

FEEDBACK SHEET *Walking Together:*

Our Lady & St Werburgh's, Clayton and Our Lady & St John the Baptist, Ashley

Walking Together

Describe what happened in your parish, how you went about the Synodal process? Approximately how many people were involved in your parish, including those who have stopped coming to church or who never come.

Parishioners were invited to a 'Synodal Afternoon' of prayer, reflection, discussion, and fellowship. The event took place on Saturday 12th February. It was attended by 24 people from across the two parishes. All age groups (9-80's years) were represented including six young people aged 9-15 years.

During the afternoon, the group spent time in prayer. The rationale and aims of the Synod were discussed. Parishioners were invited to spend time in small self-selected groups (6-8) reflecting and discussing the 12 questions from the three key topics. Key points were then fed-back to the main group, key points captured and have been summarised below. Before the meeting closed, group members were asked to write down one key point of importance to them from the afternoon's discussions and to propose a priority key action to be followed up. These themes have also been captured and summarised below. The group attended Mass and then joined together in a time of fellowship with a fish & chip / pizza supper.

Those who were not able to attend the event in person, were invited to an online meeting at a mutually agreeable time, however there was little appetite for this option.

The Diocesan questions were also handed out at Masses before the event, to enable parishioners to pray, reflect and discuss them at home. Written responses were also invited, and received from 10 parishioners. These responses were anonymous and have been combined with the responses from our 'face to face' event.

Participation

What was your experience of listening and discerning? How did this feel? Did you have a feeling of participation in this journey? How did it feel to be a part of this process?

Feedback from the experience of the event held was overwhelmingly positive. There was great appetite from those who attended to spend time together in prayer, discussion, and fellowship with each other; things that have not taken place in a formalised way in the Parish since early 2020, due to COVID. People were glad to be consulted and have their thoughts, concerns, ideas and inspirations heard. We felt very much part of the Universal Church, but also knew that this was a great opportunity for our own Parish to re-gather and move forward.

Enrichment

What were the joys? What did you find enriching? Explain how you felt the Holy Spirit was at work in your parish during this time. What was particularly significant, surprising, or unexpected about this process? What new perspectives emerged from the process?

It was a joy to be together, to pray and worship together, and to share our own journey of faith, with a particular emphasis of how the pandemic has impacted us personally and as a faith community. It was enriching to be given the freedom to dream of what our Church and Parish should and could be, and how we can continue to rebuild it. Many attending particularly expressed pleasure having younger people participate. They mostly chose to spend time discussing questions together in a group, but some of the older ones also moved between the other adult groups. Older parishioners found this edifying, but there was also a clear warning that children, young people and young adults are in urgent need of support and encouragement in their own lives of faith.

Responses

In the box below outline which of the questions your parish discussed/dialogued about, the responses made, and issues raised.

We reflected on the questions posed in the Handbook from the Diocese of Birmingham. The responses made and issues raised are summarised below.

COMMUNION: LIFE OF THE CHURCH. FORMATION.

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

- Catholic faith and Church are central and pivotal to our lives
- It provides meaning and purpose
- The Church gives strength to persevere in difficult times
- Church provides community and a sense of being united in faith and friendship
- It is a gateway to community and love
- Develops personal spirituality and relationship with God
- The Gospel eg "Love one another as I have loved you," provides a model for life
- Moral guide for life
- The great value of our Parish Priest and his ministry was emphasised
- "Church is a break from the hustle and bustle of everyday life, it provides a refuge, a sanctuary, a quiet place of calm"
- The liturgical calendar provides a rich and varied framework for life
- The Parish is our family and it is good to be part of the Universal Church (a global community)

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?

- The pandemic has been damaging for parish life and communities. Restrictions have sanitised the liturgy and created physical and spiritual divisions and barriers.
- There is a sense of brokenness and need for repair and healing
- COVID has magnified the needs of the community
- Community life at Ashley has been lost
- Gratitude to those who have served
- Strengthened own relationships with other parishioners and God through ministry
- Streaming is good for people who can't attend but not good so when people who could attend in person don't, as they miss out on receiving the Sacraments and fellowship
- Concern was expressed by many: will attendance ever revert to pre-pandemic numbers? Participation has dwindled. Continued impression of restricted Masses is not incentivising parishioners to return to church.

