of life, understanding better the link between everything and finding with the help of the Lord answers to their questions. Faith really has something to say about all aspects of human life: science, politics, education, finance...

Some people touched by the living God have produced beautiful expressions in music, art, literature. Others have lived their lives totally fascinated by the beauty of God, we call them saints. Other people even if not religious have grasped some truth that is valid for everyone.

All of this forms our Christian culture.

4.3 Throughout the year we invite many guests to speak on many topics such as faith and science, faith and the environment... or we watch a film with our parishioners and discuss the meaning of the film, other times we invite an artist to play a piece of music or we suggest a book. We call these events **Cultural Fridays** and they help us to realise that our faith can help us to have a deeper vision of life, that our faith can challenge secular culture.

CHARITY

5.1 It is difficult to give a definition of charity. The best way to understand it is to think about God. The life of God is charity, it is unconditional love. The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are a perfect communion of love. And this communion of love is not closed in itself. God created the angels, the world and us to be part of this unity and when we abandoned him, he sent his Son to rescue us.

Therefore God (Father, Son and Holy Spirit) and his relationship with us both manifest the profound meaning of love and charity.

5.2 We are created in the image of God, so if we want to enrich ourselves we have to love, we have to imitate the love of God, the feelings of Jesus.

But how can we imitate this love? What do we have to do in practice? Love is nothing other than being always open to others, caring for them, trying to respond their needs and keeping company to them.

If I behave like this, slowly the love of Jesus becomes mine and the true charity is in me.

This way of being is natural in God. But this charity is not automatic in us because of the original sin. We have to work on ourselves, to convert our heart and mind.

5.3 In our Parish there are many activities in which we care for the poor and needy. We support Charities with our money and resources. It is difficult to mention all the ones we help: **Cafod, Missio, Food Bank, Two Saints, Poitier...** and many, many others. Some of them are supported by our entire Parish, or by one church, or by some parishioners. We also help others with activities that lead us to be in more direct contact with our neighbours in need. We have in our Parish many volunteers who take communion to the housebound. The Street Pastors help the poor in the street during the weekend. Other volunteers visit the care homes around the Parish.

5.4 As we have said **true love is not automatic, we have to work at it. Visiting the sick and needy, sharing a little of their life and putting in common a little of ours is the best way to learn how to love.**

5.5 Our Youth Groups regularly do some **Charitable Work**, which helps them to learn how to love. The children of the Stars of Abraham visit some housebound to share their lives in a simple way. The same happens with the Grail Seekers and Student Youth.

5.6 In the group **Ark of Fellowship** young adults with learning disabilities or learning difficulties, their families and friends learn weekly how to love each other. The group recognises that there is value in every individual, no matter their strengths or perceived weaknesses and certainly that there is value to be found in the bonds created within such a group.

NEW PARISH CENTRE

6.1 For a vision to become real, it requires a building. **The New Parish Centre wants to be that place within which the vision of the Parish is embodied:** the big house that enables our Christian community to grow and offering us more space to run and expand our parish activities.

6.2 As stated previously, our faith in Jesus Christ has the power to give unity to all of life, providing us a core purpose and a clear direction. **The configuration of the New Parish Centre should reflect this unity and help us to live it.** We need a building with a strong heart. We want spaces that are connected and that communicate with each other. We want a structure that is a proper home for the Parish, welcoming and luminous. All those who come should feel they are entering a family environment, a place with a clear identity and a unified life, a house where clergy and lay people can share their time.

6.3 The New Parish Centre does not want to replace our local halls but to foster a sense of unity within the Parish. The **existing community facilities** at our churches will continue to be supported.

VISION AND GRACE

7.1 The Vision of the Parish is not like a plan that we want to implement. It is more like an image and an ideal to strive for. It is difficult to say exactly where it will lead. The grace of God is always present and will suggest ideas and directions that we will follow. We want to be open to God's grace in particularly listening to each other in a spirit of synodality.