

What is my dream for the Church, for my parish/chaplaincy so that it can become more outward-looking, more missionary?

The Church in the U.K. cannot become more missionary unless it has more priests. Congregations are ageing, or are already engaged in helping over-worked priests, and have their own work and family contribution to make to society, so have little capacity for more outward-looking.

It is good, and sometimes of mutual benefit, that we have had the help of clergy from overseas, but we need priests from our own country. The Church ought seriously to consider allowing priests to marry, a move which would also make the religious life more attractive to young people.

The Church also needs to seriously consider the ordination of women. Observably they have always been the Church's most loyal supporters.

Young adults must be retained, the above changes would make the Church more attractive to them, either as religious or laity.

I believe that before we can be a truly missionary church, we need to understand and live the message we are delivering. We also need to be able to communicate that message effectively against the headwind of atheism, secular indifference and Church scandals. Very few Catholics are armed with the knowledge and skills to have confidence in discussing their faith against this backdrop. A woeful lack of knowledge of apologetics and the wealth of teaching in the Magisterium is at the heart of this. My dream for the Church would be that every confirmed Catholic is, at least to some degree, able to articulate a doctrinally-correct and consistent form of what they believe, why they believe it and why they are not stupid or crazy for doing so.

A revised view of the place of women in the ministry. It is time for women to be afforded equality with men in every sphere, including the priesthood. Anything less is reactionary and paternalistic.

I dream of a Church where...

- The parish is the genuine hub for the local Church and the community is vibrant, nurturing and caring; alive with faith and a desire to share the joy of that faith with all, so that the people of Glossop say, "See how these Christians love one another, and how they are ready even to die for one another."
- The community is somewhere that all feel warmly welcomed and valued, especially those who, in the past, have been made to feel marginalised, unwelcome and unworthy; for example, those with small children, single parents, the separated and divorced, those who have had pregnancies terminated and those in same-sex relationships. The love, mercy and healing of God flows through the community.
- The parish puts mission ahead of maintenance (or, as in the present reality, managed decline). This mission to include service to the local community, promotion of social justice and care for our common home – the environment.
- The members are conscious, active, intentional disciples of Christ; and each member has an awareness of being a stakeholder in the life of the local Church.
- Attending Holy Mass is not merely a habit nor done out of a sense of obligation but flows naturally from their personal relationship with God. This is revealed in the fully active participation of all through the responses, the singing, reverent silence where appropriate, etc.
- Members' lives are guided, animated and energised by their living faith – a conscious relationship with the living God, nourished by personal prayer, reading of the Scriptures, works of spirituality and theology, retreats, etc, eager to deepen and develop their faith; to better know and understand what the Church teaches so that they can better share that faith with those they meet in the world.
- There is a shared awareness that all the baptised share in Christ's mission as Prophet, Priest and King.
- There is a strong sense of communion between the local Church and the deanery, diocese, province, the Universal Church and the Communion of Saints.
- Acts of charity are not simply franchised out; where the understanding of charity can be reduced to raising money for others to do the work. Rather, there are organised opportunities for all to be hands-on involved in works of charity, moments of encounter.

- A reduction of clericalism so that the laity may fulfil their proper role in the life of the parish and not merely passively do “what Father wants us to do”; and priests and pastors lead by encouraging their flock to be fully active and to take ownership and responsibility rather than trying to maintain personal control.
- There is an effective process of discernment of charisms of individual members that the life of the Church may be enriched by the active contribution of all.
- Members answer the call from God to generously offer their charisms in service of the Church – not merely organising secular activities but spiritual and religious – enriched by quality, ongoing training and formation. Ministries are understood as acts of service to the community and to God, not as jobs to be completed.
- The Priest celebrates Mass prayerfully and with reverence, giving room for prayer, contemplation and reflection; and is grounded in his knowledge and understanding of Sacred Scripture so that in his homily he is able to break open the Scriptures, revealing the beauty and truths that might otherwise be obscure and encourage the Assembly to reflect prayerfully on the Word of God and to enact it in their lives.
- There are opportunities for prayer and worship other than Holy Mass. The Church has a rich treasury of prayer and worship but, to a large degree, Holy Mass has become not so much the “source and summit” but the be-all and end-all”, the “one and only”.
- There is a recognition that there is a range of authentic Catholic spiritualities, and not simply a one-size-fits-all.

