

Session One: Communion

I. Journeying Companions

Think of those who form our parish community as we journey together. Which people or groups are on the edges of our community? Whom do we know who no longer walks with us, those who used to and now we don't see? How do we engage with those for whom the experience of Covid has prompted thoughts about faith? How do we welcome people?

- Parish community is made up of mostly retired people.
- Single people, divorced, LGBT and those with special needs can feel on the edge of our community. The sick and housebound can often feel discarded while those who have been hurt in some way feel they are walking alone.
- Young families and their children, and many adult children and grandchildren of ours, are not seen as much now. They are absent from our churches because they find them unwelcoming, boring, distant, and even irrelevant. This is a source of great sadness.
- Spiritual growth can take place in many settings when we are willing to have dialogue with others.
- Efforts are made by stewards to welcome parishioners back to celebrate the liturgy in a safe way but we need to acknowledge that we all have a role to play in welcoming each other.
- How do we engage with those who for whatever reason are not returning to Mass? What can we do as a community to help them? Many of these people are old and vulnerable and, in many cases, not able to access Services through the Internet.

II. Listening

Do we listen to each other? How do we best do this – people to people, clergy to clergy, bishops to bishops? How do we deepen our listening, making it a “a listening of the heart” and not just of the issues and subjects at hand? How do we ensure that the Church responds to the culture and needs of society?

- Many do not generally feel listened to in the church although believe there is a need for patience and deep listening, giving true attention. This is done best when practiced at all levels and not in little huddles.
- Parishioners need to be listened to when there is discussion about closing parishes so that they can be given the opportunity to form a community without a resident priest. There is a sense that these decisions are made at diocesan level.
- Some people expressed cynicism or even anger at their doubts about whether the synod process would be true to Pope Francis's intentions, or whether it would be controlled by the clerical “establishment”.
- Pope Francis is seen as a beacon of hope

III. Speaking Out

What is the communication like in our group/parish/diocese? Do we have the freedom to speak freely, openly, and respectfully? How am I living out my Christian life

- Communication has been more difficult during the pandemic and has left parishioners feeling that they do not know what is going on.
- Many ask –“Where were the hierarchy during the pandemic?– there were so many social issues – equality, poverty, domestic abuse – it would have been an ideal time to speak – not a word.”
- The Synod process – is offering the chance for the parish to grow, where we have been able to speak freely, openly, and respectfully.
- We are too clericalized, too reliant on a priest. When the Parish Priest changes, there is an impact on many aspects of parish life. This can be very disruptive and people can be very hurt in the process. This can apply whether or not the priest is resident.
- Some in parish were hurt by decision to close Newhaven & felt they were not listened to. In the future we may have no resident priest – we need support and encouragement of diocese to build our local Catholic community.
- Christian life is lived out through our personal relationships and also: support for foodbanks, CAFOD, homeless initiatives, refugee charities, prison visiting etc.

Session 2: Participation

IV. Celebrating

Do our celebrations in Church inspire a deeper encounter with the risen Lord? How does my prayer – both individually and in my community – enable my participation in the mission of the Church? Is the Eucharist the centre of mine, and my community’s life? What flows from the Sunday (or daily) Eucharist, from our communities into the world? What do I give thanks to God for in prayer? What do I seek from him?

- For many of us, who are in the main, retired, the Mass is an important focus of our week. A proportion of parishioners attend daily Mass when available. It is seen as an opportunity to meet God through shared worship and be sustained by reception of the sacraments.
- Our expectation and experience of Mass is often governed by the style of the Liturgy. By the same token there was no common denominator in this: Music/no music; modern/traditional; quiet/children orientated; feeling involved/a time of quiet prayer. All styles had their supporters and detractors
- Tuning in to Live Streamed Masses during the pandemic had varied reactions– for some it has been an enriching and valuable experience whilst others have found it hard to engage in the process.

- Some people think there is too much emphasis on the Priest. We can come together as lay people for prayer and non-eucharistic services. There is a need to be more open to accepting married and women deacons and priests.
- Many felt bolstered by their attendance at Services and feel it enriches their lives, enabling them to give more readily to the larger community: family, friends and neighbours, together with those they serve.

V. **Co-responsibility in the Mission**

Do I understand the mission of the Church - in my own life, in the local church, and the universal church? How do our lives relate to the Great Commission of Jesus (Matt 28:18- 20*)? What formation do I need to be more committed to the mission of the Church? What impact is our local community making in the area – do we make a difference?

- We don't wear our Catholicism on our sleeve. When we meet people, we never know whether they are Catholics, except at Church...
- Each one of us can enrich our community by offering our gifts, charisms, talents and skills within and outside of the Church.
Helping others is very uplifting and reassuring in what we believe - in giving we receive 100-fold.
- Jesus' words look very simple - but we all need adult formation.
- We need to re-create opportunities to help faith grow in our community and in ourselves. Examples are:
 - Groups for prayer and/or discussion
 - Richard Rohr (CAC) sharing Group
 - Groups for young people and youth
 - Trips, Pilgrimages
 - Christian unity events, e.g. Good Friday Witness walk
 - Initiatives to get people together socially
 - Groups for music, poetry, arts
- The impact of our community in the area is through support for foodbanks, CAFOD, homeless initiatives, refugee charities, prison visiting as well as through our personal relationships. However, we need to do more to make a difference and be relevant.

