

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:	The Sacred Heart
PARISH TOWN:	Byermoor
DEANERY:	South Tyneside and Gateshead

What was the process followed to reach these conclusions? *E.g. clergy & laity involved, young people’s voices considered, prayer & listening shaped decisions:*

Following invitations to participate in the online Diocesan briefing sessions, representatives from the parish participated at a local discussion held together with Our Lady & St Philip Neri parish. During the meeting the clergy, a lay facilitator, and a parish representative agreed upon hosting a parochial meeting where both mission and stewardship will be considered. Before the meeting relevant data was made widely available to parishioners. The meeting was held on 21st March 2026, with about 25% of regular Mass attenders taking part. A mixture of in-group discussions and question-answer format discussions took place, with feedback recorded on standardised forms. These same forms were made available both in print and online for those who were not able to attend in person. A further 15 responses were provided digitally and one in print. With the group discussions taking priority and using further form submissions as supplementary data the responses were turned into a summary document shared with the parish at a meeting on 25th April. Feedback from this meeting was used to make final adjustments to this document before submission.

Beacons of Mission: *Practices that either show signs of hope others could learn from, or faithful responses uniquely shaped by your local context:*

- 280 people attended Mass at Christmas – 7 times higher than an average Sunday in Byermoor
- While the parish has lacked stability for nearly a decade, there was real enthusiasm for the pastoral strategy – a sense of hope for the future in their locality where Sacred Heart has an influential history in the area
- A thriving school with strong links to the parish which can be developed for the longer term

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:

After a very turbulent 12-15-year period in the parish's life there is a real sense that people want and need stability. Over the last 10-12 years Sacred Heart had 8 different priests and there is a significant shared feeling of neglect as a result. There is, however, also very deep-rooted sense of belonging, with a very committed set of faithful people who make and have made significant efforts to keep both the church and the school open.

The school is seen as a real strength and a source of hope for many. While Byermoor is a very small hamlet now – the pit closed in the 60s – the school attracts children from surrounding villages which have traditionally been part of the parish with others travelling from further away. Carers of children at Sacred Heart School also stress the importance of the existing links between the school and the parish: *“As a grandparent of children at Sacred Heart school, I feel the Church's worshipping life is so important for children and adults alike. It brings a togetherness, it encourages humility and kindness towards each other. I appreciate that as a grandparent I am welcomed when there is a Class Mass.”*

Mass timings were also raised as a barrier for some, while in a good number of responses the fact that the timing suits them was highlighted as a defining factor.

Better training (and indeed recruiting more) altar servers was also highlighted.

Sacred Heart did have a strong musical heritage and there's a desire to develop this again despite the lack of a director of music or even a weekly organist proving to be a challenge. There is a strong desire in some for a more authentically Catholic approach to hymnody. There is also concern for better involvement of children in singing and in the Mass generally. A children's choir to elevate worship was suggested as a good way to bridge needs. Choirs can also serve as significant catechetical tools. However this poses significant resourcing challenges.

There were a number of responses from carers of pupils at Sacred Heart School suggesting e.g. toddler groups before school pickup time. Adjacent to this were responses suggesting better advertisement of school Masses. The opportunity for parents and grandparents to attend Monday's School Masses was much appreciated, even if it was felt this option needs to be better communicated.

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.*)

1. Continue to develop the parish facilities to make it more child-friendly — hopefully implement a planned children’s area in the back of the church.
2. Over the next years aim to develop catechesis and sacramental preparation in the schools.
3. Improve facilities: baby changing facilities and a toilet would need to be installed in the church to be able to even consider a number of suggestions regarding outreach.
4. Consider starting a children’s choir in conjunction with the school.

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

The mission of the parish is felt to be closely united with that of our school, and there is a strong desire among parishioners to see them better involved and participating more deeply.

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

Possibly different catechetical resources for the school than presently available.

Volunteers for additional youth provision.

Minor adjustments to church layout and children’s resources to be made available.

More significant works may need to be undertaken to provide toilets and changing facilities to enable better community engagement and closer links with the school.

Finding a permanent organist and director of music who might be able to develop parochial musical life and organise a children’s choir in conjunction with the school.

Further training for altar servers needs to be provided.

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

The above propositions are all in addition to what already exists, if these actions cannot happen, then things will most likely simply stay as they presently are.

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

This depends on the outcome of any planned discussions about canonical amalgamation; as well as on partnership-wide discussions yet to be organised.

Mission: TEACH - Handing on the Faith

Reflection and conclusions:

Sacred Heart Parish has had a deeply turbulent decade. Over the last 10 years the parish was served by 8 different priests. This lack of stability through endless reorganisations has deeply scarred parishioners, especially considering how deeply they feel for this community. The lack of stability has left many feeling neglected by the Diocese. This has obviously impacted on the parish's capacity to provide a steady "handing on of the faith" in years past, with a lot of this effort "outsourced" to the school. In return, a number of years ago, the school itself was also threatened with closure. The parish and the school campaigned very hard — and successfully — to keep our school open. However with further clergy moves in the parish and with leadership changes at the school as well, these efforts have not yet had enough time to consolidate. Above all the parish at the moment needs stability.

