

**Part H – Step A – The Parish Return Form**  
**Sections 1-5 to be completed and returned**  
**by 23<sup>rd</sup> April 2026**

**Section 1: Introduction**

In dialogue with your community, especially young people (in line with synod guidance) reflect on your local data sheets alongside the diocesan context. Please summarise your reflections from Part E, F and G by completing this template and returning it by 23 April 2026 to [discernment.returns@diocesehn.org.uk](mailto:discernment.returns@diocesehn.org.uk)

<b>PARISH NAME:</b>	<b>Saint Mary</b>
<b>PARISH TOWN:</b>	<b>Barnard Castle</b>
<b>DEANERY:</b>	<b>Cleveland &amp; South Durham</b>
<p><b>What was the process followed to reach these conclusions? <i>E.g. clergy &amp; laity involved, young people’s voices considered, prayer &amp; listening shaped decisions:</i></b></p> <p>Two open meetings – one at church one at school, both advertised to the parish and the latter also to parents at the school.</p> <p>Post-it board at the back of church, comments welcomed including reading and responding to others.</p> <p>Written submissions invited</p> <p>Discussions with the parish school – both leadership and pupils.</p>	
<p><b>Beacons of Mission: <i>Practices that either show signs of hope others could learn from, or faithful responses uniquely shaped by your local context:</i></b></p> <p>Attendance at Mass has been rising, especially with the return of Sunday morning Masses. Notably including young families with children, this has included the top class in the school joining the rota to compose bidding prayers.</p>	

Parish has recently produced a social/meeting room, which has allowed for fellowship after Mass, and will be used for other events over time.

The relationship with the school has grown closer in recent years.

## Section 2: Mission Discernment

Please use the suggested prompts at **Part E of The Mission Discernment Toolkit** to guide your conversations and complete the following section.

### **Mission: WORSHIP - Celebrating the Sacraments as Places of Encounter**

#### **Reflection and conclusions:**

Mass is the centre of parish life. Currently celebrated once at the weekend (alternating between Saturday vigil and Sunday morning); until recently sharing a priest with the neighbouring parish meant Saturday evening only, this caused a sharp fall in attendance, the reintroduction of Sunday morning (albeit only every other week) has helped with congregation growth. Twice during the week, once being the Ordinary Form in Latin.

Additional Mass held at St Aidan's, Middleton-in-Teesdale, 4pm 1<sup>st</sup> Saturday of the month. Well attended with very warm welcome to visitors by local parishioners.

Weekly holy hour; confessions widely available; seasonal devotions (e.g., Stations of the Cross, Rosary). This has included the Stations involving and being led by pupils from the school.

#### **1. What are we proposing to do? Concrete actions: (*Distinguish what you will do now, next, over a longer journey and who is responsible for leading it.*)**

Processions – e.g., Corpus Christi, May Devotions

Benediction/Adoration – potentially on Saturday mornings

Introduce children's liturgy (currently processing volunteer D.B.S. checks)

Parish choir to encourage better singing.

#### **2. Why are we proposing this? (*Link to Mission.*)**

To expand parish attendance, and deepen participation in worship.

To build on and consolidate recent growth among children and young families.

**3. Dependencies:** *(What will be needed to make this happen? (E.g. people, formation, finances, property decisions, Bishop approval, other parishes co-operating.)*

Sufficient volunteers, particularly with appropriate skills (especially musicians).

**4. What will be the outcome if this action cannot happen?**

Attendance will not grow to its full potential.

Worship is the source of strength to live the Christian life, the better it can be the better the lived missionary lives of the people.

**5. How will worship be organised in the area if there are fewer priests and fewer worshippers?**

Saturday evening Mass caused a dramatic fall-off in attendance, particularly in the winter months. This should be avoided if possible in future.

A willingness to have lay-led services of word & Communion if no priest is available; though this would be a large step away from the Mass. This would also need lay leaders to be given appropriate and thorough training.

Focus on a weekday Mass as a point of fellowship; though this would exclude those working.

The location of the parish means that alternative parishes are not easily accessible, with Darlington being at least 30 minutes journey by car; public transport for this journey is unavailable for much of the parish.

### **Mission: TEACH - Handing on the Faith**

#### **Reflection and conclusions:**

Weekly newsletter column (c.600) on varied subjects giving a chance to read at greater depth.

Much involvement with the parish school – both formal and informal. The parish priest welcomes classes to church to learn (e.g., about Baptism) or meets with classes in school. There are fortnightly prayer groups during morning break. The Head noted that much of this interaction is dependent on having a priest resident in Barnard Castle.

