

Discussion 1: Journeying Companions

Membership/Composition at Parish level

The parish community is made up of parish Priest, regular churchgoers/mass attendees, occasional attendees as well as the sick/housebound and those registered on the data base. It is mixed age elderly and retired with some young families.

“Active” participants may well be as few as 5% of “regular” attendees.

Margins and Beyond

Those on the edge include people who have got out of the habit of going to a physical church because of Covid and continue to attend online masses.

The divorced, disabled(mobility,sight and hearing impaired),those with learning disabilities and mental health issues, elderly and LGBT+ are also on the margins,

Those we no longer see include those who have attended in the past, perhaps when their children were young and going through the Sacramental programmes and now no longer attend.

Schools/Young People

There are not enough young people in the parish, especially post Confirmation.

Our Secondary school though excellent in quality is mixed gender and a lot of parents want single sex education for their children.

Purpose

It is usually assumed that everyone shares a similar vision of why they are “at Mass”.

However receiving the sacraments, being followers of (the radical) Jesus, having a personal relationship with God and wanting to share it, having a community experience are among different reasons offered.

There seems to be a need to develop a shared understanding of our individual and community roles as Catholic Christians.

Issues/Opportunities

Welcome and Diversity

Welcoming people to the church building had improved because of Covid and the presence of stewards: the extension of their role to an ongoing ministry of welcomer is proposed.

What about a welcome pack for new arrivals?

The need to be more inclusive is expressed: this requires changes in attitudes towards those who we identify as marginalised.

Post Covid Recovery

We need to identify Covid “live streamers” and reach out to bring them back.

To say nothing of those who feel excluded, not welcome- hurt in the past, divorced, gay...

Both these targets present challenges. Can a non judgemental post Covid invite to return encompass both groups?

In Community Involvement

We need more “parishioners” to get involved! Perhaps the small pool “doing” things are perceived to have the situation under control so that additional “help” is not required.

To address the young and their aspirations a Youth Officer is needed: in addition to engagement with their social media. This is the information age: we have to make effective use of **digital** technology.

More is also needed for non-English groups, maybe we could introduce aspects of their culture into our worship? Music/customs.

Access and Perceptions of Parishioners

Covid has allowed us to see the best of other Churches via live streaming.

There is a wealth of masses online, though they miss out on face to face communion

We can now dare ask: Is our parish not inviting or exciting enough?

We need to find out what would encourage people to stay: six monthly input/consultation

Do more people return to the parish as they settle down and have children?

The physical building is also a factor. How much access can be given during the day?

Is it well lighted? And does it say "this is a centre of Christian life"? Cross, Statue or other symbols of Christian Life..

Discussion 2: Listening

An Existential Need

We need to listen to each other, but we are probably all guilty of not listening well enough. This Synod is the first opportunity for the laity to listen to each other on key questions: Will what we pass forward in its turn be listened to?

This listening must take place across the boundaries of pastoral status: listening only to peers negates the purpose of the Synod- all voices are important.

A vehicle for Instruction and Growth

Discussion of parish matters without contention is an improvement over other milieu.

We should have a parish Pastoral **Council**.

Coming together in groups provides more opportunity for both spiritual **formation** and a sense of community: Advent and Lent groups as well as the Sycamore course provide examples.

Contrast ongoing activities (Informal conversations and coffee after mass) limited to a few with the need to reach a wider group (none active parishioners, young people).

We have to address difficulty of making church more inviting and providing encouragement for others to join in: need to involve people who may feel excluded from active participation.

Need to be open to innovation: Do we need a current version of the "Renew" process of the previous generation? Leading to house groups?

Propose a survey every six months to find out views of all parishioners(people at Mass

Consequences of non listening

No follow up from new parishioner forms:- discouragement.

No opportunity in the parish for the laity to be listened to:- disengagement.

No sense of ownership and people afraid to speak:- disappearance.

No sense of change for so long:- disillusion.

Whilst going to church even just as a habit should not be discounted, if we do not listen to each other we remain an assembly of individuals not a community.

Discussion 3: Speaking Out (Communication)

Existing Communications

Communication in the parish is not good. The one page newsletter covering two weeks does not provide sufficient information: it needs to be an exciting vehicle for growth.

The centre- the bishop and diocese - is perceived to provide little communication, which is described as one way. Although the bishop's Thursday email letter was mentioned not all in the group knew about nor had access to it.

Communication is poor at all levels within the Catholic church. There is no platform for the laity to **speak out** at any level.

The Church is used to a top-down approach and the clergy see themselves as "the professionals".

