

Summary of SYNOD Session 1: Communion Face to Face Group

1. Journeying Companions

Since the pandemic some people have changed to attending Mass online. What will be done to minister to them? The Church needs to pro-active in reaching out to parishioners who have not returned to Mass as a result of the COVID pandemic.

Different categories of Catholic were described: the committed who attended Mass regularly; cultural Catholics who only attend church for occasions such as rites of passage; and Catholics who no longer associate themselves at all with the Church. The culture around us is anti-religion so we have to be brave to counteract it.

Fear for the future of the Church was expressed and the examples of Ireland and Poland were mentioned.

The absence of young people in the Church was a significant concern. Whilst support for children and their parents was provided up first Holy Communion - with the exception of Confirmation preparation - little support was provided thereafter for young people. A more radical approach to catechesis for the sacraments that would engage more was described with reference to a model based on the RCIA. It was perceived to be challenging to retain young people but the provision of specific parish activities for them and welcoming them into existing parish groups might help.

Absent or marginal groups referenced were gay and divorced Catholics. We saw a number of groups as on the edges; young people; disabled and housebound; the 'dropped off', some of whom still pray; the 'semi-detached'; young families.

A lack of welcome exists in our church, e.g., during after-Mass coffee, some new couples to the parish were observed to be sitting alone. New parishioners need to be welcomed and encouraged. In our parish we need a strong welcoming ministry, responsible for Goodbyes as well, for those who do come to church, maybe hesitatingly.

2 Listening

We were concerned that the question referred only to horizontal communication. We need communication all ways. We need to be able to speak out honestly and with respect and to be listened to. We did not feel this was happening in our diocese at the moment.

We considered the position of the priest, with fast dropping numbers and asked 'Why'. Married, mature men are needed and lay people need to take on responsibility for tasks which do not require a priest. The experience in the growth of the number of married permanent Deacons is encouraging.

Listening well requires time and the rise of 'texting' culture militates against this. The hierarchy feels it knows better than the laity and it does not listen to them. Church initiatives tend to be top down in approach with little consultation, e.g., changes to the

liturgy. It was noted that the clergy were currently overwhelmed with duties and this made communication more difficult. The diocesan plan indicates that the current state of local parishes could not be sustained and it was likely that some would be combined. The role of the laity would necessarily become more enhanced. Doubt was expressed however about whether the laity would still be listened to.

Priests should not only be only celibate and male: married priests, women priests and lay preachers need to be considered as options.

Developed relations - and shared activities - between the parishioners in the Deanery should be encouraged.

Meetings - such as this Synod one - were perceived to be a good initiative in promoting talking and listening.

3 Speaking out

The Catholic Church in England has lost its way. Whether it is British reserve or other factors, the Church here no longer evangelises. Both individually and as a Church we need to be courageous and be sure that what we say will not antagonise the so many 'semi-detached' Catholics

- There is a strong need for Bible study in parishes.
- Catholics need to be aware of current events in the Church.
- There is a pressing need for personal holiness among Catholics.
- The Church has a lot of scandal to live down.

A word that sums up what the Church means to you

Attractive

Home

Welcome

Leviathan

Belonging

Universal family

Summary of SYNOD Session 2: Participation. Face to Face group

4. Celebrating

The Mass is a key part of Catholic life. Inspiring hope and confidence, it imparts the gift of grace and encouragement. Many members of the group felt that celebrations did provide for a deeper encounter with the Lord and that we gain a sense of community as a result. For some, the Mass is at the centre of their lives. And being at Mass elevates life; indeed, life seems empty without it. Most – but not all – were able to follow Mass online during the pandemic and this proved a great consolation.

Most found great joy in following Mass streamed from all kinds of different churches. One of the highlights noted was the good quality of the sermons. Watching online Mass became part of many parishioners' day and it was watched frequently during the week. However, it can be problematic if people don't return physically to Mass when they can. The loss of receiving the Eucharist is an important issue.

