

*Outcome of Herts Circle meeting in preparation for the Newman Assembly 10/11 October 2015*  
**on The Newman Association: is it worth saving?**

Large membership – 82 at the last count – but only about 30 come to meetings. Ageing of course.

Our committee discussed the subject and decided to consult members by holding a tea party which was attended by 24 members, and we had written comments from 3 others.

There are two aspects to the subject: the future of the Association and the future of Circles. We endeavoured to encourage people to look at the overall picture, but inevitably people tended to concentrate on their local circle. The perennially difficult problem of time and day of the week was raised regularly. We meet in the evenings, usually on Sunday. Saturday daytime meetings have not been particularly popular.

Other points to encourage more people to join:

More talks on contemporary/topical issues. (More flexible programme)

Use of social media to publicise Newman activities – nationally and/or locally

What needs does the Newman satisfy? An intellectual challenge to our faith/ a safe environment to talk and question/a supportive community of like-minded friends? Would these needs satisfy a younger generation? Should Council carry out a survey of needs of younger Catholics?

Particularly important to find out position of current students – consult chaplains (Fr Fabian). See use of social media. Contact with eg Student Cross.

Is a centralised organisation relevant to younger generation? Current membership prefers local groups linked to central Association. (Success of eg U3A local groups)

Education: Lack of platform in the Church for educating the laity (Newman's mission). How do we become known to, and work with, eg RCIA and Alpha programmes?

Secondary schools: Experience of 'Newman Lite'.

Parishes: how do Newman Circles work with parishes, particularly with parish priests reluctant or even antagonistic?

Ecumenism: in Hertfordshire we are uniquely placed with an ecumenical chaplaincy in St Albans Cathedral, weekly Mass, and very fruitful partnership in arranging joint conferences and other events. Members did not display any enthusiasm for an 'interdenominational' Newman but would prefer to continue to work with the current situation.

Evangelisation: It was felt we already do this by opening our events to anyone who is interested. (Eg Bishop Sherrington's talk on the Catholic/Methodist alliance, well attended by Methodists and Anglicans)

Exchange of ideas, subjects and speakers between Circles: Should Circle Newsletters with reports of talks be circulated widely?

The conclusion was that everyone thought the Newman should keep going with strenuous efforts to attract a younger generation i.e. the Forties and Fifties and early retired.