

Our Lady of Mount Carmel Parish, Faversham

Response to the Synod Discussion 2021

Parishioners met in response to the diocesan invitation from Pope Francis:

“Pope Francis is inviting us to listen again to each other, hearing experiences of faith with all its joys and disappointments, and to find new ways of strengthening each other. It is an opportunity for us to show our care for the family of the Church. Please do take it up in whatever ways you can.”

This is an outline of our discussions.

About 25 parishioners, Fr Kevin and Br Paul met over four sessions and this is a summary of our thoughts.

We were asked to discuss three topics: *Communion, Participation and Mission*

1. **Communion and Participation**, we brought these together as both relate to our existing experience.

We had an opportunity to share a little of our varied journeys of faith. Some came to faith as adults, some born to Christian parents, some had experienced faith in other denominations and still others always within the Roman Catholic Church. This was a rich and important time of sharing.

- All felt that their Christian faith enriched their life, and that without the Church and their community of faith their life would be poorer.
- Their experiences of different denominations and churches had given each a new experience of liturgy and community. Some had felt their faith strengthened by an evangelical style of church; rousing music, extensive preaching and teaching and dynamic community engagement, others had found silence and stillness central to their journey of faith; all agreed that community was and still remained central to their experience of Church. Not all felt fully part of our Church community now.

2. **Mission:** “Go out to the whole world, proclaim the Good News” / “Go and announce the Gospel of the Lord”

We had joyful, honest and enthusiastic discussions about the future possibilities for the universal church, diocese and parish. Our central suggestions:

- ❖ The Universal Church and Diocese
 - Grief over the abuse scandal within the Church and a feeling that we are still living with the repercussions of this, especially affecting the opinions and views of those not part of the Church.
 - A general feeling that married priests would be a good thing.
 - A feeling that the Church is still misogynistic.

- A desire for a greater role for women within the Church and particularly women priests.

❖ **Our parish**

Covid was felt to still be having a detrimental effect, but our suggestions were for something which can be done now and plans for a post-restriction world.

We felt that we wanted many things to return to 'normal' but saw this as an opportunity for change and renewal, see how we would like each area to be, rather than just be a return to how it was before.

- Ecumenism was felt by all to be central to our witness of faith and love, in our charitable work and outreach. This is shown especially through the work of the SVP, refugee support and housing scheme, the joint services organised with the Council of Churches, especially the Christmas carols and March of Witness.
- The return of the Welcome ministry, the Diversity Welcome notice to be edited and posted on the notice board.
- Visiting care homes by priests and lay parishioners. An idea of a rota of services through the Council of Churches was felt to be a good idea.
- Engaging and reengaging young people and children was felt to be vital, ideas included Children's Masses, Children's Liturgy returning, the resumption of the First Holy Communion and Confirmation programmes. Youth work was discussed, a music group was felt to be a possibility, but few firm suggestions emerged, a dedicated discussion was felt to be needed.
- A review of the times of Mass especially with a view to families and young people's needs.
- Outreach:
 - Particularly through personal witness of our living faith, shown through our love and care of others such as the SVP and Foodbank.
 - Welcome card giving details of parish groups.
 - Working and thinking Ecumenically
 - Return of the Enquirers group and RCIA.
- Adult formation and community growth ideas included: discussion groups, Bible study, praying together, sessions on the symbolism and understanding the Mass, having service sheets available again, helping those who are unfamiliar with the liturgy.
- Outreach:
 - We need to seek ways of including those with specific needs into the life of the parish e.g., Mass for the sick,
 - Transport for those with mobility issues,
 - Opportunities for people with special needs and their carers to meet
 - Bereavement service each November

- Annual service for those newly baptised
 - Nativity service review.
 - Notice board outside
 - Invitation cards available for these services.
- Develop ways to support older or vulnerable parishioners.

❖ **Our Church building.**

- Church front door being open during the day.
- The entry and exit of the church were felt to be an encumbrance to community as chatting after Mass was conducted on the road. Suggested alternatives were discussed.
- Side chapel was discussed as no view of the altar. Television screens projecting a view of the altar would greatly help. (These could also be used for hymns)
- Screens on the side of the altar enabling project the hymns.

These discussions were greatly enjoyed and very insightful. Thank you to all who took part. However, the process of the Synod is not at an end yet. Fr Kevin is planning this spring to have further discussions to reflect on the way forward for our parish.

There are meetings planned by the diocese where our thoughts will be shared with other parishes in the area and then a summary will be sent by our Archbishop to Rome to join the feedback from around the world.

Thanking all who have contributed.

Marie Mann

Appendix:

We spent some time relating our, sometimes lifelong, good and awkward experiences of being part of the Church, and then focused on particular points.

Positive comments:

* Faith gives meaning to life, makes sense of the world and is a framework for our ongoing search for Truth.

* We are nourished by being a community. The sacraments and liturgies are helpful for marking and negotiating the great events of life. Also, many strong friendships in all age groups are forged through social engagement within the parish.

* As part of the Universal Church, we can attend Mass anywhere in the world and this brings an awareness of worldwide belonging.

Difficult areas:

* The Church is seen as having an outdated, male hierarchical structure which can appear arrogant and dictatorial and does not accord with modern Western democratic culture. While men hold the positions of power, it is mostly women who work at the practical level, both in the church buildings and the charitable works. From the outside it can appear that Catholics are cowed by rules and regulations. Even within the Parish, there are still some who fret about 'keeping the rules' as the primary requirement of membership.

* There was unopposed agreement that an all-male and celibate priesthood is an anachronism and an unnecessary limitation. The ordination of both women and the married would bring new hearts and souls into the Church.

* There was a genuine concern that unless the Catholic Church modernises and becomes relevant, it will not survive in the Western world.

* We did, however, appreciate that our Parish is predominantly British, white, and middle class and other cultures may not have the same concerns.

Thoughts arising:

* There was general agreement that we should integrate more with other denominations locally, particularly with social care and charitable concerns such as visiting care homes, food distribution and toddler groups. Pooled resources and one simple Christian identity would be more efficient and truly missionary. Communal worship may be a little more problematic - the matter of shared Holy Communion may need thought.

* We would appreciate more 'adult' education within the Parish. After Confirmation there is little opportunity to further explore the many spiritual riches of the church, of which so few are aware. Conversational meetings, Bible studies, workshops and perhaps even Parish retreats, could help many to grow in Faith. Some of us have experienced events like these and had profound benefits.