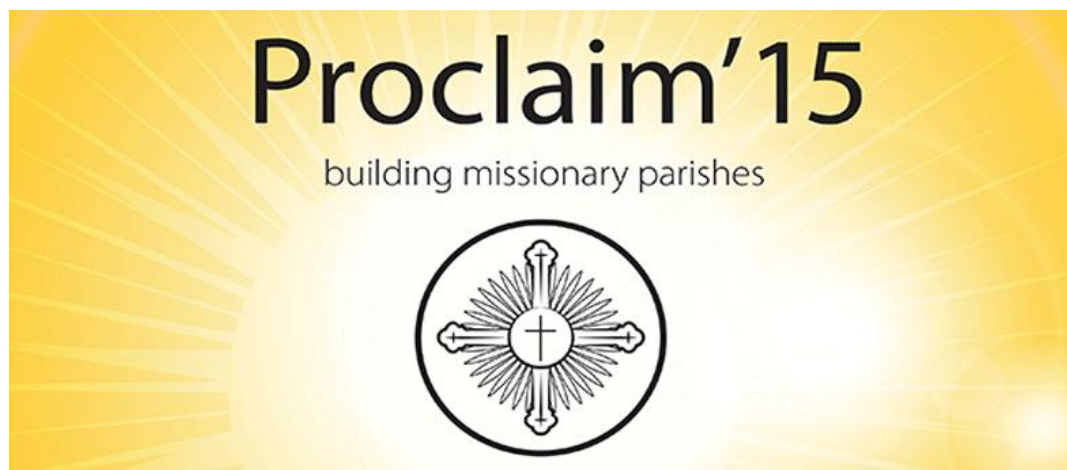


## Proclaim 15 - Spread the word



Last Saturday 11th July saw the launch in Birmingham of Proclaim '15, the response of the bishops of England and Wales to *Evangelii Gaudium*, in which Pope Francis urged the faithful to open 'a new chapter of evangelisation'

Be bold and creative in the way you evangelise! This is what Pope Francis told us in *Evangelii Gaudium* (EG33), urging us to rethink the goals, structures, style and methods of evangelisation, to arrive at new initiatives, and open "a new chapter of evangelisation ... pointing out new paths for the Church's journey in years to come" (EG1). Proclaim '15 is the national response of England and Wales. This unprecedented gathering, which is taking place on 11 July in Birmingham, is the brainchild of the Home Mission Desk of the Bishops' Conference Department for Evangelisation and Catechesis.

The gathering is being billed as the evangelisation event of a generation. It is about how to create a vision and strategy for parish evangelisation. It will include workshops on how to form a parish evangelisation team; how to evangelise the young people of your parish; how to reach out to those who have had no experience of Church; how to share your testimony in one-to-one evangelisation; and how to reach out to non-churchgoing Catholics. These are just some of the issues that will be addressed by Proclaim '15, where some 800 delegates from all dioceses of England and Wales will gather at Birmingham's Repertory Theatre.

Every diocesan group will be made up predominantly of lay people. There will be keynote addresses from Cardinal Vincent Nichols, Archbishop Bernard Longley, Revd Nicky Gumbel of Alpha, and Ms Michelle Moran of the Pontifical Council for the Laity. Each participant will then choose three workshops from the 11 available; they will include discussion on how to make prayer the foundation of your missionary parish; how to build a welcoming and family-friendly parish; how to offer prayer experiences as effective outreach; how to share the Gospel message; and how to fulfil Pope Francis' vision to be "a Church which is poor and for the poor". These workshops will be led by some 17 skilled practitioners – from Br Loarne Ferguson and Fiona Mansford to Fr Gareth Leyshon and Anne-Marie Salgo. The aim is for every diocesan group to have members who will have experienced all 11 workshops among them.

Prayer spaces will be an integral part of the event in order for everyone to explore how prayer can be the foundation of missionary parishes. The organisers believe that, without prayer, the enterprise will fail. For this reason, as conference participants travel home in the evening, every parish in the land has

been invited to come together for a holy hour to pray for evangelisation in our countries. (A 20-page booklet to resource parishes for this holy hour can be found at <http://www.catholicnews.org.uk/Home/Special-Events/Proclaim-15-Building-Missionary-Parishes/Evangelisation-Prayer>).

We hope that those who attend Proclaim '15 will return to their dioceses enthused for evangelisation. Their brief will be to report back to those engaged in local evangelisation initiatives and to support existing good work being done. Many dioceses are offering diocesan or local Proclaim events this autumn to share the fruits of the conference locally.

An online Proclaim '15 Legacy Document will be published on Home Mission Sunday, 20 September. It will contain audio and video recordings of the keynote addresses as well as of the inputs given at the workshops and interviews with the workshop leaders. Each leader will give his or her three top tips for evangelisation; and the Legacy resource will aim to offer six to 10 key points for evangelisation – potentially offering some 60-100 ideas for evangelisation in all.

Hopefully, new local evangelisation teams will be formed; they will be supported by the Proclaim resources and an existing Bishops' initiative called "Crossing the Threshold" (which is geared particularly to parishes seeking to reach out to those who no longer attend church). The Pope's announcement of a Year of Mercy should give even greater impetus to all these initiatives, calling us as it does to consider what more a parish might be called upon to do in the light of the corporal and spiritual works of Mercy – all of which have deep implications for evangelisation.

There are a number of activities which parishes might consider as they wait to receive the Proclaim '15 Legacy Document. First and foremost, parishes should pray – beginning the night of the conference. Second, parishes should prepare. If the time feels right, they might think of forming a parish evangelisation team to prepare to receive the Legacy Document. This team can be large or small; it can be drawn from parishioners across the range of parish activities. It might be fruitful for such a group, once formed, to ask themselves, "What is our parish's gift?" Then as they reflect on particular spheres of parish activity, they might ask themselves two further questions, "What do we do well in this regard? And, what more, in the light of *Evangelii Gaudium*, might the Lord be asking of us?"

If, for instance, prayer is the parish's gift, then the parish might aim to see if there are ways in which more people could be embraced by its prayer life. If Caritas is the parish's gift, then the parish might aim to see if there are ways in which more people could be embraced by its activity of outreach. If the parish's gift is Marriage and Family Life, there may be ways in which more people could be engaged in celebrating and sharing their marriage so as to inspire others in the parish in this vocation. If formation is the parish's gift, there might be ways to make lifelong catechesis more the norm. Such conscientious stocktaking – combined with heartfelt prayer – will prepare the ground for Proclaim '15 to challenge and encourage parishes in ways which are likely to be both surprising and life-giving. A generation ago, I was working with parishes in the Archdiocese of Southwark to help them identify new priorities for evangelisation. One parish chose to help the unemployed. But the unemployed were not interested. Undeterred, the parish opted instead to open a centre with their Anglican neighbours to feed and clothe the homeless. The homeless came to them in droves; and have done so for more than 20 years. One wonders what bold new initiatives the next generation will think of to herald a new

chapter of evangelisation.

Bishop Nicholas Hudson is an Auxiliary Bishop of Westminster. He oversees the National Catholic Evangelisation Conference. For more information about Proclaim '15, see:  
***[www.catholicnews.org.uk/proclaim15](http://www.catholicnews.org.uk/proclaim15)***.

Nicholas Hudson-The Tablet