It was suggested that we aren't free to **speak out** and are not listened to e.g. the bishop's reluctance to discuss the role of women in the church. Why not female deacons?

Current Expectations

Living out the Christian faith requires effort and this can be difficult. It involves applying the principles you live your life by, involvement in the church community and practical witness outside church like talking to homeless and supporting foodbank

There is a tension between being more ecumenical - working with other Christians - and historical attitudes which discourage contact.

Our young are more challenging of authority these days and don't always like what they see in the Church.

Parishioners see a difference in ability/effectiveness in communication **skills** between diocesan priests and those belonging to orders.

Although the Church needs to adapt to the changing world, changes locally always seem to require the approval of the parish priest.

Ways to Improve Communications

It would be lovely to see the priest at the end of Mass talking to parishioners in the narthex.

A parish secretary could improve communication. We see more informative and interesting newsletters in other parishes: it remains the non **digital** link for parishioners. This contrasts with the website thought to contain some good information although it can't be accessed by all parishioners.

Our schools and our sacramental programmes focus on children.

We need effective **formation** of **adults** in the faith, so that they have a proper understanding of their role within the Church..

In consequence, there would be no reluctance to **speak out** and share.

Local Synods of the people would help us to focus on what we have in common in service of others

Two final proposals:

Every Parish should have its own Pastoral **Council**.

We should explore the appointment of female deacons. (as a matter of urgency)

Discussion 4 Celebrating

Centrality of Celebration

The Eucharist is central, the main sacrament and its universality throughout the Catholic world is comforting.

The celebration of the Eucharist intrinsically deepens our encounter with God but not because of the way in which we celebrate it. Jesus is really present. "We do feel a glow within when taking communion"

Receiving the Eucharist and generally attending Sunday mass gives spiritual invigoration.

It helps to start the week afresh and remember what's important: this *resonates* into the wider community and those you come into contact with.

Celebration demands that support ministers distributing communion at mass (and to the sick /housebound), receive proper training, fully understand ministry and privilege and serve with obvious joy.

Even the masks and other restrictions applied by COVID rules have not dimmed awareness of the value of praying together with others.

Aspects of Participation in Worship

Routine?

Our faith has to go deeper than the formulaic words.

Our celebration of Mass is formulaic, it doesn't always inspire.

The laity are generally passive, the priest saying the Mass on our behalf.

Music can help to inspire and uplift us.

Special Occasion?

We need to be reminded of the symbols in the Mass to help inspire us. Not OK just to "be there" – active participation is needed.

Remembering being server as a boy and got more out of it because of the active involvement, not just Mass happening "up there": Christmas Midnight Mass was always special.

Females until relatively recently banned from active participation and only recently involved as readers, Eucharistic ministers and girl altar servers

Do not always find Mass here inspiring- since lockdown have seen other Masses livestreamed where celebration is more "alive". Not always spiritually uplifting so is this reason for few young people?

Our Easter celebration should be at a different level. Can Easter be just like a normal Sunday?

We have lost the sense of occasion associated with the Holy Week.

Need an initiative to recover involving everyone especially servers, musicians, readers.

Who will take the initiative?

Physical Space?

Location makes a difference.

Some do not understand people "at the back" as they need to be close "up the front".

There is a culture of going to the back seats in Catholic churches.

Being seated in the round encourages participation, offers a sense of community.

Prayer as Worship

In prayer, we give thanks (*to God*) for the many good things in our lives as we recognise and are grateful for all we have e.g. families and the kindness of others in the church community

We pray to be a good person as we ask for forgiveness and acknowledge that God is there to help, comfort and guide us.

There can be dry periods in prayer and it can become mechanical; repetitious prayer like the Rosary requires perseverance and a conscious refocusing so it is not just a habit.

If we forget the words of a prayer, we can just talk to God

Prayer as Service

We pray for strength in our lives, in our various roles e.g. as parents: praying with children at bedtime is important and enriching.

We pray for others e.g. the safety and well being of family and friends, and those who are sick

The prayer board at church emphasises the role of the community in praying for one another.

Discussion 5 Co- Responsibility in the Mission

Our Mission: Understanding our Role

Communal

What is the mission of the Church/the mission of St Clement's?
What is our role in that mission? To spread the word of God.
This raises the practical question, how?
By setting an example, being ready to **speak out**.
Yet we would find it hard to be street pastors!

Mission and discipleship are basic – that is the commission of Jesus
but the disciples had met Jesus in person when He was **on** earth...

Many still have image of mission being undertaken by Religious Orders (men and women) but mainly overseas.

Other denominations are expected to go out and proselytise: we experience nothing in the Catholic Church to prepare us to do this. Is it expected?

