

Part H – Step A – The Parish Return Form
Sections 1-5 to be completed and returned
by 23rd 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

PARISH NAME:	St. John the Baptist Church Annitsford
PARISH TOWN:	Cramlington
DEANERY:	Northumberland
<p>What was the process followed to reach these conclusions? <i>E.g. clergy & laity involved, young people’s voices considered, prayer & listening shaped decisions:</i></p> <p>The Mission discernment meetings were conducted according to a carefully considered and structured plan, ensuring the meaningful involvement of the faithful across all age groups. Despite certain time constraints, every effort was made to ensure that participants were fully informed about the purpose, scope, and process of discernment. The Parish Council, Finance Committee, and wider lay faithful were adequately prepared through timely updates and clear communication in advance of the meetings.</p> <p>The process was guided by the framework and parameters outlined in the provided toolkit, which proved both comprehensive and effective. All meetings and deliberations were carried out in a spirit of prayerful reflection and mutual respect, fostering a deeply conducive and spiritually enriching environment throughout the entire process.</p>	
<p>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></p> <p>Our parish community is distinctive in its capacity to warmly welcome and integrate new members. This spirit of hospitality is widely recognised and appreciated, with many</p>	

expressing a strong sense of belonging and inclusion. The parish actively fosters engagement through a range of initiatives, including ecumenical activities and the opening of church spaces for broader community use, thereby establishing the church as a vital centre for gathering and interaction.

In addition, various charitable initiatives—particularly food collection schemes supporting local food banks as well as those serving migrant communities—are consistently valued and well received. The parish also maintains a strong presence within local schools, with members serving as governors, catechists, and volunteers. These contributions not only strengthen relationships with families but also create meaningful opportunities to support and positively influence the wider community.

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:

The celebration of the sacraments is always understood within its essential communal dimension. It is not merely an individual experience, but a lived reality that must be embodied within the wider life of the community particularly at its peripheries, where this call becomes both most visible and most challenging. An authentic encounter with the Lord in the sacraments must be reflected in the life of the community and made visible to the wider world through the personal witness of the faithful.

Eucharistic Adoration prior to Mass is widely appreciated and valued by many; however, a small number perceive it as a distraction, particularly in relation to opportunities for social interaction. The availability of the Sacrament of Reconciliation is well utilised by those who actively seek it, though participation remains limited.

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.*)

It has become evident that a significant number of the faithful attend church regularly but do not engage more deeply in the sacramental life of the Church. A key pastoral priority, therefore, is to encourage more active and meaningful participation in the celebration of the sacraments. There is a pressing need for renewed catechesis among the lay faithful, particularly regarding the significance of Baptism, Reconciliation, and Marriage.

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

This proposal arises from observable trends: a decline in those presenting themselves for Reconciliation; the perception of Baptism as primarily a procedural requirement for admission into Catholic schools rather than as a foundational sacrament of faith; and a need for greater formation among young people regarding the sanctity of Marriage and the vocation to family life

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

The effective implementation of these initiatives will require committed personnel, structured formation programmes, appropriate ecclesiastical approval, and collaborative support from neighbouring parishes.

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

Even if such initiatives are not implemented at a diocesan level, meaningful change at the parish level would have a significant and positive impact on both the local Church and the wider community.

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

In contexts where there is a shortage of clergy and a limited number of worshippers, consideration may be given to the amalgamation of parishes, with the scheduling of Masses adapted to suit both the availability of priests and the needs of the faithful. In addition, where possible, the ministry of permanent deacons could be further utilised to lead celebrations of the Word and distribute Holy Communion in the absence of a priest. Where deacons are not available, suitably trained catechists may undertake similar roles, in accordance with Church norms. To support this, the diocese may consider investing in the formation and training of committed laypersons who can assist in meeting the spiritual needs of the local Church, always in collaboration with and under the guidance of the parish priest.

Mission: TEACH - Handing on the Faith

Reflection and conclusions:

It was widely acknowledged that several positive and effective practices are already well established within the parishes, and it is essential that these are preserved and strengthened. In particular, the relationship with the local school remains strong; however, it was noted

with some concern that fewer than half of the pupils are Catholic, and not all Catholic children proceed to receive the Sacrament of the Eucharist.

The Children's Liturgy at St John the Baptist Church is both well attended and greatly appreciated. Across both churches, a range of devotional practices are actively promoted, including the communal recitation of the Rosary, the Divine Mercy devotion, and the First Saturday's devotion. More recently, a side chapel at St Paul's has been blessed to foster devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary and to promote a deeper appreciation of the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

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.*)

It is proposed that greater pastoral attention be given to ongoing engagement with families following key sacramental moments such as Baptism, First Holy Communion, and Marriage. Similarly, continued and compassionate support should be offered to families during times of bereavement. Outreach to approximately ten local care homes—an initiative already in place—should be sustained and, where possible, expanded through faith-based support and pastoral presence.