"[I am] very pleased to hear the true meaning of Christianity ... I have been drawn back to my Catholic routes because of the Pope and the moral clarity he provides to the world right now as it seems to be on the verge of implosion."

- survey respondent, 35-50 years of age

The way the Catholic Faith is taught in our parish is generally seen as a strength of the parish life. There were, however, some gaps identified between the parish and school links. These have been partially outlined above.

This last year has been a year of gentle growth in the parish through catechumens joining the Catholic Church and our parish as they are baptised and / or received at Easter 2026. As catechetical meetings provided on a partnership level were not always flexible enough to accommodate late joiners, or by some catechumens, they were not felt to be covering matters of faith at adequate depth, additional catechetical meetings and sessions were provided for enquirers by the parish clergy. These were supplemented by additional monthly catechetical meetings in more relaxed, informal settings, allowing for free discussion of topics enquirers wished to raise.

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.*)

To consider ways to provide deeper stability for the parish and thus enable the teaching and handing on of the faith to take place a further, separate discussion was agreed upon in May 2026, where Canonical Amalgamation would be discussed.

Possibly expand what already happens in catechesis - already existing monthly pub talks, with continued provision of one-on-one catechesis for enquirers.

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

To provide the foundational stability that this parish has been deprived of over the last 10-15 years.

To ensure that new enquirers are given strong foundations that enable them to live out their Catholic faith with greater depth and joy.

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

Canonical background information on amalgamation to support upcoming discussions.

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

Further risk of turbulent changes that proved so deeply disruptive to this parish's life.

Mission: SERVE - Sharing Christ's Love in Action

Reflection and conclusions:

In addition to the above the parish also collects donations for the food bank operated by Our Lady & St Philip Neri Parish, and housed at Immaculate Heart Church in Lobley Hill.

The loss of parish facilities in the last decades and the demolition of the church hall to allow for school expansion has left the parish rather limited. The renovation of the orangery may be desirable but there might be other options to consider with the Diocese.

The school and the parish have a life beyond the small community of Byermoor – taking in the growing villages of Byermoor, Hobson, Fell, Sunnyside and beyond. Concentrated efforts on connecting the church, school and wider communities would provide a real service. It's more than 3 miles to each of the neighbouring Catholic churches and schools – Dipton, Lobley Hill and Whickham.

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.*)

Continue to develop links with the food bank and other services provided in Our Lady and St Philip Neri parish – working out whether that would lead to a natural amalgamation.

Re-establish a finance committee with the appointment of a Chair – parishioners suggested possible candidates.

At future parish meetings consider how we can provide meeting social / meeting space – perhaps linked to our school.

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

Canonical requirements.

The lack of adequate facilities is proving to be a barrier to outreach.

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

Donations and volunteers to pay for and carry out any works in the orangery.

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

The parish will continue without places where outreach could happen.

Mission: COMMUNITY – Building a Family of Faith

Reflection and conclusions:

Sacred Heart Byermoor, opened in 1876, has a very strong sense of shared history and identity. Links to the parish go back generations — some in the parish are very proud to have family ties that go back to the founding of the church and parish – and indeed to building it!

There is a sense of genuine welcome in the parish; with perhaps some room for improvement in dedicated welcomers on the door, as one response suggested. However parishioners said that there is a sense of freedom in the parish, where people are not protective of their responsibilities, but groups (e.g. flower arrangers) genuinely welcome anyone in their ranks.

Parishioners also take great pride in the missionary roots of the parish — the strong outreach to the former mining community, as well as the wider Gateshead area, with a number of churches being planted locally out of Byermoor.

The lack of continuity and stability, as described above, has impacted negatively on this, however. With the constant changes in administration the parish was subjected to, very little could happen to explore and strengthen what this history means today. Connections to this parish in the wider Diocese remain very strong, however.

This is coupled with a loss of spaces the church could use for social events and get-togethers, making the development of the parish's inner sense of belonging and identity a challenge.

There are currently efforts to make small changes to this, but to discern what direction these could take will need time and, above all, the stability that the parish deeply yearns for.

With the 150th anniversary of the foundation of the Parish coming up in October, there is a good opportunity to celebrate the parish's history, which can also shape our common identity today, and thus pave the way for the future.

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.*)

Explore ways to provide more continuity and stability, and thus a context in which a sense of our present identity is allowed to come to the surface.

Explore how the parish's rich history and cultural identity shapes this history today, especially in preparation for the church's anniversary.

As noted above, discuss provision of social meeting space and further facilities that would make parish property more suitable for deepening interpersonal relationships.

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

To provide a deeper sense of community and to enable genuine relationships to develop, where the faith can be shared and lived.

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

Parochial discussions about 1) possible canonical amalgamation; and 2) ways to improve our facilities.

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

As above.

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>The Sacred Heart Byermoor</i>	<i>Church</i>	<i>250</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>Y</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>80</i>	<i>Bus stops directly next to church</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
The Sacred Heart, Byermoor	Orangery (attached to presbytery)	Disused (disrepair)	Social meeting space
The Sacred Heart, Byermoor	Church	Church	Church WITH TOILETS.