Need to have mission focussed inclusive local church community: complete with mission statement

Individual

Being a good role model in our behaviour and how we live our lives, being conscious of what we do is important to demonstrate our faith to others

Spreading the word to others can be off putting if the approach is too pushy

There can be an opportunity to talk about faith if someone appears interested or asks questions – it should be them asking, not us telling

The demonstration of the strength of people's faith after Pope John Paul's death inspired some to express the wish they had faith

The fear of being criticised and seen as different stops us **speaking out** (or even displaying Christian symbols): *as can ridicule or being put down without explanation.*

Outreach and Returners

Being welcomed when you first come to the church is important. A positive result of the pandemic: this was now a regular part of all masses

One parishioner remembered being visited in their home by two parishioners after they first moved in and registered – perhaps this could be reinstated with a team offering this?

Those who return to the church after an absence can find it daunting; perhaps there could be some welcome videos on our website with opportunity to recap on faith.

The parents' sessions in the first communion programme also offer some revision of faith

To reach out to younger people requires a sensitive approach. Use of social media, videos and tailoring courses like Sycamore are proposed.

It seems to us that young people from non-Christian faiths remained strong in their faith in a way that young Catholics don't after confirmation. Does Confirmation orient towards mission?

Empowering us For Mission

We feel uncomfortable in talking about faith because we lack adult **formation**.

In effect we need faith **deepening formation**.

Where would we get this **formation**? Where do we get answers to questions post Confirmation?

Courses for readers, catechists etc have helped, also Sycamore, but ongoing training is needed

There are lots of existing resources, podcasts, TV stations (EWTN) that can help us to understand our faith, and help us to be ready for questions. However the focus has to be toward mission. Need new creative approaches and different ways of learning (even brainstorming). The need to share is recognised in a call for material for young people so they can share together.

To take responsibility people need to be open. We can for example consider house prayer groups, not always in church buildings

A sense of personal and collective integrity must be recovered. *(if we are sinners then we are forgiven sinners)*

Community Impact

We feel that our local church has little impact on the community - it does not play much of a part: we seem to exist in isolation.

As we come out of the (Covid) restrictions, maybe we need to reach out to local denominations again.

Restarting the food bank donations would be a good idea. The imperative "Love one another" (As I have loved you Jn15:12) implies: Go out to the community in need.

Discussion 6: Dialogue in Church and Society

Dialogue: Society and Faith

Our dialogue with others is affected by what has happened in the last 50 years (*since Vatican II and the ecclesial equivalent of an Arab Spring*) including the exclusion of LGBT+.

Dialogue needs to recognise common humanity: and that people make mistakes

It was suggested that Pope Francis in his humility and attempts to reach out to the marginalised might be viewed well in wider society.

Perhaps those involved with young people such as University chaplains can help to play an important role in making the Church more relevant to the world

At all levels we need to be aware of other Christians and other faiths. How much do we know of what Hindus, Muslims and Jews do and the impact of the practice of their religions?

Abuse and dialogue

Sadly the Church's reputation is tarnished with the abuse scandals that have occurred. Does the world now want to listen and have dialogue with it. In Ireland this effect has been particularly marked, with many moving away from the faith as a result.

Although opinion differs over the current extent of abuse some felt the issue had not been dealt with robustly enough. We have to deal with the issue head on as the wider community has the perception that it has been swept under the carpet.

The Church needs to lead by example, with repentance and contrition from the hierarchy, reaching out and perhaps using platforms like (digital) social media to get its message across. That this has happened in other institutions is clear, but not an excuse either for the abuse itself or the inexcusable cover up.

Self Perception: some dialogue opportunities.

Do Catholics exude a holier than thou attitude? People in other denominations seem to be more evangelical, have more uplifting hymns and move about more.

We should be proclaiming the love of God, not rules. We need to understand that it is not enough just to go to Mass on Sundays.

The Pope speaks at the moment in his actions, he shows the way.

We hope this synodal process will help us to achieve a more effective dialogue inside and outside the church.

As individuals we get on with parishioners of other denominations.

To offer any dialogue we have to meet together people from Ewell **Council** of Churches (Churches Together in Ewell).

In Church Dialogue

We need dialogue within our own Church.

Individual priests can for example be rigid/lenient in allowing communion.

Ordinary people need to be heard

We are family so we do need to talk to each other and share differences.

Need to catechise the whole church family, as well as individual families.

We see nothing formal between the preparation for the sacraments – Baptism, gap, First Confession and Communion, and gap to Confirmation. These gaps are not simply filled by “events” - coffee after Mass is not enough. What about Faith events to attract others, particularly young people.

