

Leicester Deanery Synodal Journey Discussion and outcomes 20.01.2022

Preamble: The Leicester Deanery Discussion was held on Thursday 20 January 2022 from 7 to 8 pm. There were 24 participants. Some participants were unable to log in due to technical glitches. However, having listened to sundry contributions and after prayerful reflections, the following were the salient points obtained from the listening process.

Question 1. What is my dream for the Church, for my parish so that it can become more outward-looking, more missionary?

Whilst respecting different cultures and nationalities, we must unite as one. Parishioners need to realise that the parish cannot run itself, it needs people to run various activities, attend meetings, help to achieve maintenance needs and be part of the sacraments: Holy Communion, Confirmation, the masses and fundraising activities. Everyone should understand that the parish needs many other people and the Parish Priest to enable it to operate and flourish.

That we look to understand that the Parish is more than the liturgy – this is the most important aspect of why we come to Mass but not the only reason and it is my dream that our actions have to show that we live our Catholic values, seeing our community as our brothers and sisters. We need to be seen as a beacon of hope and love in our community, addressing the common good and caring for our fragile world, being welcoming, listening to all voices, even those we may find uncomfortable to hear. That we embrace new ways of communicating and celebrating the liturgy, encouraging people to lead this to meet their needs and the needs of others.

That we, the church members, be more friendly towards those who are not our personal friends already, that we are a welcoming community for people of all ages.

To see young families at Mass and becoming involved in and initiating a variety of "Parish Family" activities. A vibrant parish where there is something for everyone and all age groups feel welcome and valued knowing that they have a vital contribution to make to the spiritual and community life of the parish.

We would like to see a Church more open to discussion and with much more communication at all levels between priests and parishioners, between parish and cluster groups, between the parish and the local Catholic schools, and with the Deanery or the Diocese. Why should we listen! We have not been heard before! Our thoughts will just be ‘weeded out’ before they get to grow

Most of the faithful have good intentions for the church but many have not had the encounter experience. I will talk about my own experience; I went to church for over 25 years but never had a relationship with Jesus. We sign ourselves “In the name of the father, and of the Son and the Holy Spirit” but I never understood what and who the Holy Spirit is. Many of us have not even identified our gifts and talents so that we can use His gifts to build the church. We have many people in our church as catechists who may be very knowledgeable but don’t operate with the Holy Spirit. I remember a priest friend who once said to me “You can’t give what you don’t have”.

Question 2 *To achieve this dream, what do we need to stop doing? What are we doing that needs to be developed or done differently?*

The parish (and the Church at large) should continue to promote and, where necessary seek to extend, an 'inclusive' environment in all aspects, recognising the importance of engaging with the diverse nature of the parish community, while also ensuring those core aspects of the parish, such as the celebration of Mass, and community engagement and charitable work, are maintained and promoted. This would include, for example, continuing, and where necessary restarting, parish and community outreach and engagement activities and events.

A Church that is more than just about going to Mass on Sundays and receiving Communion (out of a sense of duty or habit) but a Church that is accepting of its failings, breaking out of isolation method of working and (from the observations of this diocese) it's an insistence on clinging onto assets of buildings/property, rather than to utilize, manage and support its most important assets of priest deacons and laity.

Women should have a greater role- evaluate, approve, and commission all those putting themselves forward for a ministry. That every adult Catholic, whatever their gender identity, sexual orientation, race, marital or social status, has the right to offer themselves as a candidate for election to any church ministry.

A church that is bold enough to accept help from priests abroad and reengineer the true spirit of the catholic faith in England and Wales.

To be a caring community at every level – particularly parish and diocese.

Action to Take: Appoint a 'welfare officer' in every parish, who would work with a team within the parish to keep regular contact with all the housebound, elderly, and disabled persons in and associated with the parish. Retired nurses would be very good at this, and it would provide them with an important role in the community. The parish welfare officer would contact any parishioner or member of the community who became disabled, ill, or housebound, and then keep regular contact with them all.

We have to stop looking in and seeing the Parish as just the parishioners. Have to use the collective knowledge of all, engage the people. We have to stop seeing that the Priest/ Clergy have all the answers and we all need to work together to hear each other's voices. Have to cease being hierarchical – need a Church based on subsidiarity where we can feel that it is our Parish. Need to use the skills of parishioners – many know of what is out there or can undertake action research to find out. Consider having a Parish worker (paid) that would address all of these matters rather than it being the Clergy's responsibility. We need to allow the local community to have access to our facilities. Look to promote opportunities to join

together – such as visiting, we could link in with existing befriending schemes or with other Churches, we could look to advertise how to donate to local food banks, have a drop off occasionally, use Christmas and Advent. We could look to working with social enterprise work schemes to employ local people to clean the hall. Have a Parish team that has oversight of the Parish life, has a Chair and is accountable to the Parish.