Catechesis for first Reconciliation & Communion run in conjunction with the neighbouring parish. This now involves enrolment &c. during Sunday Mass so that the parish is more involved (and praying for the candidates).

Individuals for Reception into the Church have been prepared individually by the Priest, while being supported by members of the parish who welcomed them rapidly into the community

**1. What are we proposing to do? Concrete actions: (*Distinguish what you will do now, next, over a longer journey and who is responsible for leading it.*)**

Further teaching (outside of Mass) for all ages. It was noted by some that the Ordinariate community currently does so during Advent & Lent, should they move to Barnard Castle, this would be open to parishioners.

Children's liturgy to be offered during Sunday morning Mass

Contact with secondary schools if possible – N.B., the only school in the town is saecular, few parishioners attend the Catholic secondary (due to distance, 40 minutes)

Study courses provided by the Diocese across all areas of the faith would be useful – especially if provided more locally. On-line provision is useful, but human interaction can add a personal dimension.

Meetings and discussion based around elements of the Catechism of the Catholic Church, and other sources of discussions

**2. Why are we proposing this? (*Link to Mission.*)**

To expand and deepen knowledge and understand by all ages and through different learning methods.

Especially to encourage younger parishioners to remain engaged, particularly as they journey towards confirmation.

**3. Dependencies: (*What will be needed to make this happen? (E.g. people, formation, finances, property decisions, Bishop approval, other parishes co-operating.)*)**

Volunteers to lead. In some cases, joint participation with other parishes, if applicable. Time to establish and fully develop new skills.

Support from the Diocese for developing appropriate study courses.

**4. What will be the outcome if this action cannot happen?**

Failure to engage younger people will lead to their disengagement from the Faith.

Older generations will lack the chance to continue to grow and deepen their engagement.

## Mission: SERVE – Sharing Christ’s Love in Action

### Reflection and conclusions:

Involved in Lent & Advent lunches organised on an ecumenical basis in the town. In recent years this has begun to involve pupils from the school’s ‘faith in action’ group.

Rolling collection for a local food bank.

#### **1. What are we proposing to do? Concrete actions: (*Distinguish what you will do now, next, over a longer journey and who is responsible for leading it.*)**

Central to the development of the lay apostolate. Explore creating a local S.V.P., Legion of Mary, Christians Against Poverty &c. group.

Develop links with the prison (close to, but outside of the parish boundaries)

Direct links with the developing world and/or Christians facing persecution.

Reaching out to care homes (N.B., each has a monthly service organised by the Christian clergy on a rota basis – the school makes visits to the Manor House)

Canvass parishioners on their skills and talents, seeking to involve in the life and work of the parish.

#### **2. Why are we proposing this? (*Link to Mission.*)**

This is the heart of the apostolate of the laity in the Church.

We have had minimal opportunities to serve except by individual conscience taking on various roles. We are not wholly co-ordinated as a parish body. Exploring ways to serve by engaging parishioners would lead to inviting those with particular skills and talents to volunteer and create lasting outcomes.

#### **3. Dependencies: (*What will be needed to make this happen? (E.g. people, formation, finances, property decisions, Bishop approval, other parishes co-operating.)*)**

Volunteers. People to engage.

Potential to co-operate with other parishes.

Time to develop and grow fully.

#### **4. What will be the outcome if this action cannot happen?**

Our parish will become inward looking and detached from the wider communities of which we are a part.

## **Mission: COMMUNITY – Building a Family of Faith**

### **Reflection and conclusions:**

Parish social events have been developed which drawn the community together. A now annual ceilidh has been popular with all ages.

An open day, with neighbours invited, was successful

Parishioners unable to attend have often been visited on an informal basis, greatly appreciated

Website now being updated weekly with newsletter giving details of events.

Welcomer greets individuals (especially new-comers/visitors), encourages them to join tea and coffee after Mass (will be able to direct to children's liturgy when provided).

### **1. What are we proposing to do? Concrete actions: (*Distinguish what you will do now, next, over a longer journey and who is responsible for leading it.*)**

Summer social event – e.g., garden party, barbeque. If/when the Ordinariate Group moves to Barnard Castle, organising joint social events (e.g., quiz nights, suppers). Social events connected to the school would be open to those currently not Catholic, which could help to draw them closer to the Church.

Develop informal groups to meet in the new social space (e.g., coffee mornings, men's group, bereavement group, mother & toddler).

More regularised offering of lifts to those unable to get themselves to Mass (N.B., this would have safeguarding and insurance implications)

Parish group to assist with group travel to diocesan events and other Catholic gatherings.