VI. Dialogue in Church and Society

How do we understand dialogue (respectful conversation) between Church and the wider Society? Do we see dialogue as a unique contribution that the Church can make to the world? How do we address the challenges that dialogue brings about? How do we begin to dialogue with others?

- There is a world out there that is hurting. We need to move outside the Church buildings and lead by example.
- The Church needs to examine itself in all aspects. If we want to see dialogue as a unique contribution that we can make to the world, we must change too. We must be prepared to change as individuals from within. We need to accept people and meet them where they are.
- Prejudice against Catholics in British society is still there.
- Need to acknowledge reality and impact of scandals of sex abuse in the Church – some called for the Church to apologise. Impacts trust in and within the church.
- Harder to share with people with somewhat different religious outlooks so tend to stop on the social level.
- We can engage with others through so many mediums including Art & Music

VII. Other Christian Denominations

What is our relationship with other Christian communities? Do we listen to each other as we journey on our pilgrim way? What enriches us from other traditions? What do we offer them from ours?

- We need to be more involved in ecumenical activities.
- Join others in Celebration where they are, acknowledging their spirituality
- Through engaging with other Christian Churches and other Faiths we can show care for one another.
- Some have experienced division arising in the name of religion, in marriages, universities, services, sectarianism
- Need to acknowledge strengths and gifts of other faiths and religions.
- Initiatives to meet other denominations and faiths happened some time ago but some members of congregation got very upset.
- Individuals do have good relationships with people of other faiths and denominations.
- Roman Catholic church offers the sacraments.

Session 3 Mission

VIII. Authority and Participation

How is authority exercised in our communities? How do we preach the Gospel? How does our parish community bring people closer to Christ? What groups or courses are available, what initiatives are in place? What are the fruits of this collaboration, and what are the obstacles and challenges?

- Authority and Participation need to be coupled with Responsibility for our words and actions. This responsibility is at all levels – parish, deanery, diocese.....The ultimate authority within our community is the Parish priest. Is there a need to look again at Canon Law?
- The church continues to be male dominated. We must be proactive to move forward. We see no equality in the Church. As a people (women in particular?) we are not valued. In general, our gifts and talents are not recognised.
- Homilies encourage us to question ourselves and take on board our responses. It promotes a faith based on the love of God, not fear and punishment. It is a proclamation of the Gospel which we are encouraged to live and pass on. We can bring people closer to Christ by our own personal witness to the message
- We have groups that come together to pray, to serve and enhance our parish. E.G. coffee mornings, meditation, flower arranging, cleaning, welcoming, visiting the sick and house bound. However, many parishioners are reluctant to mix and not all the groups have reformed, due to fears of Covid.
- We have a children's liturgy group which is growing in strength although many teenagers feel that the church is not relevant to them. Often children and young people attend to prepare for FHC and Confirmation and then we lose them. We need to learn from other denominations (e.g. Baptists and Kings church) in order to attract them.
- The fruits of collaboration are a healthier, empowered people who know each other well because we have engaged and are concerned for our welfare. This will encourage us to then reach out more.
- The obstacles and challenges are that often something seems easier and quicker to do yourself rather than to discuss. We need to take people with us. Lack of self-confidence and self-esteem can also be an obstacle.

IX. Discerning and Deciding

How do we discern together the direction in which the Holy Spirit is leading us? Is there freedom to exercise my particular gifts in the Church, and participate in this common work of discernment and decision making? Is my parish community accountable and transparent in decision making? What can help improve this? Do I support the Bishops and the Priests in arriving at their decisions?

- We discern through prayer and affirmation.
- We can exercise our gifts in a light-hearted, informal way with friends, work colleagues and family and by the way we conduct our lives. “Extravert evangelism” is not what many of us feel comfortable with.
- We do not feel that we are being given the opportunities to participate and be listened to but acknowledge that it is beginning to happen. The Synod groups are giving us a sense of empowerment.
- It is not always clear how Bishops and Priests arrive at their decisions. We can only support their decisions if we understand them.

X. Forming ourselves in Synodality

What additional formation do I need to be a missionary disciple? Is the local community effective in catechising and passing on the faith? What tools are necessary for the Church to be truly synodal, listening and journeying together? How do we continue the listening and dialogue beyond this process so that the Church have a “lived synodality” as the Holy Father asks?

- We have stopped growing and stayed at the level of children and need to be willing to mature which often involves letting go of old practices.
- Homilies are a source for Formation along with groups which can be formed in the parish to explore our faith, but we need to desire to change and grow – to journey. DABCEC should be a source to support formation.
- Many have substituted going to church with a preference for Sport and other leisure activities. For some, changing work practices have put additional pressures on them. The church needs to be more flexible to accommodate their changing lifestyles and needs.
- When the ‘Way’ was first formed as in the Acts of the Apostles it was vibrant. We are now often seen as boring, dull and not interacting with our local community.
- We continue by building each other up, improving communication and by encouraging each other both in our parishes and the wider community.