I believe first we need to equip everyone, there are many courses available, for example, the Alpha course and in Jesus Youth, we have the Philip course. We need each one of us to have that initial encounter experience (Saul to Paul conversion, the Samaritan woman, Nicodemus and I believe the Bible has many stories where people encountered Jesus), identify our calling and then this calling doesn't become a job for us rather we build His church with love. (Of course some things need to be paid for when we need a service but not when it comes to building the church and its people). Freely you have received we should give.

Some parishes chose to respond to the questionnaires differently. Some examples can be found below.

1. How do prayer and liturgical celebrations inspire and guide our common life and mission in Parish and our community?
 - a. Lex orandi, lex credendi, lex Vivendi, means that prayer and belief are integral to each other and that liturgy is not distinct from theology. Thus part taking in liturgical celebrations not only nourishes our spiritual growth but also builds on our communal relationship.
2. What hinders you from being active in the Parish mission? What area of activities are we neglecting? How can the church help in this area?
 - a. Creating or introducing a mechanism whereby individuals and/or families nurtures belongingness to a parish would encourage them to be active in the parish.
 - b. Social gatherings/activities centred around the parish would further cement that relationship.
3. How is authority or governance exercised within our Church and parish? Your suggestions on this matter.
 - a. Elected parish members under the guidance of the parish priest would be an effective mechanism.
4. What relationships does our Church community have with members of other Christian Faiths, Non-believers, Atheists and other groups?
 - a. Parish churches could organize together common feasts with neighbouring churches of other denominations, especially Anglican catholic churches. Active organization of Octave of Unity would further help in this regard.
5. What are the difficulties, obstacles, and wounds in the Catholic Church and our local Parish Church?
 - a. Many members remain anonymous and cold. Thus people become indifferent and lose interest in coming to the parish. A welcoming parish needs both the parish priest and the community within it, to be welcoming. The community should imitate the life of the early Christians and the Apostles.

There are notions that the church the hierarchy has not been penitent enough. As a result, the following recommendation came from one parish:

1. Inclusivity with no exceptions - the Church needs to welcome all, even if personal circumstances mean persons cannot always live the expected ideals of Church teaching.
2. The Church needs to give a public "genuine" apology, supported by publicised action, to those it has damaged/abused - this is the first step needed to regain the trust, hence the longed-for return of those involved in the exodus of past decades.

In addition, a parish suggested the following:

Need to rebuild and develop parish and community: only a strong parish community can evangelise

This was a strong theme in both the Spiritual and social senses. The need existed before Covid and has grown since.

Points raised: •The need to know each other better outside the circles of people we know and thus more of a community. • There is very little interaction at Mass. •Make current activities more social. •Through a stronger community we would become more welcoming of marginalised people and more evangelising. •We can appear unfriendly whilst trying to respect newcomers' privacy. •To encourage more participation in activities rather than leave it to the few.

Marginalised groups

Groups on the margins locally figured strongly: the youth of the Parish, travellers, homeless and the socially isolated (the sick and elderly). Particularly a better welcome of Travellers. More widely: the homeless, refugees, ex-offenders, lonely, single-parent families, families suffering from debt problems. Formulate a strategy to reach out to those who feel excluded starting where they are, rather than where we would want them to be. Whilst we cannot endorse aspects of the lifestyle of some, we should show them, Christian love.

Young people & Families

Young people were highlighted. There is very little for them at the Parish level. Nothing to make them feel part of or belonging to the Parish. There should be space or forum for them at the PPC/Newsletter/ Website. And the need for them to be involved with Ministries such as welcoming. There could be more collaboration with the school. The need to reach out and welcome families especially after COVID when many are no longer attending.

PPC

The need for better awareness of the role of the PPC which and communication of its meetings, agenda and decisions and how it is constituted. To reflect the makeup of the Parish Community. Such as the young and the travellers' Community.

Keeping in touch with older people

The need to communicate and keep in touch with the elderly and frail. Through letters and through some sort of befriending group to visit and chat to them who are often so involved in parish life. Could we find a more organised way of getting them to Mass?

Going outwards

To create a better perception of Catholics who are often seen as outmoded or different. To make better use of our facilities for the service of the community and make them welcoming hubs of compassion. Our coffee mornings could open to others outside the Catholic

Community. Is there a specifically Catholic charity or initiative that might be a good means of evangelisation in that it would be a demonstration to the wider world of the way the members of the Parish are living out the message of the Gospels? It could also be something young people can be involved with. Mention was made of the Pro-life tradition of this parish which needs revitalising and could be a focus.

The spiritual life of the parish:

It was felt that the prayer life of the parish had disappeared over the last two years and people no longer feel connected or with God. We need to find some ways of coming together, both spiritually and socially to rebuild relationships. Prayer, Bible groups were mentioned and exposition of the Blessed Sacrament.

To reinvigorate the music at Mass and make it more attractive to the young. To reintroduce the Bidding prayer groups. The exposition of the Blessed Sacrament was mentioned.

Adult formation → “We need to evangelise ourselves to evangelise others”

We need to be reminded constantly that our commission given by the Lord is to make disciples, teach, and evangelize. Formation in faith, encounter with Christ and understanding of our faith. Study groups Bible Catechism. We cannot share what we do not have.