Catholic lending library in church

Gardening group to care for grounds and gather people

Develop children's space at the rear of church – helps to encourage young families present at Mass.

New housing is being built in Barnard Castle, produce a 'Welcome to the Town' postcard giving details of the church (possibly undertaken with the other Christian communities in the town).

### **2. Why are we proposing this? (*Link to Mission.*)**

So that we develop a strong sense of community, becoming a whole parish family that can support and offer assistance to each other. Gather new comers to join our family.

**3. Dependencies: *What will be needed to make this happen? (E.g. people, formation, finances, property decisions, Bishop approval, other parishes co-operating.)***

Volunteers to lead and proteges willing to take up roles.

Willingness to listen to each generation and its particular needs.

In certain cases, appropriate volunteer recruitment including safeguarding checks.

**4. What will be the outcome if this action cannot happen?**

We will become insular and diminish, and fail to hand on the Faith to each new generation.

## Section 3 - Stewardship and Our Common Home (Property)

### Accessibility (to be completed by Parish)

Site Name	Building Name	Estimated Occupancy Capacity	Estimated hours of use per week	Estimated number of car parking spaces	Level access into and within the building (Yes/No)	Accessible WC within the building (Yes/No)	% of people travelling by car	Describe local public transport links
<i>Barnard Castle, Saint Mary</i>	<i>Church</i>	<i>156</i>	<i>6</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>Y</i>	<i>Y</i>	<i>75</i>	<i>Town centre bus stop, 10 minute walk away, with a half-hourly weekday service (to Darlington). Sunday service every two hours, with the first bus too late for current Mass time.</i>
Middleton-in-Teesdale, Saint Aidan	Chapel of ease	60	0.5	1	N	N	70	Bus stop 5 minutes walk away. Six depatures per day during the week, no Sunday service.

Notes: **Estimated occupancy capacity** – This is simply intended to be a reasonable estimate of the capacity of our churches, halls and meeting spaces. In the future it may be necessary to check these capacity figures against the site Fire Risk Assessment the survey programme for which is currently underway across our Diocese.

**Existing and potential future uses (to be completed by Parish)**

<b>Site Name:</b>	<b>Building Name</b>	<b>Existing uses</b>	<b>Potential future uses</b>

## Section 4: Stewardship Review Discernment

Please use the suggested prompts at **Part F of The Mission Discernment Toolkit** to guide your conversations and complete the following section.

### Stewardship: FINANCES

Public knowledge about state of accounts would help with transparency – including the true costs of running a parish. Publishing levels of giving would aid transparency.

Cost sharing with the Ordinariate Group assists with levels of financial support.

Recent appeal brought additional standing orders.

Potential to save money through parishioner volunteers rather than employing contractors.

If we want to do more, we may have to give more

Repairs to the cemetery building are likely to present significant cost.

### Stewardship: BUILDINGS

Church, presbytery, and chapel of ease (Saint Aidan's) are well-maintained on a rolling basis.

Barnard Castle church and presbytery are owned by the Bowes Memorial Trust, and governed by a long-standing agreement between the trust and the Diocese.

Moveable ramp allows wheelchair access to church, a more permanent solution should be implemented.

Social space recently developed (greatly aided by a generous donation), whose contribution to the mission of the parish has already been felt and will continue to be developed. This also includes a new accessible toilet.

Chapel of ease could be made into a sustainable outpost, e.g. with solar panels, double glazing. Presently used for monthly Mass, other groups could be welcomed, especially in summer months when the area receives many visitors.

Cemetery not widely recognised as part of parish, currently run by a volunteer couple. Chapel/sexton's storage, an iconic building framed by the approach to the cemeteries (Catholic and county), is in state of disrepair needing attention.

## **Stewardship: PEOPLE**

*Please summarise your conclusions based on F3. discussions and the following questions:*

### **How does your parish benefit from its Parish Finance Council and Parish Pastoral Council?**

The P.P.C. meets regularly to discuss matters raised by the Priest, and by members of the Council. Membership of the P.P.C. is advertised to all members of the parish to assist with communication.

### **Does your parish have active representation on the Partnership Development Group?**

The Partnership Development Group has not met in recent years.

### **Are there potential lay leaders in the parish and would they be willing to be trained?**

Yes. Currently the same group of volunteers tend to assist with all element of leadership roles.

## **Stewardship: SUSTAINABILITY**

*Please summarise your conclusions based on F4. discussions*

### **What is your assessment on sustaining current mission provision over the next 10 years?**

A few people are shouldering responsibilities, but more are being brought in. Parents of young children are carrying a heavy load, and their willingness is welcome but dependent on time.