To preface my dream, I hope that all the dreams will be seen and heard not only by the parish and the diocese but by the Vatican. My own first dream is that women can assume their rightful role in the priesthood. Every parish I know of is sustained by women with many of them inspiring in their spirituality and service. The church should no longer cling to the idea that women are lesser beings to be confined to minor roles as is the case in too many fundamentalist regimes.

To achieve this dream, what do we need to stop doing? What are we doing that needs to be developed or done differently?

I can only suggest things that need to be re-started, but are difficult or impossible because of the lack of clergy, e.g. visiting, or at least knowing the names of parishioners.

To be missionary in spreading the Word in the modern world, we need to be authentic, by which I mean that we genuinely need to show people "what hope His call holds for us" and why our faith is rational rather than just 'wishful thinking'. Mission has to start WITHIN the Church, as how can we convert others if we are not yet converted ourselves? Education is the only means of doing this and it needs to start with adults in parishes and be focused on much more than scripture. Start with churchgoing parishioners and then widen this out to lapsed Catholics in the area. Another important group is parents presenting children for First Holy Communion, many of whom are not practising Catholics. A good grounding in philosophy, theology and apologetics would help the average Catholic enormously, even if provided at a very basic level in an informal Q&A setting. Certain parishioners could be developed as lay trainers to assist the parish priest, and enthusiasts could be shown how to take their studies further and deeper. As each group grows and word spreads, it can become a mission 'powerhouse' that works with local schools, holds public Q&A sessions and debates, and becomes a genuinely Catholic voice in the community. Essentially, this is a case of going back to our roots.

Priests were married until 1123. The last 900 years have demonstrated that the enforcement of celibacy is a human error with clear behavioural consequences. Anglican priests can convert to Catholicism without losing their marriage. It is time to make celibacy a choice, not a requirement.

To achieve this dream of Church, we need to...

- Teach people how to pray, rather than to “say prayers”; for example, Lectio Divina and Ignatian, imaginative and contemplative prayer.

- Greater provision for opportunities such as retreats, courses, Bible study, etc., and growing a culture, a mindset where such activities are seen as an integral part of our Christian lives.
- Quality catechesis, especially for Sacraments of Initiation recipients and their parents, but also ongoing catechesis for all, whether provided inhouse or via organisations such as Word on Fire.
- Create stronger ties and greater alignment between parishes and schools. On a diocesan and national level, a re-examination of the role and purpose of Catholic schools and whether we should have so many.
- Provide opportunities for prayer and worship other than Holy Mass.
- At All Saints, refreshments need to be served after Mass and people encouraged to stay behind to get to know fellow members of the community.
- More effectively identify Charisms within the parish, for example by making use of the “Called and Gifted” process.
- Provide high-quality training and formation for all lay ministries with ongoing appraisal and formation.
- Regular nurturing appraisal, feedback and help for priests – if it’s good enough for the teachers in our Catholic schools then it’s good enough for our priests.
- Far better and more effective communication from the diocese, province and the national Church – too much presently doesn’t filter through to parishioners.
- Assessment of how the parish can be actively involved in works of charity within the local community.
- Seek to develop close ties to specific charitable projects overseas, with identified targets for initiatives and regular two-way communication, thus engendering a sense of ownership.
- Amalgamate the four present parishes (AS, SM, SC, IC) into one, with one “Mass centre” – numbers are presently so small (and have been for a long time) that communities are no longer viable; charisms are spread FAR too thinly.

To further change the nature of priesthood, the rule about celibacy is relatively modern in historical terms. There is deep irony in the way the church has welcomed married, non-celibate Anglican priests into the ministry but will not allow our priests to marry when so many of them have a lonely existence without loving support. It is time for change. Despite the many denials by the Vatican, I do believe that the horrific numbers of child abuse cases that have plagued the church, would not have escalated in this way if priests had not had to remain celibate.