Dialogue presumes that we properly include and involve people with disabilities and people with different lifestyles

At a simple resource level surely marriage preparation for example can be shared with other denominations or even other faiths?

Discussion 7: Other Christian denominations

Personal Experiences

One participant expressed good fortune in having family members from other Christian denominations which enriched dialogue between them.

Those who have attended other Christian services have felt enriched by them e.g. Evensong, Christmas Carols

Sometimes Christians from other denominations put us to shame, both in their prayer devotion and the living of their faith. They are usually confident in leading extempore prayer for the occasion.

Other denominations have open friendship groups, cafés and caring clubs

By contrast as Catholics are we too passive: often we go to Mass and that's it. Is that enough?

We need to be faith **community**: and express that as we welcome people, focus on the person of Jesus and rely on the Holy Spirit

Local Church Experience

Churches Together in Ewell and the **Women's World Day of Prayer** and **Good Friday witness walks** have been effective local ecumenical initiatives. They have been curtailed by Covid and it is hoped they will resume.

Although St Clements is a member of **Churches Together in Ewell** it is not seen as active, reflecting its profile in the community

Need to examine what is our relationship with the local community.

The doors to the church are too often locked, not a friendly sign. Perhaps bright welcome signs can feature at all entrance doors.

Wider Issues

The wider world does not understand divisions in Christianity so we need to work together to be heard. Jn 17:21 that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me.

The success of house groups and less formal Churches has been noted. We can perhaps learn from them in our emergence from Covid.

There has been too much focus on maintaining structures rather than going out to share the Good News. This is a "shared" experience. We need to transition from maintenance to mission.

There was some lively discussion about the role of married Anglican clergy in the Catholic church., where many now function as priests.

Whilst they are welcomed because of our own dearth of priests, there are reservations that some may have joined the Catholic church because they are opposed to women priests and bishops. (Some participants themselves did not like the idea of women celebrants, expressing that it was unscriptural!).

It was noted that "lack of priests" locally was turning our attention towards continents like Africa and Asia for priests. It was questioned whether those only having experience in a religious community could easily adjust to being a parish priest here.

We need to transform the culture to be open, Christ centred and allow in the Holy Spirit. Although this is said of the Church it applies to the wider world.

Discussion 8 Authority and Participation

The Authority Model

Authority comes top down from Rome, via Archbishops, Bishops Conference, Diocesan Bishops and Priests.

The Diocese is autocratic and “Top down”

If “Authority” is from the top; we need correct information from the top.

Power is seen to be exercised but not by us, you and me.

Need to get Church authorities to understand that we are the Church

Informal Structures

Empowerment comes from the Mass to galvanise us to Mission. The Laity have authority to join the mission via our Baptism and Confirmation.

However, there are no **authorised** groups through which the laity can carry out this Mission: maybe this is why we are having a synodal process.

Do we have an awareness of preaching the gospel as our job-priest, prophet and king?

We preach the Gospel through the way we live our lives, living out our faith in our other roles and by example.

Hearing the Gospel and homily may inspire us.

Evangelisation, Formation and Sacramental Programmes

Sacramental preparation can play a role in bringing people to Christ. As can talking to others and again, the example of our lives and what we do.

More courses like Sycamore allowing small group discussion would be desirable; use of other online resources such as CAFOD Stations of the Cross.

Alpha courses in some parishes **directly promote evangelisation.**

At present there is no post confirmation **formation.**

There could be courses/ meetings/ videos for adults and young people after sacramental preparation.

We only get extracts from the Gospel at Sunday Mass but need preachers to help us grasp the whole of Scripture: like Bishop Barron and others

There is a lot out there but we need to gather together the list of resources and our newsletter is insufficient for the task

Orientation

This collaboration can lead to a growth in faith and understanding. One obstacle is time, especially for younger working people and families.

Our St Anthony’s group addresses some pastoral care for housebound Parishioners

We have had Lent/Advent groups in homes and at the church in the past.

We need to communicate as a vibrant community to encourage others

We need to be more outward facing to non-affiliates and other denominations.

Some other parishes are more dynamic enabling things to happen

New initiatives are needed... Tradition occurs when something happens at least twice

Discussion 9 Discerning and Deciding

What is being discerned?

We do not even know how the decisions of priests and bishops are arrived at.

In terms of discernment and decision making, it was felt to be a drawback that there is no forum to put ideas forward as there is no parish **Council** or team supporting Father Graham. It is right that the final decision is Father Graham's, but others could support him in this process. See the innovations of teams in "Divine Renovation".

