

# Walking Together Meeting

## Sunday, 23.01.2022

St Anne's Catholic Church, Digbeth, Birmingham

Present: **11**

The meeting started with a prayer - *Adsumus, Sancte Spiritus*

### **THE QUESTIONS**

#### COMMUNION: The life of the Church – FORMATION

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

##### **Answers:**

- Offers the Blessed Sacraments
- Re-enforces community ties and social events
- Develops friendships
- Provides role (church activities / duties), serving mass
- Opportunity for prayer and worship
- Gives guidance, purpose and perspective
- Platform for focussing on charitable involvement and giving support to others
- Fosters our faith journey
- Gives hope, meaning, re-assurance and a sense of belonging
- Provides a good example with Jesus and the apostles plus history of reaching out, charity
- Inspires us to love God, our neighbour and be better Christians

#### **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?**

##### **Answers:**

- Significant reduction in numbers; parishioners have not returned
- Reduction in £ collections / funds
- Growth in pessimism
- Dislike of remote (Zoom. Web) mass
- Recognition that new technology also has positive benefits (listening to Mass remotely)
- Jobs shared between fewer people
- Additional jobs for cleaning and stewarding required
- Disuse of Parish Hall
- There have been many deaths during the period - exacerbated reduced numbers.
- Co-incidental introduction of Clean Air Zone, change in bus routes, limited permit parking has further decreased attendance..
- ◆ Start a Parish Council to organise and inform tasks / responsibilities
- ◆ Checking to see if parishioners are OK, not isolated
- ◆ Use Notice Board

- ◆ Invite school participation. Consider monthly Family mass and standardise more children involvement e.g. at the Offertory, altar servers, readings, singing hymns....
- ◆ Reach out to catholic children at non-catholic schools; sign-posting; additional in-house teaching / training
- ◆ Rationalise catholic primary schools, concentrating on renewed specialist, catholic teaching
- ◆ Encourage greater use of nuns for house visits, as available
- ◆ Opportunity to attract new parishioners with change in demographics / housing development
- ◆ Organise car sharing
- ◆ Provide training & develop co-responsibility
- ◆ Access funds from Diocese for ongoing costs and remedial maintenance

**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?**

**Answers:**

- Informal conversation after mass (tea club)
- Home visits by priest
- Home visits by laity, with appropriate training, safeguarding, indemnities
- Home visits by Eucharistic Ministers (with communion)
- Hold open Parish Meetings; amalgamate with other initiatives (Friends of St Eugene); develop more activities
- Invite other groups to attend (SVP, Legion of Mary, Reps from Fatima House & Tabor House; initiatives of Irish Welfare Association, other groups etc.)
- Invite individuals to report back at the end of mass to congregation on work done; progress made; request for volunteers / funds / initiatives
- Train altar servers (school boys & girls) and more senior people
- Reach out to migrants at the Rowton Hotel and local areas. Link more fully with other agencies; make connections.
- ◆ There is a drastic shortage of young people specifically and numbers generally have declined
- ◆ People from the 'resident' projects - Homeless people and female Asylum Seekers plus neighbouring shelter projects should be invited / encouraged to attend
- ◆ Re-use the church hall
- ◆ Host 'bread + soup' evenings
- ◆ Invite people to attend by distributing informative (church details / services / activities/ opportunities) leaflets, using volunteers
- ◆ Note that post-pandemic period offers an opportunity to re-connect
- ◆ Acquire Diocesan lead on LGBT, inclusiveness issues

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

##### **Answers:**

- Largely ignored as not relevant OR meriting respect for recognition of charitable work done
- Hostile - looked at with open dislike as associated with history of endemic abuse and secretiveness; not accountable; no transparency OR a place of friendship, comfort and consolation
- Considered remote, suspicious and exclusive as clergy wear odd clothing and do not engage in normal work activities - set apart
- Clergy seen as elitist or
- Always asking for money
- Not respected
- Hold bad memories from school (teachers, institutions)
- Bad press; little 'push back'; positives not advertised. No feedback available to monitor results of efforts invested. However, there is media opportunity (several platforms) to inform, defend and reach out, providing an alternative narrative, Could be re-enforced with leaflet distribution.

