

Walking Together Meeting

Saturday 22.1.22

St Anne's Catholic Church, Digbeth, Birmingham

Present: 12

The meeting started with a prayer.

THE QUESTIONS

Fr introduced the background information to the meeting and the information surrounding the Synod.

COMMUNION: The life of the Church - FORMATION

1. **In what ways does the Catholic Church enhance your life?**

- Many areas of life has been enhanced by the Church and sometimes it has led to disappointment, not only with the Church but with oneself also.
- For many it is a social part of their life and they would be lost without it.
- For some it is habit and community and they have been brought up as a Catholic, for some it was an essential part of their position in life/ work.
- A person who had converted to the faith as an adult, had found great comfort in the Church and wouldn't be without it.
- Church can be like a family for some.
- Some people mentioned that they knew non-Catholic people who were just as committed to society and living a good life but did not feel the need to have the Church as part of their life.

2. **Reflecting on 20 months of the pandemic, how has participation in your parish been affected? Were these issues and / or opportunities there before and how can participation be strengthened moving forward into the future?**

- Totally disrupted people's way of life and commitment to Church.
- Some people have decided not to come back to Mass as they get great comfort from Mass online and they are in the safe environment of their own home.
- Some have found different Parishes around the world with retired Priests that they know saying Mass, so have stayed with viewing Mass online.
- It has affected the Parish immensely as people are still afraid to come out.
- It has enhanced some people's lives who have got more involved in the running of the Church since it has reopened as they have become a Church warden, which they have enjoyed. It has been suggested that the meeting and greeting set up when Churches reopened continues as it makes people feel welcome.
- A question was asked about the whereabouts of our young people in the parish and ethnic minorities. This was thought to be because of the welcome that is often missing from many parishes with many been 'clicky.' The Church has not moved with modern times and younger people are often ostracized

and criticised by the hierarchy of the Church and also the Priest and Parishioners within a Church.

- Bus services and parking has changed and is an issue that wasn't there before the pandemic. There has also been a noticeable change with the Clear Air Zone with one parishioner informing the group that her car had had to be changed due to it being 6 months too old (2015 diesel) and the clear air zone would have applied every week.

3. **What are the means by which different voices can be heard in your parish (particularly those on the periphery of parish life)?**

Which groups and individuals are least included in your parish?

- Through meeting and greeting at the door and after Mass as Parishioners leave.
- Welfare of Irish community in the Parish is still a focus.
- LGBT- unsure of any people within the parish as they have not made themselves known and due to whether they would feel comfortable to inform, because of the teachings of the Catholic Church around this subject.
- People commented that the Church should not be controlled and run by one person or group of people, ie, Parish Priest/ Archbishop/ Trustees and that Covid had highlighted the need for Parishioners even more, to be part of the running of every Parish, Diocese, Archdiocese.

4. **How is the Church perceived by members of your family, your friends and work colleagues?**

- One Parishioner quoted, 'Church is loved by some, under suspicion by others and ignored by many.' When talking about the life of the Church within her family.
- Other comments included the fact that if somebody new comes to Church/ Mass and they are disappointed, then it is lost and people will not come back.
- There is a lack of interest with young people.
- The Liturgy needs to speak to people.
- Some won't sit through an hour of Mass.
- There is too much responsibility on Catholic schools to ensure children are prepared for Holy Communion and Confirmation rather than putting the onus onto parents. They are the first educators of their children in the faith and over the years due to many families not attending Mass regularly, the onus has been put onto schools. The schools can support with the teaching of the strategy but maybe the onus needs to go back to parents. Then they will attend Mass if their children want to make any Sacraments.
- One Parishioner commented on the reputation of Catholic schools being good but this reputation is not reiterated within the Church environment.
- There are concerns for the future of the Catholic Church within society with the way it is being run, and the future of it, is an issue.
- Some traditional practices need to be modernized, not the Mass but the Churches dictatorial (in some places) responses.