Better communications and use of technology

- '**Who are we listening to and for whom are we planning?**' Listening to people properly and fully will help to understand what people are asking for or perhaps what they need even if they aren't saying it directly

Making the most of technology & virtual media. The need to use modern media better to communicate simply arouses interest. Ask some of those more “tech Savvy” to help others access mass online. Put our own service online with a link on the parish website. To update the Parish List.

Immediate action: to implement a welcoming group and to find those Parishioners who are not on the Parish List to better Communicate.

Longer-term action: To develop a Parish Pastoral plan to discern and implement the above themes.

Similarly, the following resonates with the above opinions:

Immediate Action

We will take action to ensure that the church is a more welcoming place to visit.

For example review information boards, notices, posters, tea and coffee events and aspects of the liturgy to see if they could be more welcoming and inclusive.

Medium/Longer Term Actions

Investigate the needs of various groups, including those within and those potentially part of, the Holy Cross community.

We will explore and implement a range of communication techniques to try to get input of thoughts and ideas from a wide range of people.

These might include, among other things:

- Paper and online surveys
 - Meetings and presentations (in-person and online)
 - An informal chatting and social interaction
 - A ‘What’s On event to which groups will be invited to send a representative(s) to run a stall/information table. Members of our community will be invited to attend the event and find out how they can be involved in what the various groups are offering.
- In addition, we will review previous consultations and assemblies that have taken place and ensure any outstanding action is progressed.

Challenges

Identifying groups that might be considered ‘marginalised’ or ‘excluded’, possibly including children, teenagers, young adults, elderly, lonely, homeless, lapsed Catholics, those needing support with relationship and marriage breakdown, LGBT+ groups and those from ethnic minorities.

Breaking down perceived barriers between the congregations of our several Masses

Providing liturgical, catechetical, spiritual, social, and personal development opportunities for diverse groups with different needs.

What is the dream for the church, and my parish, so that it can become more outward-looking, more missionary?

- That the word of God can be spread throughout the world and that families and individuals come together to pray and understand the scriptures, as is said, and taught in Church
- Reinforce the message of the commandment, ‘you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind and secondly that, ‘you shall love your neighbour as yourself
- Parishioners need to be reminded to have compassion, sympathy, love, and consideration for each other. Their character should reflect Christ i.e. have faith in Christ, belief in him, have hope that he will fulfil his promises to you, do charitable activities, be kind, honest and caring towards each other and to non-believers so that through this sort of attitude, they will follow Christ
- Support parishioners to believe in the power of prayers and worship, keep encouraging them to pray with the family, children, and others

- Church's need to invest more time and effort in building a relationship/bond with its local parish community i.e. organise social events for families, plan regular activities for children and young adults, host a citizen's day for older people, arrange Adoration evenings for the sick in the community
- Church's should do more partnership activities with other local faith and community groups
- The Church should reconsider its policy on divorce, be more sympathetic and compassionate to individual cases, don't alienate or isolate those who are divorced through no fault of their own.

To achieve this dream, what do we need to stop doing? What are we doing that needs to be developed or done differently?

- Church should ask parishioners to keep reminding themselves who they represent, encourage them to be proud to say that they are Catholics, assist them to defend and promote the Catholic faith to non-Christians
- Provide more support to local Parish Priests and ask parishioners to give thanks for their Parish Priest, especially as fewer people are joining the priesthood
- Tell parishioners to pray every day especially for the Church, its community and for their Parish Priest
- Keep reminding and encouraging parishioners to help the Church, ask them to consider what they can give or do for the Church and to celebrate what the Church does for them
- Ask parishioners to be kind and caring to others
- Encourage and support parishioners to invite others to become members of the Church congregation i.e. give them a registration form to fill in, inform them about all the good things of the Church, make sure that they are introduced to the Parish Priest and welcomed to Church, on their first meeting.

Who are the marginalised people in our Parish and how do we help them?

- The marginalised people in the parish are the elderly and people with disabilities especially those who struggle to walk, have poor eyesight, have hearing issues or are in a wheelchair. The Parish should discreetly identify these individuals and have a small network of people in place to support them and their carer's when they attend mass
- In terms of society, it is those who have lost their faith in Christ our Lord. They lack the means to mitigate their pains and difficulties because they do not know how to access unconditional love that God alone can give
- Same is true for the homeless, many of whom find themselves in dire situations through no fault of their own
- Churches need to do more to raise awareness of local issues and ask their parishioners to be more compassionate and supportive towards those who have lost their faith or

are homeless i.e. donate to registered charities, help food banks and/or be involved in befriending/mentoring programmes.

In Summary, the responses were honest but further discernment is needed. The following gives insight to various thoughts:

- We need many people in our church as catechists and training are imperative.
- A church that is open and transparent in all her dealings with clergy and lay faithful
- A more missionary approach to evangelization by openness to the possibility of hiring lay people to facilitate church programs.
- The Mass needs to integrate various cultural differences.
- A liberal church, a welcoming church.