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

##### **Answers:**

- Include parishioners to participate in processes
- Include women in clerical structures
- Include women priests; married priests; adapted deacon role (for better balance and increased resource / capability)
- Form Committees
- Form Church / Parish Council
- Improve transparency
- Improve accountability
- Develop trust
- Develop integrity
- Provide training; hold seminars
- Invite informed suppliers, experts
- Facilitate co-responsibility
- Develop systems to report up the hierarchy
- Develop simplified systems & language to report down the hierarchy
- Discourage misogyny or any prejudice to make participation more inclusive
- Improve links to schools to avail of expertise and resource there
- Encourage reform of hierarchical structures to enable more inclusiveness by LISTENING, increasing democratic process, empowering Laity, being accountable, honest and trustworthy
- Discourage Diocesan visits with negative agenda and hostile attitudes

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

### Answers:

- Accountability and transparency - collegiate responsibility perceived as irresponsible and secretive; not accepting blame and perpetuating malaise and decline, despite Cardinal's (limited) missive
- Teaching on contraception
- Real dialogue with other Christian denominations (Orthodox church)
- Inclusive dialogue with other faiths and no-faiths; tolerance
- Inability to reform or accept new realities; innate conservatism; position above society (not service provider), not relevant, outdated
- Women priests
- Married priests
- Sexuality
- Establishing mission, renewal, forgiveness and healing
- Strengthening Catholic school curriculum & links for greater inclusion & volunteering
- Training for Laity
- Offer better response to people who do not have English as a first language. Hold special 'dedicated / bi-lingual mass'; provide occasional Latin mass; discern what is needed. Open the doors....
- Stewardship of the Planet to ameliorate climate change, cherish creation and ensure sustainability
- Being able to adopt fairer, more open policies and improved structures to broaden the Church's wisdom, truth, understanding and inclusiveness. Involving the laity in co-responsibility should entail more democracy, empowerment and flexibility essential for sustainability and progress of the Mission. Note 1: the Mission could be de-railed by imposing change on the broader church (e.g. rationalising deaneries, developing plans to manage the decline and demise of churches) without full consultation and disclosure, Note 2: The C of E has been restructuring for some time and has had to 'open up' to sustain itself. The Catholic church has an Opportunity to evaluate best practice and implement essential reform...

Final Prayer...

# Sunday, 06.02.2022

St Anne's Catholic Church, Digbeth, Birmingham

Present: **14** + Comments from separate conversations

PARTICIPATION: Liturgy and Worship. Co-Responsibility.

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

### **Answers:**

- It adds to the ability to form a self supporting, sustainable community of worship, to bolster the integrity of the church
- It provides the opportunity to support the mass by: - communal worship; participating in the sacraments; setting up the altar; reading the epistles and bidding prayers; singing hymns; collecting offertory donations; performing warden duties; joining the after mass tea / social; enhancing direct communication, information, initiative & ideas sharing; contemplation of the homily; discernment of the gospel; thereafter, setting the tone for religious response in everyday life
- It is wonderful to receive God's grace through the sacraments and to be sustained by the gospels with spiritual nourishment, fulfilment and direction so that we can share His message in our daily lives
- It helps to evidence the message of the gospels by visualising Jesus's journey in relation to our own life
- It allows us to share a common service and value the same religion wherever we are in the world
- The joy & welcome of mass makes me feel comfortable, safe and loved as though I belong - at home. It encourages me to attend.

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

### **Answers:**

(Similar to no. 7, above)

- It gives hope and fulfilment; sustaining: - faith, belief, constancy, trust
- It underpins values, supporting the structure of civilisation, securing relationships, enabling the connectivity with God
- It celebrates our religious experience and appreciation of the world
- It re-affirms our understanding of the sacraments and resolve to be better Christians
- It provides consolation and healing for the bereaved
- It gives empowerment through Baptism, saves souls and bestows Grace.

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

**Answers:**

(Similar to nos. 7 + 8. above)

- It helps bring perspective to life
- It helps to enable understanding, purpose and mission
- It brings us closer to God
- It gives hope, inspiration, endurance and courage to face challenges and make firm commitments
- It provides a joyful experience and consolation
- It reinforces Faith and associated Christian values
- It fosters empathy with other worshippers
- It helps us to live the prayer and to do God's will
- It helps us to gain a balanced viewpoint and motivation to do charitable deeds
- It is fundamental to our identity to establish who we are and how we lead our lives
- It directs our actions
- Personal prayer, rather than 'formulated' prayer, can bring closer relations with God
- 'Repetitive' prayer can be less meaningful but can also allow for better contemplation, listening
- Prayers are a fundamental part of life and relations with God and our neighbour

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

**Answers:**

- Attending Mass and supporting the Church community
- Sacraments - preparing the altar
- Donating to Church and recommended charities, mass petitions
- Counting the offerings
- Gardening, litter picking, Church cleaning
- Flower arranging
- Preparing Church for different liturgical seasons
- Assembling the crib and Easter garden
- Warden duties
- Support funeral masses, rosary, benediction and adoration of blessed sacrament
- Attend Church meetings - Friends of OMI, St Like's gospel seminars, Shelter project, Caritas group, finance meetings.
- Organising readers and counters rotas
- Participating in social events - parish dinners, special birthdays / occasions, social outreach / day trips (theatre, National Remembrance Arboretum, Creation Walk)
- Visiting the sick
- Providing support to Fatima House and Tabor House committees / projects