- Some have appreciated the quiet in church and found it reflective, others felt rushed and unable to spend time in church in quiet prayer before and after Mass
- Participation may be gradually increasing. However, it always seems to be the same people who become involved (risk of cliques). The parish needs to do more to involve others, particularly the young. Return of children's liturgy may aid this
- People are 'out of the habit' so need something 'additional' to prompt a return to these habits
- People seem happy to go to the theatre, football, shops – so if they are not returning to Mass, we need to ask why and what we can do to encourage them
- Is this an opportunity to reinvent parish life? We all need to experience the joy of being a Christian in a Catholic community (might a retreat be a good idea?)

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?

- AGM is a good opportunity for voices to be heard, but only a faithful few attend
- The groups least included are the 18-35 year olds / young adults and single people. The 18-35 year olds are making many decisions and have many questions and doubts about their faith. The parish needs to find ways of holding on to the young and including them in parish life
- Parish council is a forum where aspects of parish life can be discussed, but a mechanism for hearing the 'silent majority' is missing. It is seen as a fund-raising body by some
- People who live alone are difficult to engage with, although LinkLine, our Parish befriending charity, does reach out to those who are isolated
- There is a thriving primary school, but a lack of input from the families into the parish, resulting in a rift when the children reach secondary age
- It's important to welcome new families
- Perhaps a welcome Mass and coffee morning for reception parents in school or Church
- We need to be more aware of the many 'inactive' people who still nurse their old pains which may be very deep, and not look at them as being 'lapsed'
- Finding a way of getting groups together may be of benefit and help bridge generational gaps (eg could the young provide IT courses for older people?)

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

- Abuse crisis is appalling and has greatly damaged the Church's reputation and authority
- Young may see the Church is not moving with the time; find language/ structure hard to relate to
- Young particularly may see Mass as dull and irrelevant (want to go, have to go, or can't be bothered)
- Sexist and old fashioned
- Sexual teaching is out of date
- Confession is inappropriate
- Mortal sin is an unsatisfactory concept
- Opinions are often clouded by what they hear in the media
- Too much wealth
- They see divisions in the within the Church – eg traditionalists and Novo Ordo Catholics
- May also see the Church as giving a sense of community, stability and welcome
- Supportive, but want the family to be put first
- Maybe we have 'tunnel vision' and this in turn can cause our families and friends to adopt different values

- Pope Francis' focus on social justice and the environment has been positive, but the Church may be viewed as being too quiet on key issues

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

- Increased lay involvement, across all 'sections' of society, including women
- Difficulties arise because hierarchy is unused to democracy or consultation, and the laity are unused to participating (in areas outside of finance and administration)
- Listen to the voice of the young people (Church of present and future)
- Treat all groups with respect and pro-actively be more inclusive
- Explain the meaning of rituals and sacraments (be more accessible)
- "Listen to the views of parishioners and their parish priests. But ask questions in a way that is more accessible than this questionnaire. And when they have views, don't treat it as a box ticking exercise and file them away never to be seen again!"
- Maybe the Holy Spirit is bringing about change, and we need to accept and follow His lead, it is His Church

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

- The Church is failing to respond to rapid (Europe-wide) decline in membership and practice. The spirit of the age is self-satisfied and sees no need for God. It is characterised by consumerism and individualism
- The inclusion of young adults and supporting them to strengthen and develop their faith. Keeping young families after confirmation transfer to secondary school – this applies to young people AND their families
- The Church has given us modern day examples of great faith eg Blessed Carlo Acutis, however many parishes are losing their young parishioners in droves. Our young people are the future of parish life and the Church.
- Clericalism
- Failure to respond to the growth in the world's population, specifically in developing countries, continuing to prohibit contraception
- The Church is struggling with trends in the new Christian churches. Perhaps it is time for a new Moses to take hold of the reins. He wants us to be one and remain true
- Does the Church actually proclaim, 'Good News?' Do it's members actually live an authentic 'life in Christ.' Do we really teach what we preach with our lives?