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

The parish is currently operating at a slight loss, which, if weekly average giving per person would be increased with only £0.50, would be entirely covered. However there are a number of projected expenses and major repairs to the cemetery wall and presbytery that would halve parish savings.

Given the disruptions the parish has been subjected to over the last ten years there was a lack of clarity in its own legal status, its finances, and governance. The parish finance committee has not met for a long period. Currently all parish finances are managed by a volunteer (Paul Hutchins) from Our Lady and St Philip Neri, with the collection being counted either by two volunteers locally, or sometimes by the clergy.

Over the last year financial reports have been made available to the parish through the newsletter, and every six months through a printed report.

The parish finance committee needs to be reinstated urgently and the provision of reports needs to be embedded as regular practice. Then further decisions need to be made regarding works to be carried out that enable the site's safe operation: first works inside the buildings and then around the perimeter.

There is a desire in the parish to work with cost effective contractors.

Further ways to enable giving were encouraged by parishioners in their responses: contactless payments are suggested as an effective future option.

Stewardship: BUILDINGS

Please summarise your conclusions based on F2. discussions

Sacred Heart Church is architecturally sound, however the average attendance in 2024 (which is commonly held to have increased since then) being 43 each Sunday for a seating capacity of 250. The church is used at least twice a week for parish worship with the school attending at least fortnightly. The school further uses the premises for educational walks, "Children of the Eucharist" meetings and other events.

There is substantial green space available, and for now, gardening and maintenance tasks are carried out by a volunteer. However long term sustainability of this is an issue that was raised in discussions, and there will be a need for more volunteers to maintain the grounds.

The lack of toilets within the church building and the lack of social meeting space available to the parish are challenges that need to be considered; however in a way that would not detract from the church's building's character. Buildings are, otherwise, accessible, with a few minor safety hazards that can be easily corrected: safety film needs to be installed on the glass panes on the stairs leading to the organ loft. The cemetery path needs to be repaired, and the present, damaged, haphazard cemetery boundary wall needs to be demolished and with time, replaced, preferably with a hedge.

Collaboration with neighbouring parishes and schools is already happening through common projects (food bank), joint worship events. Canonical Amalgamation with Our Lady and St Philip Neri needs to be discussed in the coming weeks.

There are currently no easily accessible opportunities for reducing the church's carbon impact for lack of funds, however a thorough refurbishment of heating systems and the presbytery's glazing and insulation would be deeply desirable. The parish grounds have more than 90 trees that are a real asset in providing carbon traps. It is hoped that the amount of green space can be increased by replacing the broken cemetery boundary with a hedge.

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 Parish Finance Council needs to be re-established.

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

No; and with +Stephen's announcement made regarding Deanery reorganisations on 29 October 2024 at a local Deanery meeting at St Joseph's Blaydon where it was repeatedly said that partnership structures will be replaced by Deaneries, there will not be one. The Parochial Administrator and the Assistant Priest are already present at Deanery level meetings. There was some confusion about the parish's partnership status given changes.

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

We found no answer to this question in our consultations due to lack of clarity regarding definitions. That said there was enthusiasm for the parish to instigate the roles needed to be sustainable.

Stewardship: SUSTAINABILITY

Please summarise your conclusions based on F4. discussions

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

The provision of worship, which is the primary mode of the church's mission, is likely just about sustainable for the next 5 years. However, the parish already has to share its clergy with Our Lady and St Philip Neri, and with possible future moves and retirements the current set-up where Sacred Heart remains its own legal parish does not seem sustainable. The parish has already agreed to hold discussions about potentially amalgamating with OLPN. Discussions have already taken place at Our Lady and St Philip Neri which seem to indicate that some answers to Sacred Heart questions are already emerging.

A neutral balance needs to be reached at least. Further ways to support the parish financially need to be explored. Establishing a finance committee with its own Chair will help this situation.

Ways to offset the cost of projected repairs need to be explored; through relying more widely on volunteers, finding contractors that the parish can work with that are more competitively priced than the present provision available through the Diocese, and ways to raise funds that would include the local community (e.g. fundraising with the school for repairs).

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?

Strong community, a sense of belonging and great degree of resilience despite parishioners feeling they have been neglected over the last 15 years. Gentle growth in numbers at present, and a relatively even financial situation for now. Growing sense of willingness to work for the parish. Desire to offer more service in volunteering. Enthusiasm for missional opportunities with the school.

What should be adjusted?

Slight revision of giving and finances. Improve facilities and address outstanding repairs; add facilities that enable better outreach to young families. Strengthen the worshipping life of the parish through involving children more and strengthening liturgical and musical life. As a matter of urgency reinstate parish finance committee. Discuss amalgamation.

Where is the Holy Spirit prompting bold steps?

Considering amalgamation with Our Lady & St Philip Neri.

What are our next steps as a parish?

Discuss amalgamation; reinstate finance committee. Decide about future repairs and improvements to buildings on site that could enable us to strengthen links with school. Explore ways of establishing a children's choir. Improve provision for young people in our churches through spaces dedicated for them, altar server training, music (discussed earlier).

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**.