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

**Answers:**

- Very little as constrained by current demographics and repercussions of Covid - school masses have been ceased
- We do welcome young people on an individual basis
- We invite young people to take part in the liturgy - (not of late)
- Attend First Holy Communion mass, supporting with beverages + snacks
- Organise hymn singing
- Invite them to become altar servers, to present the Offertory, and to read the Epistles - (not of late)
- ◆ Proposals:
- ◆ More integration with the schools through attendance at Mass and greater participation (as above)
- ◆ More home visits by the priest / laity
- ◆ Invite young people specifically to after-mass gatherings / socials with refreshments
- ◆ Establish a Youth Club
- ◆ Organise trips to Alton Castle and Soli House

**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?**

**Answers:**

- The Parish relies on the congregation to be proactive in supporting the daily life of the Church through various initiatives e.g. playing musical instruments, singing, providing practical support (maintenance) - flower arranging, baking, and empathy - looking out for people. These activities are largely custom driven or ad hoc.
- ◆ Increasing Participation & Co-responsibility:
- ◆ Invite musically gifted children at schools to play at mass
- ◆ Provide information leaflets / invitations
- ◆ Organise periodic Family masses
- ◆ Provide Youth Clubs dedicated to children's needs / wants, to make it an attractive option for them
- ◆ Develop further interconnectivity in structures
- ◆ Develop the roles of the laity to have more responsibility with empowerment, including leading services
- ◆ Provide teaching and learning
- ◆ Include women in hierarchy and leading services
- ◆ Broaden clerical experience to include teaching / training the laity involving a flattened hierarchy, integrative, non elitist priests/clergy
- ◆ Ensure increased transparency and honesty on behalf of the Church
- ◆ Develop an attitude of willing, shared service
- ◆ Build shared experience to develop trust and expertise (mentoring)
- ◆ Safeguarding to be explored and strengthened
- ◆ Introduce some interface between the Diocese and laity
- ◆ Introduce some interface between the Diocese and other Christian churches
- ◆ Introduce some interface between the Diocese and other faiths involving joint activities and service

- ◆ Diocese needs to redeem itself / the Church to regain trust to enable shared activities
- ◆ More humility needed on behalf of the Diocese to encourage greater openness, democracy and shared commitment
- ◆ An agreed constitution needs to be constructed defining process, rules, values, policies, responsibilities and (joint) empowerment
- ◆ Retreats need to be organised to focus on healing and Christian action



# Sunday, 20.02.2022

**Present:** 11 (+ comments received separately)

MISSION: Social Outreach. Evangelisation. Our Dream.

Opening 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?**

### **Answers:**

- Parish & Community - There would be full time, resident priests, including female priests / clergy / hierarchy to provide a fuller compliment and better balance, mitigating against abuse and being more representative...
  - Better attendance, including more young people using social media to engage at their level
  - Include more nuns, especially for home visits
  - A fuller compliment of services, including 'foreign' language masses
  - A safe and welcoming environment
  - A facility supporting - youth clubs; crèches; the dementia club & other areas of need (to be identified)
  - Educational links e.g. Newman University - developing an education centre
  - Links to food-banks and other agencies
  - Increased networking with other faiths to deliver support and care to the community, developing better understanding & relationships
  - Encourage information sharing and develop partnerships to become a more effective provider
  - To keep a watching brief on the Area Redevelopment in process - to take advantage of any opportunities emerging to bring the profile of the parish & school into prominence with view to sustainability into the future and matching needs / providing a service to the growing community
  - Improve transport services
  - Improve car parking services
  - Look to improve the musical input within the parish services
  - Keep the church in good repair without the threat of closure and the burden of extra donations for maintenance
  - Establish a fully functioning, inclusive, representative, empowered & informed Parish Council which designates responsibility and ownership for parish tasks
  - Establish a cohort of church helpers for cleaning, gardening etc  
To be mindful of Catholic tradition and congregation when appointing (former) protestant / CofE / conservative priests (performing services) to catholic parishes lest they cause existing parishioners to leave'.
  - Establish a Christian identity for the church as a good, holy, positive, trustworthy, inclusive, charitable & outreaching entity...
- ◆ For the World - Support the extension of missionaries to the rest of the World
- ◆ Protect the environment

- ◆ Feed the hungry and provide for the poor
- ◆ Support initiatives to abolish world debt
- ◆ Speak out against injustice
- ◆ Maintain integrity by being honest, open and not being hypocritical
- ◆ Issue new edict for Catholic clergy (to gain trust): 'Thou shall not abuse children'
- ◆ Reform Rome - enable adequate transparency, accountability, inclusiveness, democracy and probity
- ◆ Provide support to the Pope to lead the reforms needed
- ◆ Campaign against the Arms Trade
- ◆ Campaign against modern slavery and trafficking
- ◆ Provide support for the exploited
- ◆ Form an effective political lobby for Christian values and intervention
- ◆ Note that it is sinful not to intercede where wrong is being perpetrated
- ◆ Determine an effective ecumenical programme, fostering good-will, shared values and initiatives. Proclaim the Good News...!