This would help with transparency in accountability and decision making.

This would be different from the parish meetings that have been held in the past which were not always positive in nature.

We don't take part in decisions, seeing the result afterwards

Importance of the Holy Spirit as without Him we go nowhere!

Discerning People?

Laity have never been asked to participate in discernment: these Synod discussion groups are a first: there is no laity decision making. Are we involved, even at parish level? No!

Very often it is the same (*limited number of*) people who participate in Church life, beyond attending mass. Perhaps breaking down what is involved so that others can see what might be required, what the commitment is, may encourage others on board.

Perhaps a digital database of **skills**, talents could be set up. *One person thought that it is up to the individual to offer their **skills** which would then be welcomed by the priest.*

The role of women is a limited one in the Church which curtails their freedom in exercising their **gifts**.

Aids to Discernment?

One person talked of another parish where the parish **Council** was made up of individuals with different organisational responsibilities which are then shared with others.

We are told what **happens** and accept it! There is no avenue to dispute if we disagree and people simply leave the Church if they are not happy...

The Church is a theocracy not a democracy! There is no mechanism for the laity to support bishops and priests in decision making, although individuals may make suggestions at parish level.

We may pray for discernment, that we have more opportunity to meet and discuss, yet the laity still have a passive role in discernment.

Are we too wedded to the status quo?

Lack of married men (and women) priests

The Mass groups are parallel, almost separate parishes.

Symbolism is not always clear to us today

Would we gather the talents and commitment of the parish via a Ewell census?.

Are we willing to get all church groups (clerical and laity) established on an equal footing, with an equal sense of mission and shared message, so that the Church can move to a united and outgoing sense of missionary discipleship?

Many people are seeking but we do not collectively reach out to them.

What do we need to do?

We need to expand on the Mass readings to extend our understanding of Scripture: there are courses on this eg time line for the events in the Scriptures

We need to start up parish meetings again and they need to be more regular with an agenda sent out in advance and AOB allowed.

We need to do things together because we are the Church

We need to feel we are part of the worshipping community

We need to claim our role

We need to listen to people in respectful, open and transparent dialogue

We need to be enabled!

We need to work together helping people to grow

Discussion 10 Forming Ourselves in Synodality

Understanding Synodality

What is going on and what should be going on?

Need to start living like a faith community

What do we believe in?

More regular discussions would help continue the dialogue. This has been an enjoyable and worthwhile exercise, although at times the language and phrasing of the questions didn't make them easy to answer.

It is important that the laity **feel** that they have been listened to and that something positive will come out of this process.

Getting people to be who they are- realise that they are beloved of God.

People need to hear that and take it on board

It is hoped that reflection on it will have a collaborative element, both at parish and diocesan level.

What are the fruits of collaboration?

What next and what is the way forward?

Promoting Synodality

Laity want to be involved; we are honoured to be taking baby steps in this process.

As said before, courses and also follow up to sacramental preparation could help in **formation**.

Passing on faith- effective to a degree but not with young people post Confirmation.

It is difficult to engage the young as they have other pulls on their interest and they often cannot see the relevance to their lives.

Tools for synodality- they are largely already there e.g. the internet. This could be used more at local level e.g. a community page on Facebook, as per the example of St. John's Stoneleigh. Possibly a young person could be involved e.g. as part of a school project.

Although, it was acknowledged that Facebook is not the platform of choice for young people!

We need to be heard, are the laity going to be empowered?

Things which are important in the life of the parish community are not just for the priest alone.

We need to ask for what we need, to reorganise and move on

Any reason why we can't have local reviews of how the synodal process is progressing?

Open meetings on zoom.

We need to be aware of the range of **skills** available

We need to talk and share at parish level to use our **gifts**

Achieving Synodality

What additional **formation** do I need? Need to pray!

Prayer life and relationship with the Lord are key

Need to be called to mission

Want to be using our **gifts** for the glory of God.

We need group meetings, sharing, learning, building community.

We need a voice but not by delegation.

Are we people built in faith, having an impact on the community around us?

Priests need to empower the people to be missionary disciples, using all relevant media to develop a culture of continuous life long spiritual development and formation.

Clerics need to delegate so that laity can participate more: in church, on line or in house groups

Lack of priests will lead to de-clericalisation, so we need to start preparing now.

We need to learn to grow together.

There is danger in acting as being individuals in a materialist, individualistic society.

The parish should be people working together, around the Eucharist

One person is nothing on his/her own but needs to collaborate with others

Solidarity with other Christians too is key and we must work together to get the job of evangelisation done.

Invite other denominations into our groups.