5. **How might the Church improve its decision-making processes?**

- Parishioners need to be part of the decision making otherwise people think they cannot be heard and are not listened to.
- Parishioners/ other establishments concerns need to be attended to by the Archdiocese and not 'swept under the carpet,' like the past issues of the Church have been, within the Hierarchy, otherwise we could find ourselves in a similar situation in the coming decades.
- Concern that the Parish Priest may have concerns and can only take it to the Deanery where it can be discussed but often they are told to sort it out themselves rather than have a support mechanism around them. They can feel very isolated within their vocation.
- There needs to be a greater transparency in how decisions are arrived at and an explanation as to how any decision has come to its conclusion. At the moment decisions are fed back with no opportunity to question and this is very unsatisfactory.
- In the Anglican Church there is a Lay Group who are chosen to make decisions. These people are chosen using a fair process and the Church has to ensure that any decisions made by the Laity group are followed and upheld. Trustees within the Catholic Church are made up of people known by the Archdiocese and therefore, no transparency, no democratic decisions are arrived at. The Synod of Laity has been quite influential within the Church of England.
- With regard to the Synod feedback to Rome, Parishioners found it unacceptable that the Bishop will decide what is fed back.
- There needs to be a reform of hierarchical structures to enable more inclusiveness by listening, increasing democratic process, empowering Laity, being accountable, honest and trustworthy and to develop trust amongst Laity with hierarchy of Church.
- There is nowhere/ nobody to go/ see if people are not happy and want to express their opinion at Archdiocese. Responses via email are often weak and do not answer the issue or concern raised. People are expected to follow like sheep and accept decision but Church are still very reliant on these same people to help aid the future of the Church. Due to a lot of unhappiness about decisions made, it has led to many leaving the Church and many more continuing to leave the Church.
- The Hierarchy of the Church still have a long way to go to ensure people feel valued within the Church and there is not a culture of, 'Do as I say, not as I do.'

6. **Which of your concerns does the Church fail or struggle to respond to?**

- Treating people at different levels with the hierarchy still being at a higher level to the rest of the people.
- Each person within the Church should be allowed to play their part and respected for the part they are playing. The tradition picture of not being able to question clergy is dying out and people who were brought up this way are very elderly. Therefore this old patriarchal hierarchy will eventually lead to

young people within our Church, not attending and the Church becoming like the Anglican Church has within society. They changed their hierarchical planning when it was too late.

- Failure of inclusivity for all and a reputation of a changing Church is not happening in reality.
- There is a clear transparency concern and the Archdiocese need to become more open to all.
- Brushing issues under the carpet continues and honesty continues to be an issue, despite the fact we were reassured this would not happen again.
- Expression of good Catholic people leaving the Church and their professions due to lack of compassion and the fact that Laity are expected to follow Catholic Social Teaching at all levels but Clergy and other departments within the organisation (not all) do not.
- Concern about the dignity of the human being and the common good for all being ignored.
- Lay people have continued to protect the Catholic Church through the sexual abuse scandal and concerns are still rife amongst the Church that bullying is continuing but under a different issues.
- Lack of ability to share thoughts and opinions with the Hierarchy of the Church, expected to follow directives without being allowed any opinion on it.
- One Parishioner who attends several Churches believes there is a failure from the Hierarchy to look after their Priests, who are working with the future of the Church.

Meeting finished with a prayer.

Walking Together Meeting

Saturday 5.2.22

St Anne's Catholic Church, Digbeth, Birmingham

Present: 16

The meeting started with a prayer.

THE QUESTIONS

PARTICIPATION: Liturgy and Worship. Co-Responsibility.