PARTICIPATION: LITURGY AND WORSHIP. CO-RESPONSIBILITY.

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

- It's the summit and centre of our faith. It brings us closer to Christ who asked us to remember him by means of the Eucharist
- Experience of being part of the Body of Christ
- Each has own contribution potentially/ different roles/ altar serving/ reading etc. makes a difference
- Contribute to music; uplifting
- Empower to live out our vocation to be holy
- The Word of God informs our faith and provides a source of reflection
- My prayers are joined with those of the rest of the congregation, united in worship
- Each person's presence makes a difference – 'the more, the better'
- Changes us personally: we have the joy and privilege of receiving Holy Communion; hearing the Word of God; praying and meditating together as a community
- Reduces social isolation and loneliness

- Value being part of a community of faith; learning from each other
- Sacrament of Reconciliation brings healing and forgiveness

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

- They are priceless source of grace, without which there is no spiritual growth
- Life would be meaningless without them. Food for the journey – healing and strength
- The sacraments are everything on our journey through life
- We feel more really, God's abundant love
- There seems to be an 'over-emphasis' on sacraments as the only authentic way in which God can be manifest to us. They can be divisive in excluding some (eg divorced and remarried, Christians of other denominations). The pandemic has enabled us to find other ways to experience the Holy Spirit in our lives
- Feel closer to God, safer in His presence
- Share joy
- Reset the week
- Priest's sermon; benefit from teaching
- Experience of awe and wonder
- "At different ages allows us to appreciate growing our relationship with God and implement this in our daily lives"

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

- Prayer brings us closer to God; feel safer/ looked after by God/ feeds our relationship with God
- Morning and night prayer and grace before meals are important. 'Magnificat' is excellent, as are 'Walk with Me' booklets.
- Music an important vehicle of prayer
- Need to listen and silence; both important aspects of prayer
- Feel never alone when praying
- Take time out of day and commit time with God, connecting with the moment; grounds us spiritually
- Fundamental part of life and being in relationship with God
- Importance of prayer for Parish Priest and our Holy Father
- The Holy Rosary and Fatima messages are very important
- Prayer helps me to be close to God and spend time with Him
- Provides space and time to reflect and be grateful
- Develops relationship with God
- Prayers bring the needs of others before the Lord
- Daily conversation
- Provides comfort and routine
- Group prayer rewarding – vespers/ prayer group/ grace

10. How do you currently participate, personally, in the life of the Church?

How much responsibility do you have as an individual?

- Attending Mass/ In services
- Social occasions
- Music
- Altar serving
- Piety stalls

- Church cleaning
- Finance and administration
- Supporting marriages
- Reading at mass
- Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion
- House groups
- Parish office
- Support friends in the community
- I prefer to be a part of a group than to be a leader

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

- Mostly through the next-door Catholic Primary School via Masses, First Communion and Confirmation for the children; and also via social links with the school (fayres, concerts and celebrations).
- Families with young children are well supported, but less so for older children
- There is not enough support when children leave secondary school, especially at a time when worldly distractions draw them away from the parish
- Supporting/ leading Children's Liturgy; important supporting young families
- Sacramental preparation

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?

- With both parents typically working, people are very busy. Very few are willing to assume additional responsibilities. Aim should be to get young involved, e.g. as representatives on committees
- The Parish does use the gifts of others – music, liturgy, flowers, leaders of groups, sacristan
- More needs to be done to involve young adults – eg Sycamore course, social events, retreats, Taize prayer
- The Parish leaders should meet with Fr a few times a year
- Through prayer, invitation and teaching people to understand their role and recognise that their gifts and expertise are God given for building up the Body of Christ. People need help to discern what their contribution ought to be and encourage all to take up new challenges
- Important to welcome all, invite participation, encourage all skills to be positively used... probably many wasted resources

MISSION: SOCIAL OUTREACH. EVANGELISATION. OUR DREAM.

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?