There is also a recognised need to revise the format of the joint weekly parish notices to ensure greater clarity regarding events, responsibilities, and areas where assistance is required. The potential use of parish distribution lists to conduct a survey or census—aimed at identifying the gifts and talents of parishioners—was also discussed.

Furthermore, there was strong support for organising a joint parish mission or a series of retreat days, carefully planned and well publicised, featuring speakers on specific themes to deepen faith and understanding.

Consideration may also be given to reintroducing lay-led Services of the Word and Holy Communion, particularly to provide greater flexibility in weekday worship when a priest is unavailable. At present, such services tend to be oriented towards older parishioners, with limited provision for those of working age.

The introduction of a monthly Family Mass was also positively received, with children and young people (from Year 5 onwards) encouraged to take an active role in readings, collections, and the offertory procession. In addition, Kathleen has agreed to explore the suitability of the John Paul II Award for potential implementation within both parishes.

A further need identified is for deeper catechesis on Church teachings, particularly concerning the Sacrament of Reconciliation. It was observed that while some individuals express openness to communal penitential services involving general absolution, there remains reluctance towards individual confession, indicating a need for renewed formation and pastoral sensitivity in this area.

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

The mission of the Church is fundamentally one of outreach. Rather than focusing solely on declining attendance, there is a clear call to bring the Church to where people are. This necessitates creative and proactive approaches to evangelisation and the transmission of the faith in contemporary contexts.

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

The successful implementation of these initiatives will require committed individuals and structured formation programmes to equip them for effective ministry.

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

Even if such initiatives are not realised at the diocesan level, meaningful developments at the parish level can bring about significant positive change, with lasting impact on both the local Church and the wider community.

Mission: SERVE - Sharing Christ's Love in Action

Reflection and conclusions:

Both churches have tried to be active in our area sharing the love of the Lord in various activities. Association with the various faith groups in an around our area, support to the spiritual need of various care homes and hospitals around, support to the local food banks, associations with the local school is commendable in spite of the growing age of the congregation.

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.)

Looking forward to having more volunteers who could get actively involved in the various social programmes locally. Looking forward to bringing more young people to the church, to this effect we are planning to look at how our wider Christian fellowship encourages youth. It is a sad fact that parishioner numbers age top heavy age wise; if we don't change this who will there be on the pews on a decade or two?

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

We are proposing this since we strongly feel that it is the need of the time. Now a days we see a multi-cultural faith community and there is a need to bring all into the church and make them feel they are welcomed.

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

We need to have people with openness and formations

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

The outcome would be even if it does not happen at the diocese level, at the Parish level a change could be brought about and that would have a huge effect on the local church and the society.

Mission: COMMUNITY – Building a Family of Faith

Reflection and conclusions:

In our both parishes people always feels that they are well accepted and cared. From the various instances its being proved that they have a feeling of belongingness. Our churches always catered to the needs of the vulnerable and isolated by reaching to them though our volumeters. Despite various difficulties our church communities feeling of bond and supportive and mutual caring always motivates us to look forward and strive to be better.

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.)

The aging population and the absence of young people is of great concern at present. We have ventured in to various activities to reach out to the young families though our presence in the nearby schools and special family mass for the children etc have paid certain fruits however it is very insignificant. Young families have always their other priorities above the church and since we are going to have a huge issue with attracting the young people to the church.

As such happy with the way the church function since we try to delegate our responsibilities wherever it is possible and required. What we envision is a participatory church where everyone feels the responsibly of being a stakeholder.

We are very much concerned about the amount of support we render to the priest and deacons. Most of the time the priest is found to be overwhelmed with the jobs and other daily chores of life since most of them do not have any assistance like a sacristan and housekeeper.

Both our parishes are blessed with a vibrant multi racial faithful. The way we have accommodate everyone is commendable and their faith and devotion has always edified the rest of the faithful and thereby making a vibrant worshipping community.

