

The Parish of Corpus Christi in Headington incorporating Our Lady of Lourdes, Wheatley.

Synodal Pathway Summary Document: April 2022

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COMMUNION

In what ways does the Catholic Church, especially our Parish make a difference to your life? How good are we at welcoming everyone and listening to everyone or do you feel that you go unnoticed and have not found a way to share your ideas?

The outstanding overall thread was how welcoming and inclusive people feel under the shepherding of Canon Mervyn and Sister Marie Ann.

The sense that attending Mass is an important aspect for many of those who responded. Whether this is for the sacramental and prayer life or just as having somewhere to have a community and fellowship in Christ, it is an important part of people's life, providing an anchor in an otherwise turbulent life.

It seems that we could do better at communicating the opportunities we have for ways to serve our community whether that is through social justice and outreach, or being involved in reading at liturgies.

This also links into how welcoming the more distinct communities within the parish community are or could be. Some people felt that Fr Mervyn held the weight of welcome on his shoulders and it was not shared by members of the parish, and recent lack of tea and coffee after Mass has led to a disintegration of the social fabric of the community.

There is a need for a "new starter's" guide into the parish community. It can seem a little overwhelming especially when you are a new Catholic also showing up to a new parish.

What do your family, your friends and your work colleagues think of the Catholic Church?

While there are a few positive comments within this section suggesting that people see the Pope as a good representation of what they would like the Catholic Church to stand for, and that it provides them with solace and a solid direction for how to be in this world, in general the positive doesn't go much beyond that, particularly when extended beyond the nucleus of those who attend Church regularly. A few felt the Church was a force for good, and provided a rock on which to build their family life.

The Church is at best seen as a curiosity, and there was not much understanding of the good the Church does as felt by those within the community against those outside the community.

From the negative aspects, which were the majority, many cite homophobia to the dishonesty regarding the various abuse scandals—child and clergy—as reasons for either leaving or dismissing the Church. There's a failure to be welcoming to other faiths and practices, and a sense that people have "voted with their feet" and left the Church because it is misunderstood, the teachings are complicated, it's outdated and unwilling to

change, misogynistic, old fashioned, irrelevant in today's society where science and a more "enlightened approach" provide better direction.

From the Meeting:

As noted at the start of this summary, the meeting was guided along the idea that we start with Communion, in looking to how we approach our life and community within the parish. Once we have an idea of how and what we are doing, we can then move onto the next sections of the pathway, Participation and Mission.

The meeting took some of the ideas from above and in small groups discussed what they felt was important to focus on. While the summary of the meeting came away with six points, there were many others, mentioned above which were also held to be important. As the meeting leader only allowed one word from each group and no repetitions, and there were only five groups, had there been more groups, or two words per group, the list would have been longer, and probably would have included other areas of importance.

The Six main ones were: • Belonging

- Welcome
- Visible
- Youth
- Interacting
- Ecumenical (added last by insistence of the attendees!)

Some words noted on lists during the meeting, but not included in this six were (in no particular order, and not exhaustive!):

Family, Liturgy and Worship, Eucharist, Journey, House Bound, Bible Study, Bereavement, Education, Sacraments, Home, Point of Contention, Greeters, Children's Liturgy, Different Communities within Parish, Inclusivity

PARTICIPATION

Does our Parish make the most out of the wonderful talents and skills of you and of the people in the parish? What suggestions do you have to encourage people with talents and skills to become more involved in the life of the Church?

The use of talents from within the community for the parish is seen in particular lights: running the parish council, music, creating space for the young to learn their faith while socialising with each other, getting people together to discuss the faith, and the various known ministries.

While some people felt that there was good use of the talents, others felt more could be done, while a few felt unqualified to answer due to being unable to attend for the past few years. A few felt we did not make use of the talents of those in the parish.

One factor that was common was the lack of obvious ways one could get involved and how improving that awareness could be achieved. Recognition of Ministries such as Readers, Meet and Greet, Sacristans, etc and the need to have both people and training for those who join them was raised as something which could be improved. Better communication channels between the parish council and the community are needed.