- Overt welcome to all; reach out to divorced, LGBT, race etc.
- Welcome and accessible services to non-Catholics... make every opportunity at baptisms/ weddings etc
- Regular retreats
- Confident to explain to others why our faith is important/ meaningful
- Ecumenism – acceptance and celebrate unity between faith communities
- Sermons relevant to everyday life

- More use of parish community facilities
- For every parishioner to experience the intimate love God has for them and their dignity as children of God. Everyone would acknowledge the power of the Holy Spirit in their lives
- Ideal parish should be a community of all ages and backgrounds, with a thriving group of young practicing members.
- Ideal parish must always have a priest. No priest, no Mass, no parish!
- It would have a SVP Society – no-one could feel lonely
- Increased concern for local refugees
- Increased Eucharistic adoration
- Increased participation of young adults
- Increased support for the bereaved
- Increased support for those struggling financially
- Increased support for those with physical / mental health problems
- Increased prayers for those suffering in the world
- To be a place that new families and relatives want to come to
- Faith in Action would be a good way to evangelise

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

- Reading and study of the faith after 'school-days' (ie personal formation) is desirable. Otherwise, we rely on sermons at Sunday Mass. The problem is that the scripture readings (especially OT) are often unhelpful and difficult to connect with lives of people
- It helps to speak positively about being part of a community, united in faith, respect and love for one another
- It has changed who I am – I reflect more, my faith is an open part of my life
- Informal and formalised faith sharing – pre pandemic RCIA and CAFÉ course were helpful
- Positive mostly, but overemphasis on rules

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

- Should be the foundation of our lives, to love one another
- General attitude of parish to poor is good, eg via food bank
- I wish I had more so I could do more but must be happy with all the gifts I have
- We contribute to second collections
- Do something unique to help others, not just supporting charities

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

- General attitude of parish to poor is good, eg via food bank, but we could do more
- In all the services; in social occasions; in music; piety stalls; cleaning; finance and administration
- LinkLine is excellent. So is work of Ministers of Communion. But would not an SVP be a worthwhile addition?
- Liaise with other faith groups to address the needs of the local community
- Use FHC and confirmation to link up young families with prayer sponsors from the parish – this would build up resilience in older people and widen social networks for families

Dreams

If you were asked to “dare to dream” about how you see the Church in the third millennium, what might your dream be?

Following our discussion, we asked individuals to write on a post-it-note, their one take home message, and one action or ‘what next’ point:

Key point from the day	Action – what next?
Involve young people	Survey young – what want
Concern about how to convince young people to commit to God and His Church	More days like today. Retreats. Services for all community
Church is losing the young	Make Mass more accessible for the young
The importance of reaching out to the youth and marginalised in meaningful and accessible ways. Truly welcoming people and not one off gestures.	Interaction of different groups leads to better community. Have more events with mixed groups / retreat
Be more aware of those on the fringes of our Church, and reach out	My wish is that the parish provides to all enquirers and the faithful, the mechanisms, groups, which will offer clear responses from Church teachings to all the world’s challenges and lead them back to God
LOVE. INCLUDING CHILDREN. GREAT. SERVICES FOR ALL COMMUNITY	Youth involved with adults in each group
Voices of young in the parish	Hope > Love > Love of Christ
Loving service > hope. Gentle witnessing	Welcoming those who are ‘on the margins’
The listening and open witnessing was so good and necessary	Share our hope with the world
Good dialogue with all parish	Hold special services to welcome and engage all in the Catholic Church
How much people felt about being part of the Parish community	Develop communication skill son meeting with people in life with expression of out Faith. More study groups and interdenominational contacts
It was good to be together – can we do so again?	Bring back Saturday Mass at Ashley. Maintains the community at Ashley.
I’ve never reflected on the purpose of myself in the Church or what should be changed. Just discussing it with others and hearing their views has been incredibly eye-opening	Res-establish parish life with Mass at the centre. More Exposition please.
Make Mass more engaging, especially now children’s’ liturgy is not a thing	A word of welcome to visitors to the church, especially non-Catholics
COVID has pruned, burnt, weakened the Church and our lives / community	To bring back Saturday evening Mass at Ashley
	YOUNG TO BE INVOLVED
	Help young families make an early commitment so they can continue and develop their relationship with God and keep the younger generations interested
	Include all ages, groups and abilities
	Children can read if they want



	Fan into flame the POWER of the HOLY SPIRIT to heal and refresh (post COVID) – Alpha?
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