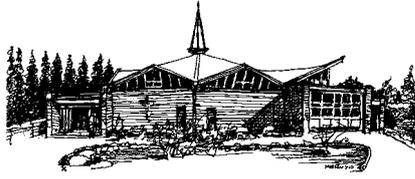




**Our Lady Help of Christians,  
Rickmansworth**



**St. John The Evangelist,  
Mill End & Maple Cross**



**St John Fisher,  
Chorleywood**

5 Park Road  
Rickmansworth  
Hertfordshire  
WD3 1HU  
Tel: 01923 773387

Email: [shaunchurch@rcdow.org.uk](mailto:shaunchurch@rcdow.org.uk)

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Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ,  
King of the Universe  
26<sup>th</sup> November 2017

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

***'Go, therefore, make disciples...'*** (Matthew 28:19)

These words of Jesus, known as the Great Commission, set out the reason why the Church exists: to tell others about Jesus and make them his disciples. Pope Francis echoes this call that our parishes be places that make "*missionary disciples*" (*Evangelii Gaudium* [EG] 120).

My vision for the future of our three parishes is that each will become a place that makes "*missionary disciples*". I am passionate about this exciting vision and during the autumn I have been sharing my vision with the three pastoral councils. Today, I want to begin to share it with all of you and explain how together we can shape this and bring it to life.

Pope Francis believes that we need to rediscover our core identity and purpose as Christians: to *be* and *make* "*missionary disciples*". Indeed, Pope Francis has said that he dreams that parishes will have a "*missionary impulse capable of transforming everything*" so that our customs and ways of doing things serve the mission rather than our self-preservation [EG 27].

As your Parish Priest, I share Pope Francis' dream. I dream that *our* parishes are centred on and revolve around, being and making "*missionary disciples*". What is a "*missionary disciple*"? Simply, someone who has fallen in love with Jesus Christ, commits themselves to grow in love with him, and who joyfully tells others about him. Fr Damian and I will share more with you about this vision of missionary discipleship in our homilies this weekend and next. Indeed, the sharing of the vision is something that will be an important and on-going part of our Sunday preaching.

You may be asking, "Why is all of this necessary"? Firstly, because Jesus told us to do it! But secondly, like the majority of Catholic parishes in the Western world, we find ourselves in a state of steady decline. Many of you will have experienced the sadness and pain of seeing family members and friends fall away from the practice of their faith. As a Church we are trying to maintain a Catholic way of life that no longer speaks to the reality of people's lives. It doesn't have to be this way! The Good News of Jesus is relevant to every generation – as "*missionary disciples*", we will find new ways of sharing this Good News with those around us.

One essential feature of becoming “missionary disciples” involves developing an invitational culture in our parishes. This invitational culture will encourage us to invite those who do not come to church into a gentle process that meets them wherever they are in their lives. It will also offer them opportunities to continue growing in the process of being “missionary disciples”.

It will take time for this invitational culture to develop but Fr Damian and I are committed to working with all of you to make this dream a living and vibrant reality. Importantly, each of you will have a part to play in transforming our parishes. I encourage you to speak to Fr Damian and myself over the coming weeks about the mission and to ask any questions you may have.

One important practical step in making this dream a reality is to move towards creating one joint pastoral council to serve the three parishes. Why the need? This new joint pastoral council will have a new and primary task: ensuring that everything we do in our parishes has as its principal goal the making of “missionary disciples”: people who fall in love with Jesus Christ, grow in love with him, and share this love joyfully. The new joint pastoral council will be created in February/March 2019. I will write to you again before Christmas to share details of the initial step we will take as we begin the transition process.

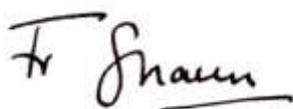
I wish to be clear that I am committed to ensuring that each of the three parishes continues to have its own unique life and character, while we find new ways of working together to make “missionary disciples”. The experience of the past four years has shown that there is so much more that our parishes can achieve working together than individually.

For sure, this vision is challenging and it will at times be messy, but it is also exciting and I firmly believe that this is the direction in which we are being called to walk. Pope Francis offers us words of challenge and encouragement as we set out on this journey together:

*“I prefer a Church which is bruised, hurting and dirty because it has been out on the streets, rather than a Church which is unhealthy from being confined and from clinging to its own security. I do not want a Church concerned with being at the centre and which then ends up being caught up in a web of obsessions and procedures. If something should rightly disturb and trouble our consciences, it is the fact that so many of our brothers and sisters are living without the strength, light and consolation born of friendship with Jesus Christ, without a community of faith to support them, without meaning and a goal in life. [EG 49].*

Finally, and most importantly, I ask you all to pray for our three parish communities as we prepare to embark on this new adventure of missionary discipleship together. I invite you to pray particularly to the Holy Spirit that we may be more joyfully open to Jesus and his command for us to be and make “missionary disciples”.

Yours in Christ

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Fr Shaun". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style. The "Fr" is written in a smaller, more upright script, while "Shaun" is written in a larger, more flowing cursive. A horizontal line is drawn under the name "Shaun".

Fr Shaun Church  
Parish Priest