

*A Synodal Church, in announcing the Gospel, “journeys together”. How is this “journeying together” happening today in your parish? How is the Holy Spirit inviting your parish community to grow in “Journeying together”? Where in these experiences do you hear the voice of the Holy Spirit.*

There are many successful groups in the parish whose members are journeying together, however, the parish as a whole is not. There were comments from several that the parish is fragmented.

Many spoke of the joys they find in the parish community, again mostly in the groups, the friendliness, the sense of belonging and being part of a family. The groups are very loyal to the parish and will always "rise to the occasion". Many believed the Holy Spirit was present and the voice of the Holy Spirit was guiding them, even if unrecognised.

The only comment about **growing** in journeying together was that the Synodal conversations were helping the parish to grow in journeying together.

We were also asked to comment at this stage about difficulties and obstacles to active parish life. Some of these will occur in the other sections, however, it was stated that some people lack self-confidence, some are simply apathetic - relying on the core parishioners to support the parish.

We have good local Catholic schools, however, where are the pupils on Sundays? Many blamed the current culture prevalent in our society, others simply the parents.

## **Core Question 1 – Listening**

*How is God speaking to us through the voices that are in our midst? How is God speaking to us through voices we sometimes ignore, including those on the peripheries? What space is there to listen to the voices on the peripheries, especially cultural groups, women, the disabled, those who experience poverty, marginalisation, or social exclusion?*

First point to note is that there was vehement objection to "women" being included amongst those on the peripheries. It was felt very strongly this was not the case, it was obvious from the fact that approximately 80% of those attending the Synodal conversations were women. More use should be made of women, often people find it easier to approach women, especially other females, they are also often better at listening.

God is speaking to us in many ways, however, sometimes it is a challenge to listen. Some of the ways people felt that God was speaking to us through voices in our midst were: through our friends and colleagues within the parish, through attendance at Mass and other parish meetings, through Christian literature - for example Bible Alive, Walk With Me, Catholic newspapers and periodicals - The Church Times, The Tablet for example, through radio and television programmes for example Songs of Praise, and occasionally random events like a telephone call which has the voice of God hidden within the conversation.

Regarding those on the peripheries whose voices we sometimes ignored, this raised more questions than answers. How can we judge who is on the peripheries? How are we ignoring voices? It was stated that the parish never deliberately ignores a voice that is heard. Do we have a twinge of conscience at times for not doing more about those on the peripheries? Once again who and how? Maybe we have to listen better.

Within the parish there appeared to be only specific spaces to listen to certain groups on the peripheries. For example, those who are sick or lonely, there is a parish visiting group who look after these, however, in most cases we have to be informed first. Although Welcoming before Mass has started again now, being stopped due to the pandemic, the welcomers generally cannot tell who is in poverty, who is suffering social exclusion who is feeling marginalised. In

the wider world we are constantly being bombarded about those on the peripheries, hardly a news broadcast passes without some reference to one minority or another, to the point where it was felt by some that we were continually being lectured on inclusiveness.

It was agreed that we need to engage more and find new, more innovative, ways to do so. We also need a structure to enable us to open up to people's needs and concerns and make them feel more valued.

### **Core Question 2 – Speaking Out:**

*What enables or hinders you from speaking courageously, candidly, and responsibly in your parish and society. What space is there in your parish for the voice of people, including active and inactive members of our faith?*

Note some of the points in this question overlap with question 3 and 4 so these should be considered together.

There were few enablers within the parish: anyone can speak to the welcomers, welcoming attendees at Mass, and there are some well known people in the parish who could be approached. Within society it is dependent on self-confidence, though no-one felt that they were evangelists in the sense of the disciples or any other missionary or preacher. In society, people felt that they were only able to speak candidly with close contacts for example colleagues.

It was agreed that there were more hindrances than enablers. Some did not want to speak out in case they caused offence, some found the language too difficult, even for example the Synodal documents are not in a language that is always plain and simple, and hence does not reflect a Church that is trying to reach out to all. Some did not want to commit to more time that might be involved, some felt restrained by social ethics, some felt a lack of opportunity within the parish, some did not want to appear overtly religious within society - admitting this was due to the culture of the present times, and some simply lacked self-confidence.

For active members of the parish the parish priest is easy to speak to and listens, especially one to one. Generally the parish is a welcoming environment and those active members are open and generous, there is most often a good response when there is new requirement within the parish, either financial or some task to be carried out.

Regarding the space in the parish for the voice of inactive members of our faith the answers were: not good at talking to strangers, there is none, and is there any?

One suggestion to overcome some of the shortcomings was to provide a "Suggestion Box" in which people could post comments, ideas, problems, worries, anonymously if they wish.

### **Core Question 3 – Sharing Responsibility for our Common Mission and Sharing Authority and participation**

*How are the baptised members of your parish able to participate in the mission of the Church to proclaim the Gospel? What hinders people from being active in your parish? How is authority or governance exercised in your local parish? How are teamwork and co-responsibility put into practice in your local parish?*

Note some of the points in this question overlap with question 4 so these should be considered together.