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

***Answers:***

- Reflection - the Gospels and teachings encourage mindfulness of God's Holy Plan, so that we love Him and each other, striving to be better Christians. This has been reinforced with seminars held (Advent, Easter), studies of St Luke's gospel, Friends of the OMI meetings / initiatives, attendance at mass plus other religious services, particularly via the internet
- Development - the parish has responded to needs identified and volunteered in projects e.g. the Shelter Project; Fatima House; Taber House; answering the Synodal Journey questionnaire..
- Acted on - (as above) There have also been associated groups developed indirectly for - Dementia support; ICT classes; Irish Language classes; Traditional dance classes; hosting foreign masses; membership of project committees; welcoming strangers to the church (including after mass refreshments); Irish Welfare accommodation; community affairs e.g. St Patrick's Day. Unfortunately, the pandemic and current demographic position has been detrimental to participation in projects
- Speaking about Catholic Faith - This is seen more in action than words but bearing witness is important. It often comes down to exhibiting a religious medal and to living a Christian life. Sometimes apologising for where the Church has been to blame (corruption, abuse etc) but explaining that there is a much wider, wholesome message of Salvation....

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

**Answers:**

- There is a personal responsibility to adhere to the message of the gospels and to 'Love thy neighbour' in a meaningful, positive way. This, perhaps, needs to be reinforced with an emboldened, affirmative edict: 'Provide for and serve the poor'
- Collections for specific causes, donations through 'charity' boxes, supporting other Church initiatives e.g. St Chad's Sanctuary all contribute to serving the poor
- There is also the time given to consoling the poor in spirit, listening and giving advice plus prayers, on a personal level
- There is the possibility of considering which of the church's assets is not needed for the fulfilment and continuation of God's message and corresponding sale / gift to the poor. The church is not an estate agent though it dedicates a lot of its energy to this enterprise and other legal expenditure. The question of overly elaborate and potentially wasteful use of funds for vestments could also be investigated, having established what the priorities are
- The parish does support poor causes / projects. On an individual basis, parishioners do look out for each other as well as contributing to the Offertory

**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....)?**

**Answers:**

- Reform the greater Church to make it a viable organisation that achieves its mission. Such improvements would revitalise parishes on a local level, giving them more credibility, support and ability to perform
- A reformed church would offer a prayerful and inclusive place of worship to more people who could then become more involved in activities and the Liturgy
- A reformed church could have structures that respond to opportunities for better networking, communication, information, shared resources and technology, making it better able to respond - 'to love God and thy neighbour'
- For the homeless - support the existing projects and petition people in power to provide suitable accommodation
- For the lonely - organise home visits and invite to community functions
- For the bereaved - organise home visits, include in activities, offer counselling and practical support.
- In general - Acquire more resources to provide for the 'needy' and to enable inclusion.
- Set up Youth Clubs or other designated clubs as needed
- Train and resource volunteers to provide help with administration and benefit claims
- For the bereaved - Form specialist groups. Seek help from experts e.g. Hospice specialists. Organise home visits. Offer parish talks on death and loss, Include in community activities. Offer prayers
- For prisoners - Allow priests more time to undertake visits by covering more

church duties

- Develop volunteer groups to intercede for prisoners and offer help with gaining employment. Support / promote specialist schemes like Jerrico (house building) who engage former prisoners and encourage reform
- For people with addictions - Network with the experts and follow their guidance on providing help in supporting a rehabilitation programme.
- Support by offering employment or access to employment by setting up a focussed volunteer group. Provide donations. Include in community activities
- For the sick - Establish groups of volunteers for hospital visits, where possible. Home visits.
- Task the Parish Committee to keep a watching brief on recovery of the sick and designating support action; link to other agencies for expertise plus access to resources
- For refugees - Support existing initiatives e.g. Fatima House
- Improve links with other agencies and decide on an appropriate strategy to develop structures of support
- Develop structures to provide language courses and training
- Include in community activities
- Support with form filling
- Offer mentoring
- Invite and welcome newcomers to the church. Hold cultural exchange
- For the world - Support foreign missions with prayers and money
- Support climate protection
- Support human rights initiatives and groups e.g. Amnesty International
- Support measures to eliminate the Arms Trade
- Promote policies advocating global peace

Discourage the Archdiocese from taking measures to undermine the sustainability of our parish long into the future e.g. intercession by Estates Management & church hierarchy to subvert local initiatives.

Final Prayer