<p>2. Why are we proposing this? (<i>Link to Mission.</i>) We are proposing this because of our concerns ; Ageing population, difficulties in attracting young families and huge workloads of single priests whose local supports are dwindling due to the aging volunteers</p>
<p>3. Dependencies: <i>What will be needed to make this happen? (E.g. people, formation, finances, property decisions, Bishop approval, other parishes co-operating.)</i> Need for more and more volunteers; a participatory church where all share the responsibilities</p>
<p>4. What will be the outcome if this action cannot happen? The outcome would be even if it does not happen at the diocese level, at the Parish level a change could be brought about and that would have a huge effect on the local church and the society.</p>

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
St. Johns the Baptist church - Annitsford	<i>Church</i>	<i>200</i>	<i>7</i>	<i>18</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>70</i>	<i>Bus stop within a 3 minutes walk with a hourly bus</i>

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)

Site Name:	Building Name	Existing uses	Potential future uses
St. John the Baptist Church - Annitsford	St. John the Baptist Church Presbytery	Vaccant at present	Could be used to accommodate a reitred priest/ Needs refurbishing / have informed Bishop as well as the Property incharge

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

Please summarise your conclusions based on F1. Discussions

Following discussion, it was concluded that finances are not currently fully transparent or widely understood. It is recommended that quarterly financial reports be presented to the Parish Council, alongside an annual summary of abbreviated figures shared with the wider parish community.

The parish is considered financially sustainable over the next Ten years. Adequate funds are in place to meet major costs, with annual income remaining stable and supplemented by occasional legacies.

Financial monitoring and review processes are in place

Major anticipated costs are generally consistent with those outlined in the Diocesan toolkit for both parishes. Additionally, there is a potential requirement for Huge repairs and maintained of both parish church, presbytery as well as the suage system of the parish hall are pending for the last three years. Various delays from the concerned departments are appalling.

It is believed that financial resources are being used appropriately to support the mission. While maintaining two churches is currently sustainable, there may be opportunities for cost savings through operating as a single parish, thereby reducing duplication such as cross-charging and maintaining separate financial records.

Stewardship: BUILDINGS

Please summarise your conclusions based on F2. Discussions

It was agreed that the presence of two churches does not weaken the mission. Instead, they provide complementary forms of worship within a rapidly growing town. St John's offers more traditional services, including organ music and hymns, while St Paul's provides a more contemporary style with guitar-based music, appealing to a broader demographic.

The buildings are appropriately used, and both are necessary to effectively serve the geographical and demographic needs of the area.

Running and maintenance costs are viewed as proportionate and justified given the size of the parish and the area served, and they do not unduly hinder the mission.

Both buildings are accessible, safe, and fit for purpose.

One presbytery has been identified as surplus to requirements. Consideration should be given to how this asset might be utilised to meet diocesan needs. However, disposal may be challenging due to the significant costs associated with separating the building from the church.

Collaboration with local schools is already taking place, though there is scope to strengthen partnerships with neighbouring parishes.

No clear opportunities were identified to reduce the carbon footprint of the buildings. It is recognised that significant changes, particularly to heating systems, would involve substantial financial investment.

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?

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

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

At present, the average age of the faithful is approximately 60 years and above. Consequently, most of our current volunteers also fall within this same age demographic. While the existing level of volunteer support remains adequate for now, there is growing concern regarding long-term sustainability.

Leadership, at present, continues to be maintained effectively. However, there is an observable decline in the number of individuals willing or able to step forward for leadership training and succession. This trend is largely attributable to factors such as advancing age and prevailing health conditions, which limit active participation and long-term commitment.

Geographically, both churches are presently well situated to meet the needs of the faithful, offering convenient access for regular worship. At this stage, no significant changes to this arrangement are anticipated soon. Nevertheless, potential challenges must be acknowledged. Issues such as old age, declining health, and limited access to transportation may increasingly affect a segment of the congregation, making travel – even to nearby places of worship – more difficult.

These constraints could have implications for future attendance and community engagement.

Stewardship: SUSTAINABILITY

Please summarise your conclusions based on F4. discussions

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

- What is essential for the mission is the cultivation of a well-formed and cohesive community of the faithful, grounded in a deep-rooted spirituality. Such a community should centre its life on the sacraments and the Word of God, with its members striving to embody the values and teachings of Jesus Christ in their daily lives.
- In this regard, we do not currently perceive any immediate risk to the sustainability of either church. Nevertheless, there are clear opportunities for greater collaboration, including the sharing of resources and the integration of certain pastoral and administrative functions. Consideration could be given to operating as a single parish community while retaining two distinct places of worship.
- It must be emphasised, however, that we strongly advise against the closure of either church. Such a course of action could result in a significant reduction in participation, with an estimated 40% of the current faithful potentially disengaging from regular worship altogether.
- Each parish possesses its own distinct strengths and challenges. St John's is a listed building with an active graveyard, reflecting its historical and pastoral significance. However, it faces practical limitations, particularly regarding parking, as attendees are often required to park along the roadside. Additionally, the church requires urgent roof repairs and ongoing maintenance, which will necessitate considerable financial investment. Encouragingly, the parish can presently address these financial demands.
- By contrast, St Paul's is a comparatively modern structure, requiring less immediate maintenance. It benefits from adequate parking facilities and a location near the town centre, enhancing accessibility for the faithful. What is essential for the mission is the cultivation of a well-formed and cohesive community of the faithful, grounded in a deep-rooted spirituality. Such a community should centre its life on the sacraments and the Word of God, with its members striving to embody the values and teachings of Jesus Christ in their daily lives.
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- At present, it has also been proposed that the presbytery at St John's be utilised to accommodate a retired priest. However, this would require a programme of refurbishment before it could be deemed suitable for residential use.
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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?