Concern was raised by some about the changing comportment at Mass; particularly where it concerned a lack of reverential quiet at the end of Mass; the occasional intrusive behaviour of young children during the service was also perceived by some to be a problem.

In our prayer we give thanks for the Church; for the NHS (clapping); the rapid development of vaccines and the advance of the technology of communications that keeps us in touch with our families and our community. We pray for help and the guidance of the Holy Spirit in seeking God's will.

Sadly, when parishioners leave the church on a Sunday it can feel like 'going into a void' - into a world which neither acknowledges or is even aware of Christ. But some in this world respect us and may even ask for our prayers.

5. Co-responsibility in the Mission

The mission of the Church was defined by one as 'spreading the good news'. However, there was strong resistance to the idea of knocking on doors and attempting to persuade people to join the Church; although admiration was expressed for those denominations who do undertake this kind of evangelisation.

Although there was agreement that sometimes we lack the courage in talking about the faith, it was felt that more indirect forms of evangelisation were best. First, one must become a good Christian oneself; and then provide a good example to others by the way one lived one's life. Direct proselytising was disapproved of.

We need to understand our community as it is today. In our world of sound bites, one gift we could give is to spend time really listening to people.

Since our church is located on a busy bypass, might we not appeal to passing drivers by means of a series of banners with Christian messages on our prominent bell tower? This could be an action undertaken by a group of parishioners.

6. Dialogue in Church and Society

Responses to this set of questions were distinctly downbeat. It was felt that the secular world not only ignored Christianity but positively discriminated against it in our society. The present scourge of clerical abuse of vulnerable people in the Church resulted in negative media coverage and encouraged in outsiders a jaundiced view of the Church.

However, we are good at responding to material needs e.g., supporting the local food bank, Fairtrade and Live Simply initiatives. In this we follow Jesus, but are we responding to the community's spiritual needs?

7. Other Christian Denominations

Whilst inter-church activities have been absent since the pandemic, several people spoke of interesting and worthwhile events they had attended with other local churches, e.g., at St Mary's, Ewell, the Methodist church and the Women's World Day of Prayer. One contributor mentioned that she prays online with Christians from different churches. However, by no means everyone had taken part in ecumenical events. Some felt that *Local Churches Together* is moribund.

One of the strengths of our fellow Christians is the study of the Bible. Could we start Bible Study groups in our parish?

Perhaps we should consider building stronger links with those beyond our own parish such as other parishes in the deanery or external agents such as our MP.

Summary of SYNOD Session 3: Mission Face to Face group

8. Authority and participation

It was noted that authority should operate at different levels, i.e. subsidiarity should be active. Most group members were not sure that there were opportunities for laity to participate in decision making at any level of the Church. We couldn't work out where authority in the Church really comes from.

Current participation in the life of the parish has diminished. The closure of much parish life due to COVID has meant that groups, courses and initiatives have not been possible (an exception was the recent Zoom 'Sycamore' course). People can also be made to feel they belong in social events, coffee mornings etc. However, the importance of parish sacramental programmes in bringing people nearer to Christ was noted.

9. Discerning and deciding

We feel that we do not listen to the Holy Spirit as much as we should, but He has brought us together now. It was accepted that the Synod was designed to address this point.

The parish would benefit from an active pastoral team. There was no lack of desire to support priests and bishops but the group did not feel confident that what they had to say had any influence in the decisions made at a higher level.

Post-pandemic, the group are keen to support a greater level of parishioner input to help with accountability and transparency. Open Parish meetings were considered a very positive approach to address the roles within the Church and to encourage more support from the youth and families.

10. Forming ourselves in Synodality

These Synod discussions have opened conversations on topics not usually shared among parishioners. This was considered to be a good thing.

Future parish projects need the laity to take responsibility, but offer them sufficient time to make them happen.

Communication throughout the Church is very important and considered lacking at many levels. At Parish level, the weekly Newsletter is considered an important form of messaging that could always be expanded upon.

More informal meetings to discuss our faith should be encouraged, as well as better supporting *Churches Together* to develop contact with other Christians. We should also develop a greater awareness and knowledge of non Christian faiths.