

St Paul writes to a divided Church in Corinth, and to us, stressing our uniqueness as the Body of Christ. This image of one body, united and yet diverse, points towards the direction we must take and the effort we must make if we are to fully realise our goal of uniting everyone to Christ.

We are not simply co-believers or collaborators. Instead, the Holy Spirit draws us into a close union with the Risen Christ. This union means being united at a fundamental level with every other Christian woman and man. Religious individualism is far from the Gospel. Within this, we must appreciate what this Body of Christ looks like in real terms:

- It is Universal as part of the Global Church
- It is Local as part of the Diocese
- It is a Parish Community
- It is part of the Local Community

It is within these dimensions that we seek to look at how we can Build Connections that heal divisions and help humanity towards its destiny.

Spreading the Word through Connections

A strong desire is expressed to return the Church to its core values. There is also a sense that these core values mean different things to different people. However, what is similar in all responses is that one core value of the Church is to promote and enhance relationships by building connections. This is seen as in line with the spreading of the Good News that proclaims care for people who are experiencing poverty or marginalisation. These similarities point towards the care of all creation that is visible in the community. ([Big Listen 2.1, page 19](#))

There is a recognition that our communities are divided socially but these divisions also extend to the diverse needs of people who attend Mass, events or services. While all agree that hope and faith is to be found in the Church, many hold different opinions on what enables them to find this hope and develop their faith when they attend Church. There are people who look for more quiet and reflective environments and therefore find it difficult when children or others disrupt this or whenever there is a more vibrant service or Liturgy. Others express that they do not attend Church due to it being 'too Churchy'.

There is also an appreciation from many voices who feel that families who bring the young to Church should be welcomed and encouraged, despite any disruption they may be deemed to cause.

The Parish Community

The Big listen responses highlight that people have differing opinions on what makes 'Community'. On the one hand, 'Community' is understood by a minority as a 'Church or Parish Community' that is distinctive from the rest of the local community. On the other, a majority see the Church or parish community as including the wider community in which it is situated. This has implications on how people seek to build connections.

For those who view the parish as part of the local community, ecumenism and inter-faith relationships are seen as crucial elements in the practice of faith. Tolerance of all faiths is seen by many as a clear display of 'loving our neighbour'. Many also sense that, somehow due to Covid; there has been a slowing down or complete withdrawal in communications and relationship building across this 'much wider' parish community. ([Big Listen 2.2, page 20](#)).

However, there are others who have a genuine fear of other religions extinguishing Christianity. These fears affect how far they are or not able to reach out into their community.

Despite this fear, there still remains a potential for a change of heart, as people continue to look to the Church in the Diocese of Salford for guidance. ([Big Listen 2.2, page 20](#)).

Evangelisation and Outreach

Respondents identified that effective evangelisation occurs when Catholic life is present and alive in the local community for others to witness lived experience. People are looking for the Church to take an active role in fostering community and relationship building by modernising churches to make them more welcoming for their respective communities. Examples put forward include developing church halls into community hubs or cafes that serve the needs of the wider local community.

Many point out that church should be a place where people can receive guidance and are listened to with compassion and understanding. It should be where everyone gets to experience being part of the local community, where 'neighbours' are comfortable to be together and build relationships ([Big Listen 2.4, page 22](#)).

Questions

In the light of what has been raised specifically in the Big Listen, how can we Build Connections that enhance our mission to build up the Body of Christ here in the Diocese of Salford?

Please note that the following questions are only designed to guide and prompt your reflection and do not seek in any way to limit your prayerful discernment.

- Thinking about the context of your parish, how can it become a place where everyone feels part of the community?
- How can your parish share Christ's message of love, compassion and selflessness to all people and places in its community?
- How can you create and enhance fruitful and enriching relationships with people who are non-Catholics within your community?
- How can we make families welcome in the celebrations, liturgies, services and events in our parish?
- How can the parish support local families and individuals who feel isolated, either from the Church or from their wider family?
- How can your parish support people who benefit from sacred silence and quiet reflection while also meeting the needs of those who are seeking more vibrant prayer experiences?
- How can the local Church make itself more present in the life of the wider parish community?
- How can we improve connections between parishes, deaneries and the diocese to make people feel more linked to the Universal Church?
- How can we build up the Body of Christ where there are low numbers of 18-50 years olds currently participating actively in the life of the parish?