Several areas of parish life are clearly strong and should be preserved and built upon:

- **Strong sense of community and belonging** – The parish is widely experienced as welcoming, inclusive, and multicultural, with people feeling accepted and cared for.
- **Sacramental and devotional life** – Eucharistic Adoration, Children's Liturgy, Rosary, Divine Mercy, and Marian devotions are well valued and attended.
- **Links with schools and wider community** – Active involvement as governors, catechists, and volunteers strengthens outreach to families.
- **Charitable outreach** – Food banks, migrant support, and care home ministry are impactful and appreciated.

- **Use of two churches** – St John’s and St Paul’s complement each other, offering different styles of worship and serving a growing population.
- **Spirit of collaboration and prayerful discernment** – Meetings were well-structured, spiritually grounded, and inclusive.

What should be adjusted?

Some areas are working but need refinement or development:

- **Catechesis and formation**
 - Deepen understanding of sacraments (especially Baptism, Reconciliation, Marriage).
 - Address misconceptions (e.g. Baptism as a school requirement).
- **Communication**
 - Improve clarity and usefulness of parish notices.
 - Consider parish census/survey to identify gifts and skills.
- **Post-sacramental engagement**
 - Maintain contact with families after Baptism, First Communion, Marriage.
- **Liturgy accessibility**
 - Broaden appeal of weekday services beyond older parishioners.
 - Expand Family Mass and youth involvement.
- **Financial transparency**
 - Introduce regular reporting to build trust and awareness.
- **Collaboration**
 - Increase sharing of resources between the two churches and neighbouring parishes.

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

Certain patterns or realities are limiting growth and should be addressed or let go:

- **Passive participation**
 - Many attend Mass but are not engaged in deeper sacramental life.
- **Over-reliance on clergy**
 - Priests are overstretched due to lack of practical support (e.g. sacristans, administration).
- **Resistance to certain sacraments**
 - Reluctance toward individual confession weakens sacramental life.
- **Aging volunteer base without succession planning**
 - Sustainability is at risk if younger leaders are not formed.
- **Duplication of structures**
 - Running two fully separate administrative systems may be inefficient.
- **Limited youth engagement**

- Current efforts are not yet significantly impacting younger generations.

Where is the Holy Spirit prompting bold steps?

There are clear invitations toward courageous and forward-looking action:

- **Invest in lay leadership and formation**
 - Train catechists and lay leaders to share responsibility for mission.
- **Reimagine evangelisation**
 - Move beyond “waiting for people” → actively go out to where people are.
- **Engage young people intentionally**
 - Develop youth-focused initiatives and pathways (e.g. John Paul II Award, active liturgical roles).
- **Strengthen sacramental culture**
 - Renew emphasis on Reconciliation and deeper understanding of all sacraments.
- **Operate as one parish community (two churches)**
 - Share resources, unify vision, reduce duplication while keeping both worship sites.
- **Expand pastoral outreach**
 - Especially to care homes, bereaved families, and inactive Catholics.
- **Use lay-led services where appropriate**
 - Especially in response to clergy shortages.

What are our next steps as a parish?

A realistic and practical path forward could include:

Immediate (next 6–12 months):

- Introduce **quarterly financial updates** and improved parish communication.
- Launch a **parish survey/census** to identify skills and willingness to serve.
- Expand **Family Mass** and youth participation.
- Begin **targeted catechesis** on key sacraments (especially, Reconciliation, Baptism, Marriage).
- Recruit volunteers for **practical roles** (sacristy, admin, outreach).

Short-term (1–2 years):

- Develop a **structured formation programme** for lay leaders and catechists.
- Establish a **post-sacramental follow-up system** for families.
- Organise a **parish mission / retreat series**.

- Strengthen **care home and community outreach**.
- Pilot **lay-led liturgies/services** where needed.

Long-term:

- Move toward functioning as **one parish with two churches** (shared planning, resources, vision).
- Build a **sustainable leadership pipeline**, especially involving younger members.
- Explore **greater collaboration with neighbouring parishes**.
- Continue maintaining both churches while improving efficiency.

Overall Insight

The parish is **healthy but at a turning point**.

Its greatest strength is its **community spirit and faith foundation**.

Its greatest challenge is **sustainability – especially engaging younger generations and forming future leaders**.

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** by **23rd April 2026**.