7. **How do you believe your presence at Mass makes a difference?**

- You have a conscience if you do not attend.
- During Lockdown there was access to Mass online every day and it was beneficial and allowed the us to concentrate more on the Mass. We were able to really listen to the Mass and what the Priest was saying without distractions around us. We got a lot more out of Mass online because of this reason even through Spiritual Communion.
- The rebuilding of the Church community is required to be rebuilt.
- Coming to Mass is a social event.
- It is about community and a meeting with our Lord.
- The younger generation (in the majority) are not part of this sense of community largely due to the unrealistic directives of the Church/ Archdiocese.
- Mass offers a good opportunity to get away from everything else that is happening in people's lives, gives some time of reflection and refreshes identity and beliefs.
- There was a comparison of going to a live sport's event being similar to going to Mass with regard to atmosphere and belonging when in person rather than watching online.
- The Liturgy has to speak to us and unless we can get a message from it then we have to ask, is it worth it. All people have to be part of it and not just the clergy, not only in the Liturgy but in the running of the Church, not just parish Church that is attended but the Church as a whole.
- Some really missed Mass during lockdown and were glad to be back at Mass.
- Some people were completely cut off from the Church during Lockdown due to lack of technology.
- The meaning behind the Church is the people within it. We are all followers of Jesus Christ and we are all an important part of the whole Church and of the Mass. We are all the disciples of Christ and have to have a means to spread the news and feel valued within the establishment and by the hierarchy of the establishment as well as within the parish environment.
- Receiving of God's grace through the receiving of Holy Communion is very special.

8. Explain what difference does it make in your life to receive the sacraments.

- When viewing Mass online, it was just as special to receive Spiritual Communion because of lockdown.
- It is important to ensure we believe what is coming from the heart through the receiving of the Sacraments, rather than following out of habit or because it is the expectation given from the hierarchy.
- Sacraments are part of our lives and so important. It is important to receive the grace we get from the receiving of the Sacraments.
- It was encouraging to see the queues seen in one local Church lately from the amount of people wanting to receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation.
- Some have never got anything from Reconciliation and found it difficult to go to Confession. Some mentioned the fact that they had had a bad experience in the past and it had put them off Confession. There was a mention of speaking directly to God is a lot more effective for others and that a Sister within the Church had once explained that the 'I Confess,' prayer is just as effective as going to Confession as an individual and if people were more comfortable with this, then it has to have the right reasons behind it and allows for the persons to feel more comfortable and accommodating towards the Sacraments.
- Rather than Confession being heard in a Confessional box it was mentioned that in Walsingham, the person just walks alongside the priest.
- Confession was missed by some during Lockdown but not all and the idea of guilt for some, was associated with this Sacrament.
- The 'I Confess' prayer is a form of absolution and a lot more effective for many people.
- The teachings of St. John Vianney were mentioned regarding the Sacraments.

9. What part does prayer play in your life and your relationship with God / the Church?

(Similar to 7 & 8)

- The teachings of St. John Vianney were mentioned and how prayer is important in people's lives.
- Many believe in prayer and that it provides a strong belief in God being all powerful.
- Prayer is very powerful and when you pray through different methods, you can see the benefit of it.
- Many people pray when guidance or something is needed rather than praying a prayer of thanksgiving.
- Many believe we can call on prayer when needed.
- Prayer can be very powerful but when a prayer is missed, guilt can often set in. (Novena)
- Lighting a candle is a form of prayer.
- Prayer of the clergy and religious is followed and when in active religious life it is part of life.

- One quality time of prayer during the day is more beneficial than prayers throughout the day and is enough.
- People, including children should be taught that prayer is personal to each person and there shouldn't be a dictatorship that each child when growing up should know certain prayers by heart. This can be damaging to the child and certainly encouraging children that they are just reciting prayers for the sake of it. (Reference to Grandchildren at school.)
- Silence and times of reflection can form a very important part of your prayer life.

10. **How do you currently participate, personally, in the life of the Church? How much responsibility do you have as an individual?**

- Participation in lay activities such as charity work, is very much a part of the parish. There are a number of volunteers within the Parish who ensure the Church and charity encounters are part of the life of the Parish.
- It is just as important to be a good person and participate in helping people, as it is to be part of an establishment.
- Everyday life is part of the Church and the Gospel teaching of not being boastful about helping, is as important.
- Different people identified the different parts they play in the parish, such as readers, counters etc.
- Evangelisation is essential for the future of the Church and an essential part of this is to ensure people are living the life they are preaching about.
- Lay people are required in the running of the Church as a parish and as an establishment as a whole Church.