The structure of how the parish council works, and the substructure beneath that was raised by some as being an important aspect to look at. Underlying that was a sense that the parish priest is overburdened and that the parish council needs to be stronger and more identifiable.

Some people wanted less formal and smaller gatherings to exist to provide forums for fellowship and faith development.

A desire to help other parishioners attend Mass, and be involved with Church cleaning was mentioned alongside others who were concerned about making a commitment, particularly on a regular basis, as work schedules for some people are not regular. Those who wanted to be involved were concerned about letting people down.

The diversity of the community was mentioned, and it was noted that perhaps more could be made of the regional cultures within the parish to add to the 'spice' of the liturgy.

How do you believe your presence at Mass makes a difference and how does prayer and liturgical celebration, especially Sunday Mass, inspire and guide you?

For the majority the response to this question was how much attending Mass filtered into their lives in a variety of ways: from the gift that is the Eucharist, to providing strength for the week ahead and a relief from the worries of the week now gone. Some found strength from seeing the Holy Spirit at work in those around them even when they themselves were struggling, which in turn spurred their own sense of the Spirit within.

Some of those who experience the joy of being part of the Communion in celebration and thanksgiving identified the internal strength it provides them while not necessarily understanding how that would reflect or change the outside world, while others noted it was a sign of the Christian presence in a secular world.

Many people focused on how important the homilies are to them, helping them understand the readings and how to place the biblical and gospel message into their daily lives, challenging them in good ways while inspiring them in others.

Some reflection on the ability to attend via streaming was mentioned, and in particular how important this was during the lockdowns. It seems that many still use the service although most are much happier to be able to attend in person.

The importance of prayer, of Christ being in the midst of the people, of the music and uplifting nature of being a community together in prayer and worship was highlighted by

many and how that relationship carried them through the week was mentioned in particular by a few people.

It was observed that Mass was an excellent time to be removed from the modern world and the distractions it contains, but that there could be more time for silent prayer.

One person says that predating the pandemic, they stopped attending Mass and this has opened up the time to think and pray about their Christian life and how to live that and relate to other Christians. This less "Churchy" way of life feels good to them, and has given them time to reflect how they also do not like the way the Mass is conducted, about which they feel very negatively.

MISSION

What does our Parish do well to help parishioners grow their faith, particularly in support of families of young people in their faith development?

In both the work she does for the Children's Liturgy, and youth communion and confirmation preparation, Sister Marie Ann was singled out in recognition as a particularly strong aspect of our support for younger people learning about the Church. It was also noted that there should be more help from other members of the parish with this area.

No less an accolade was presented for the work the parish priest does, particularly in connection with the two local catholic schools, St Joseph's and St Gregory's, and how his enthusiasm and involving manner draws the youth contingent to the Church. This is also extended to preparation for other sacraments, especially marriage, where people praised Fr Mervyn for his guidance and continued support of those entering holy matrimony.

Many people noted that Fr Mervyn's work load (and therefore probably other priests too) to cover his general duties and provide the educational foundations for the parish mean he is probably stretched too thinly, and worry about how this will affect his ability to maintain his pace.

Some parents can feel awkward because of the disruption their crying children can cause, but those who mentioned this stated how welcoming and patient the parish is in this regard.

There is recognition that fellowship groups, small prayer groups, and equivalent for all age groups or both/and families would be a good thing to have, but some people are unaware of what the parish actually offers in this regard. That covid has dramatically reduced their ability to function was noted by many, but the desire to see them resurrected as soon as possible is tangible from the answers provided.

Some people mentioned that the opportunity for pilgrimages was an important part of their parish experience, while others would like to see a youth led Mass, perhaps once a month, to help the young engage. The bulletin was mentioned as a useful resource with its scripture reflection.