Personal invitations are the best way to recruit new volunteers. The close community nature of the parish assists with this.

## **Section 5: Snapshot Summary and Parish Conclusions**

Please refer to **Part G of The Mission Discernment Toolkit** to guide your conversations and complete the following section. Provide clear, honest, and prayerful conclusions.

**What is thriving and must be strengthened?**

1. Worship: Attendance at Mass is rising. One Mass at weekend, twice during the week (one of which being the Ordinary Form in Latin). Monthly Mass at St Aidan's Middleton in Teesdale. Strengthened by:

- Increase parish attendance and deepen participation in worship; build on and consolidate recent growth among children and young families attending.

2. Teach: Weekly newsletter column (c.600) on varied subjects giving greater depth; involvement with the parish school – formal and informal. Catechesis for first Reconciliation & Communion run in conjunction with the neighbouring parish. Strengthened by:

- further teaching (outside of Mass) for all ages; children's liturgy during Sunday morning Mass; contact with secondary schools; study courses provided by the Diocese if delivered more locally.

3. Serve: Involved in Lent & Advent lunches organised on an ecumenical basis in the town; rolling collection for a local food bank. Strengthened by:

- development of the lay apostolate: explore creating a local S.V.P., Legion of Mary, Christians Against Poverty &c. group; develop links with the local prison; links with the developing world and/or Christians facing persecution; reaching out to care homes.
- canvass parishioners on their skills and talents, seeking to involve in the life and work of the parish.

4. Community: Parish social events for all ages drawing the community together; parishioners unable to attend visited on an informal basis; website updated weekly; welcomer greets individuals especially new-comers/visitors. Strengthened by:

- More social events; if/when the Ordinariate Group moves to Barnard Castle, organising joint social events; social events connected to the school would be open to non-Catholic families, which could help to draw them closer to the Church.
- Develop informal groups to meet in the new social space (e.g., coffee mornings, men's group, bereavement group); regular offering of lifts to those unable to get themselves to Mass; parish to assist with group travel to diocesan events and other Catholic gatherings; Catholic lending library in church; gardening group to care for grounds and gather people; develop young families children's space at the rear of church; produce a 'Welcome to the Town' postcard giving details of the church (possibly undertake with the other Christian communities in the town) delivered to the new housing developments in Barnard Castle.

### **What should be adjusted?**

To Serve: Sharing Christ's Love in Action is perhaps our weakness and this will take time to establish.

**What drains Mission, is unsustainable, and needs to be released?**

Not applicable

(Our finances are closely monitored and efficiencies have been made identifies over the passed six years. The Covid pandemic was harsh with Church closure, but our close knit community continued to contribute financially throughout the period.

Barnard Castle church and presbytery are owned by the Bowes Memorial Trust, and governed by a long-standing agreement between the trust and the Diocese. The Parish maintain the day to day costs and contribute 50% towards the Trust's Property Insurance costs.

St Aidan Chapel of Ease has minimal running costs, with occasional maintenance costs. It is regularly visited by parishioners from upper Teesdale who attend to non-specialist repairs and grounds maintenance.

The Chapel/sexton's storage in the Cemetery, is an iconic building framed by the approach to the cemeteries (Catholic and county). It is in a state of disrepair and needing attention. As a significant landmark within the town it may attract local funding to repair and retain which we can explore with the Diocesan Property division and Barnard Castle Town Council.)

**Where is the Holy Spirit prompting bold steps?**

- Hope and determination to achieve our proposals and courage to adapt our plans as necessary.
- Exploring potential of St Aidan's Middleton in Teesdale Chapel of Ease a frontier outpost of the Diocese: a place of peaceful tranquillity and possible retreat. Suited to mission, reflection and worship especially in summer months when the area receives many visitors. The building would require investment to make it environmentally sustainable and financially self-sufficient with potential for use by other local groups to create income.
- Built the apostolate of the laity within the parish, especially in the field of "Sharing Christ's Love in Action"

**What are our next steps as a parish?**

To immediately begin the process of implementing those proposals which are easily achieved.

PPC to meet in the next few weeks to decide on priorities and methods of achieving our aims.

## **A REMINDER OF NEXT STEPS**

Once completed, the parish should **submit this Part H** which is a summary of findings from The Local Mission Discernment (Part E), The Stewardship Review (Part F), and The Parish Snapshot Summary and Conclusions (Part G) to **[discernment.returns@diocesehn.org.uk](mailto:discernment.returns@diocesehn.org.uk)** by **23<sup>rd</sup> April 2026**.