11. **How do families and young people effectively participate in the life of your parish? What do you do to support them?**

- There are not many families in the life of the Parish due to the demographics of the location.
- Parishioners (majority) try to welcome new people to the parish.
- A lot of young people fall away from the Church and then go back to the Church when their own children are in Catholic schools or they want to send them to Catholic schools.
- Youth clubs do not have the same attraction as they used to and many young people are not interested in joining one. Youth clubs had been set up in the past by former Priests and they did not work. There is a reliance on volunteers to promote the future of the Church and people work, have their own family life etc.
- Youth work seems to have moved to places like Alton Castle.
- Years ago there was no technology as there is now and so times are very different.
- The Church are very reliant on school encouraging Mass participation. Staff in schools have their own Parish to attend and also their own family life. Mental health and well-being of school staff must be taken into account and many

staff travel to their place of work so asking them to participate regularly in the life of the school Church rather than their own parish is unfair. Schools seem to have taken over the delivery of Sacraments and taken the responsibility away from parents. It needs to revert back to parents being the main educator in the faith with schools assisting in this not being the prominent force. Without school's participation in the faith of young people, there would be even fewer young people attending Mass.

- Financial support is provided to some youth initiatives such as pilgrimage to Lourdes.

12. **How does your parish effectively identify and use the gifts of its people? How can we better enable full participation and co-responsibility in the life of the Church at the parish and diocesan levels?**

- Difficult as the demographics of the Church makes it very difficult to form a parish community with most attendees travelling into the Church for Mass.
- People have been asked to participate but the reality is that it is not taken up.
- PP or leading parishioners could give an overview of various parish activities and initiatives and invite people to find out more and participate in their work.
- Some initiatives such as the Night Shelter brought people together.
- Participation has declined even more since lockdown with many still frightened to come into a Church and a decline because of deaths amongst the elderly.
- Archdiocese and hierarchy need to be more at ground level and working with the people rather than dictating from the top.
- Culture of 'them and us' regarding the Archdiocese and its people.
- There needs to be more transparency and honesty from hierarchy.
- Somebody described the gaps between the parish level and the hierarchy as rungs missing from a ladder, where communication, transparency and honesty is a major concern.
- Somebody suggested that a representative from each parish should be able to make contact with the Diocese to express any concerns/ issues and communication may then be improved. At the moment if you seek advice, complain or voice any concerns they are largely ignored. Complaints sent to the person in the Diocese who the parishioner is complaining about. Trust within Parishes and school and other establishments within the Church needs to be gained from the hierarchy before things can move forward.
- For the Church to redeem itself there needs to be a lot of changes, particularly at the top. It shouldn't be a message of 'them and us' and it is at the moment. Jesus would not want this of His Church.

St Anne's Catholic Church, Digbeth, Birmingham

Present: 15

MISSION: Social Outreach. Evangelisation. Our Dream.

The meeting started with a prayer.

QUESTIONS:

13. **If you could describe your local parish fulfilling your dreams and concerns for the whole world and the local community, what would it be like?**
- A friendly parish like this is usually/ a welcoming environment for all and by all.
 - Church needs to be truly representative of all ages where Church is located.
 - A more active parish where more lay people are represented to work together for the good of the future of the Church.
 - Female priests and a more respect held for females within the Church as a whole.
 - A community where singing is part of the Mass and not just for the few who are in the choir.
 - Singing is seen as a prayer for the community as a whole and not a competition between who can sing the loudest.
 - Continue with the CD music but congregation could join in as they used to.
 - A community where more is made of the joining in of music which England tend to fall down on a lot during Mass.
 - A Mass where everyone can join in with the singing and not just the 'elite' few who know the words/ hymns etc.
 - A community such as in years gone by, where the priests came as a mission to involve the Church in the local community.
 - Groups within the Church do not necessarily have to have a priest leading the group and more lay people should be used to encourage a spirit of community and more 'normality.'
 - The sense of Church within the community needs to be promoted, which is difficult as the Church is not a Parish as such and people travel from around the outskirts of the city to attend Mass.
 - Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament should be brought back after restrictions are lifted.
 - To ensure the future of the parish is all of our responsibility and not just that of the Priest.
 - A concern is that the UK , along with many richer countries , is becoming more and more secular and materialistic with the emphasis on the individual not the community at large. Also that the Church is a hierarchical organisation which is male dominated and not reaching out to the broader community. The dream is that the Church builds on its past great achievements , is far more inclusive , and has a strong positive agenda of caring for all those in need , and global sustainability. My fear is that the Church will die if it becomes out of touch and irrelevant to society at large.
 - To build up a group of people who can lead different groups within the parish

community to deliver Holy Communion/ Confirmation classes etc and not rely on school to fulfill the role of the parish. (Unfair to rely on school staff who attend their own parishes at the weekend.)