Some feel that the Diocese has serious gaps, in particular their provision for the youth, and that they are following an out of date set of policies. For the youth, the opportunity to find their voice and mission within the Church seems lacking, and even the ability to serve on the altar, receive communion, and attend family Masses was not seen as necessarily enough to retain them in later years. Some felt it would be good to have an actual youth worker to fill this hole. Also from these gaps, there is a feeling that it's not just the youth that need help in understanding the Church's teachings, but the older members including parents and grandparents along with those who may not have families, be living a single life, or perhaps are widowed, divorced, or have no relatives; all these areas and people should be recognised and the gap in seeing them and connecting them corrected at both the parish and Diocesan levels.

There was a notable annoyance at the "clerical central decision making" which is seen as a hindrance to the parish, particularly in regards to the decision, some years ago now, to close the ecumenical St Augustine's and open "an unsustainable Catholic secondary" school.

Concerns on the age of confirmation at 10 or 11 years old were mentioned, the feeling being that it was too young.

What more can we do in our Parish to reach out to people in need (homeless, lonely, the bereaved, prisoners, the sick, people with addictions, refugees, people with disabilities, those who suffer in developing countries)?

Awareness of what is going on already is considered by many a first step. They call on the PPC to provide a list of things that are happening already and then from there we can assess what else may be needed.

For those who were aware of some of what is going on, they felt we were making good efforts, but that perhaps more could be done. Establishing groups who can go out and visit our own parishioners while also making use of the community hall to provide a regular and free place for gathering and community with tea, coffee, and light refreshments. Others mentioned restarting the CAFOD international matching of parishes—how we provided a water system to an Ethiopian parish was raised as a wonderful example, and if not through CAFOD, then perhaps looking to make that happen ourselves.

The Justice and Peace group was named several times and lauded for the work it has done. The different collections for the Foodbank, Gatehouse, Friends of the Holy Land, to

highlight a few, were all seen as excellent examples of the work they have initiated and completed.

Some people raised the idea of founding a St Vincent de Paul group which in itself would address a certain level of mission and outreach, and perhaps help catch those who “fall between the cracks”. Equally, associating ourselves with non-Catholic or non-Christian groups who are already targeting areas rather than starting afresh might also be a smart move.

It was raised that we are good as a parish to respond to particular appeals, especially when they are all over the news. Others noted that while the Parish is a Live Simply and Fairtrade Parish, individuals are involved in food banks and lunch clubs and seasonal collections (Christmas Gifts) and the like, there remains the question of how embedded this approach is in everyone’s way of life; does everyone make the effort beyond their attendance of Sunday Mass to live this way? Some did answer this with a sense that many of the parish all do little things in everyday life to reach out and help where they can.

Some felt that while reaching out is important, we might first need to tend to our own and see if there are those within our community are in need. If we can’t serve those who share our pews, who may be lonely, bereaved, sick, suffering, hungry, struggling with life, or addictions, or even their faith, how can we expect to serve those beyond?

There do appear to be a number of respondents who are already helping people in some of the areas already noted, particularly with addiction, or other illnesses.

It was noted particularly that Fr Mervyn seems to be the only person who people can visit when they are bereaved—a group to service this part of the community seems to be both wanted and needed. It could be coupled with scheduling visits or phone calls to the lonely and sick.

Bringing in guest speakers to impart to the community what they do, such as visiting prisoners, the elderly, soup kitchens, etc. as well as keeping a constant reminder over the year that such things exist, was suggested as one way to inject a new approach.

DONA is already being used in the parish which, it was noted, has an excellent news letter— distributing this may provide both ideas and a sense of what is achievable by seeing what others are doing.

The question of training was raised in regards to both leadership roles in the parish as well as for members of any groups which are created to serve particular groups.

Lots of people raised points about fundraising through raffles, bring and buy sales, or equivalent events while some suggested mentoring for young adults, both for life events and in connecting them with the rest of the community.

It was particularly noted that prayer was important for this aspect of the parish’s development in the Mission of the Synodal Pathway.