The baptized members participate again in their groups, for example the choir proclaiming the Gospel through their singing, other groups through their good works. As stated earlier there are many active groups in the parish, however, no individual would describe themselves as an evangelist. Most of the groups are active only among others in the parish, there is little outreach to the wider community, probably none during the pandemic and it is going to take some adjusting to reach out to the wider community. Several hindrances that prevent people being active in the parish were raised. Many people lead such a busy life in the culture of our time that they have little time to spend as active members of the parish. Other points raised were: lack of confidence, did not want to volunteer in case one "gets stuck with the job", "others" do the job - this relates to the "core" members of the parish who seem to undertake all the tasks, so it must be made clear that all are welcome and ensure a "closed shop" image does not exist, and finally apathy amongst some members of the parish.

The authority and governance of the parish came in for much criticism. There is a Joint Parish Pastoral Council (JPPC), however, apart from those who were members of the JPPC no-one knew who the parish representatives were. Several did not know the JPPC existed, and again apart from the members no-one knew what was discussed at the meetings. Furthermore it was stated that the JPPC would only discuss matters that affected both parishes so how were matters that affected only our parish to be raised and discussed? In the past there were Parish Meetings. There was a financial committee, did this still meet? There were many suggestions on what should be done to remedy this situation but these will be taken outside the Synod conversations.

Team work and co-responsibility mainly yet again occurs within the groups in the parish and as stated previously these work well and are successful. The individual groups liaise with the parish priest whenever necessary, and again this works well. It was felt that, apart from a leaflet called Helping Hands which is handed-out to newcomers there is little publicity about the many groups and this should be looked at carefully for the future to ensure more members of the parish have the opportunity to become involved.

#### **Core Question 4 – Discerning and Deciding**

*How does your parish use the methods of listening and speaking (consultation) to make decisions? How does your parish promote participation in decision making within the hierarchical Church? Does the decision making of your parish help you to listen to all members of the community, including those who are on the peripheries of parish life?*

Note some of the points in this question overlap with question 3 so these should be considered together.

The methods of listening and speaking (consultation) appear very informal - approach the parish priest who is always willing to listen and will deliberate carefully, asking others that may be involved, before making a decision. Thus there is no known **structure** for this process. In the weekly newsletter there are at times issues raised for which comments or feedback is invited, how successful this is was not known as again there was no known structure for this process. In general it was stated that there was a lack of communication within the parish as a whole entity.

Regarding the parish participating in decision making within the hierarchical Church nothing was known at all.

The decision making within the parish does not help one to listen to **all** members of the community. Once again groups, in consultation with the parish priest, listen to those

concerned, however, there is no known structure in place to enable listening to all members of the community including those on the peripheries. Again the point raised was how are we to recognise some of those on the peripheries? Some would consider those whose contribution to the parish was simply attending Mass on Sunday as on the periphery but others argued they would not see themselves as on the periphery.

Again there were suggestions on how this may be rectified but not in the scope of the Synodal conversations.

### **Core Question 5 – Celebration**

*How do prayer and liturgical celebrations, especially Sunday Mass, inspire and guide your parish? How does your prayer life and celebration of the Mass inspire and inform your personal decisions and decisions in the parish community? How does the parish invite all baptised Catholics, including our ethnic communities, youth, families and persons with disabilities and their families, into the active life of the parish, especially Sunday Mass?*

It is felt that the Holy Spirit is present in Church at Sunday Mass, there is a general feeling of community which some found inspiring. For some the music inspired them, others found the pastoral letters from the Bishop and messages from the Pope inspiring. It was stated, however, that all was not inspiring: the sermons are often too convoluted, too long and the theological points are often above the understanding of many, they should be more in touch with the community. More emphasis during the service on world events would be beneficial. The services, including the Mass are very rarely aimed at children and families. If the Sunday Mass guides our parish then it is due to the presence of the Holy Spirit. More people felt that when prayers are offered on particular occasions these are more likely to guide the parish.

On a personal level, life would not be complete for many without the celebration of at least the Sunday Mass so definitely inspiring, as well as the Mass, prayers and meditation were all helpful in personal decisions. People were unsure whether they helped decisions in the parish community, since many were not involved.

It was stated that there was a feeling that the Church, in the wider sense, was not always welcoming and the "rules of the Church", "man-made" deterred some from attending Mass, for example divorcees. In addition the Church does not always seem welcoming to some who do not always share the traditional Church view such as same-sex couples and the LGBTQ+ community. We must learn to be welcoming to all, not only baptised Catholics but to the wider community and ensure they know that they are **all** welcome.

Once again there appeared a disparity between the numbers attending the Catholic schools and those attending Sunday Mass, and for those attending we must make more effort to actively include them. There is little to attract the youth into active parish life.

It was noted that within the last few years the Church and parish hall, including the toilets had been modified to make disabled access much easier and more convenient. The picture at present is rather false because of the pandemic, many disabled are classified as vulnerable.

It was felt that the parish needs more professional help from the diocese on how to be more inclusive.