- Be mindful of the existing Church congregation when appointing new Priest. Not to appoint a Priest who will come in and change everything and not taken into the feelings, thoughts and opinions of parishioners who have been there serving the community before the new Priest arrived.

14. How does your experience of parish life allow you to reflect, develop, act on and speak about your faith?

- Do different Orders within the Church inspire different people to attend that particular parish, ie, Augustians, Oblates etc.
- Certain Churches can hold a feeling for you, such as St. Peter's Basilica in Rome.
- Parish life largely depends on the Parish priest and the relationship different people have with him. One member of the Parish feels much more comfortable speaking to their parish priest here rather than the priest who is associated with their work role and therefore advice is sought from our Parish Priest rather than the one who they should be working with.
- Acting on the experience of parish life has to be led from the top and set as an example. Some believe they have a voice within the parish they attend but are not listened to by the hierarchy of the Church.
- Regular meetings with parish priest was suggested but also a regular meeting with the hierarchy of the Church to express concerns, voice opinions and feel as though they are being heard within the Church.
- The Church cannot rely on the local parishioners to ensure the future of the Church within England when the hierarchy, they feel, often takes them for granted and does not listen to concerns and issues.
- The Church as a while must learn from past mistakes if it wants to move forward and have a future within our society.
- Our parish has been very good at developing the life of the parish and the charitable organisations associated with the Church.
- Coming in contact with , seeing , and witnessing really good people of faith , and listening to our Priest encourages me to believe in God ' s goodness which gives the confidence to try and act out our faith.

15. In what ways is the call of Jesus to serve the poor a priority in the Church and especially in our parishes?

- This has to be a priority for all parishes to ensure the Gospel message given by Jesus.
- Parish has a strong reputation for many years for helping the poor.
- There are different levels and descriptions of poor. Some people are emotionally poor, lonely, isolated, mental illness and not poor in economical means. While the parish try their best to address the economically challenged, we must remember those who suffer from being poor in other circumstances.

- A suggestion was given about CAFOD's 'Walk for Hunger' sponsored walk and how people could support it after an acknowledgement of the poor abroad.
- We support Fatima House, Tabor House, Fireside, CAFOD, Mary's Meals, SVP etc within the parish.
- It was felt that in some way, this was the one thing that everyone could contribute towards in one way or another.
- The Parish has a great reputation over the years for helping the poor and marginalised in our community and beyond . The homeless , those looking for work and a place to live and most recently female refugees have all benefited from the goodwill of our Parishioners.

16. **What more can we do in our parishes to address the needs of the poor (homeless, lonely, the bereaved, the sick, people with addictions, refugees, people with disabilities, those who suffer in developing countries....)?**

- Please see answers for number 15.
- Change of hierarchy within the Church and decisions being made by laity group with varying people with different backgrounds making up the group.
- There is a need amongst the lay in our parish to keep conversations going to ensure aid is still given.
- There has to be an understanding that we as a parish or Church cannot do everything and there is no shame in that. 'Whatsoever you do for ...'
- Some of the above listed people require professional help and the parish/ Church is not a replacement for social services or the NHS.
- Our Parish can not replace Social Services but we can react positively to those who request our help. Perhaps we could choose one area or focus every two years or so to concentrate our efforts . Also we could expand our knowledge of organisations in the locality to which we could direct those in need.

Final Prayer

Over the three weeks of meetings there was an overriding message of the necessity for a major reform of the Church as a whole, particularly from the hierarchy to ensure the future of the Catholic Church within England.