

Synodal Reflection Process: Report to Parish.

This initiative of Pope Francis to engage the whole Church in a process of reflection and discernment to find “a new way of being Church” was seen as an opportunity to be grasped and a good number of parishioners attended one of the groups offered or submitted written comments. In general, people were glad to have the chance to share with each other about their faith.

Many statements, views, questions and suggestions were put forward and below is an attempt to give an overview (with paper-saving in mind!)

1. The Family and our Companions on the Journey.

Family members, friends, parishioners, colleagues and other Christians were seen as sharing the faith journey but faith issues were often not discussed directly, perhaps because in this culture religion is seen as a private matter. Some people engage more often on matters of faith and morals; others feel they walk alone (with God) though non-Catholic spouses’ support is appreciated.

One main concern was that younger generations are not part of the regular church community, raising the question of the future of the Church. While young people have good Christian values and do good in the world, attitudes in society towards sexuality and gender have changed and they may have lifestyles not approved by the Church. Opportunities to talk with youth are necessary.

The second main concern was the isolation and pain of divorced people who are unable to re-marry in church and may feel excluded from the Eucharist. Young people, too, who may not be regular church attendees, may be refused marriage, baptism of children, so opportunities for re-connection with the church are lost. The Church needs to change, to welcome and attract.

2. Community, Parish and Diocese.

2A. **Liturgy.** The Mass is seen as central to our lives, from which we draw support and strength, spiritual and social. After Covid restrictions there’s appreciation for a return to ordinary freedoms of singing, having time after Communion, etc. Variety and quality of on-line Masses was valued but full participation is needed to deepen our faith. Eucharistic services of the Word and Holy Communion during the week in the parish priest’s absence were well attended, prayerful, and Ministers were very competent. In view of the bishop’s apparent disapproval, how will our desire for spiritual sustenance be met during the week when shortage of priests curtails Masses? The text of the rite allows for no confusion between Mass and this service. The suggestion that at weekends we should travel to other parishes will exclude some people and hinder growth as a Christian community. The spiritual needs of people need to be prioritised with more prayer to the Spirit, discernment, silence within and outside liturgy. A call noted for more freedom to celebrate Masses in different ways: small groups, for youth, parents and children, more informal, monthly children’s liturgy, etc. Scope for more varied prayer services: vigils, novenas? There is love for, and attachment to, SMC’s church itself – parishioners worked to fund the building of it. Some feel a sense of loss for the Church as it once was: full of young families, the priest a familiar presence, visiting homes, schools, etc. Appreciation of the priest’s use of inclusive language in liturgy (new translation needed!) and attempt at dialogue-homily (poor response – shyness and audibility?). Need for more people to be involved in various Ministries – commitment difficult in busy lives. Do we radiate joy in our liturgies?

2B. **Community.** This is a time of uncertainty and change for the parish as we face the reality of being a parish without a resident priest. Anxiety was expressed about the shortage of priests and vocations but others saw new possibilities opening up with lay-led parishes. Many participants saw a need for married and women priests or deacons. (Women are a significant presence in the Church but not in leadership roles). There are some concerns about divisions arising in the parish, with some wanting to move on quickly without a priest and others recognising that respect and sensitivity are required in the transition. We must be united in service to each other and the Development Group, tasked with planning for the future, must maintain openness and transparency in communicating with the rest of the parish.

For some, the parish is the main source of community and there were many suggestions about building community with events which bring joy, excitement and involvement. With Covid restrictions lifted, it is hoped that already established activities will resume (e.g. coffee after Mass,

etc.) with possibilities for new initiatives (small interest groups on U3A model, walking groups, etc.). All activities require time, energy and commitment. Who will offer? Welcome ministry and organisation of transport to church for those who need it was seen as good, as also themed displays in the past which affirm each other's gifts. It was suggested, in concern about young people, that some might be found to communicate with their peers about faith, that Confirmation candidates could be followed up; also youth groups, sport, etc. Churches Together in Haxby brings prayer and witness opportunities – do we support enough? The marginalised: elderly, those with learning disabilities, who lack computer skills, etc. Need to be truly inclusive. On-going discernment through prayer, listening to God, awareness of local, world and Church news needed.

2C. **Communication**. People are reluctant to speak out because of fear of being criticised, being labelled or from a sense of their own lack of knowledge of the faith. Various solutions were suggested of adult formation so that the knowledge of the faith is kept alive and up-to-date. Could Further in Faith group re-start? Information about parish activities wanted with open meetings with representatives of each group. Two-way communication with the Development Group important: accountability in service. Dialogue with the priest is often reduced to permission-seeking; he can block initiatives. Good communication between priest, Eucharistic Ministers, SVP etc. essential re. sick and those in need. Pilgrimages encourage faith-sharing. A Deanery Pastoral Council would facilitate wider involvement and participation in decision-making.

2D. **Mission**. Meaning of "mission" today? - in small daily actions and encounters. Are we slow to witness explicitly to our faith? Keeping the church open every day is an invitation to non-Catholics as well as parishioners. Parish gives generous support to Cafod, emergency appeals, charities. Do we neglect any in our own community? Some participation in ecumenical activities (Good Friday, etc.) but other invitations could be extended to local churches e.g. Christmas services. Do we advertise events, use Radio York? Are we ready to learn from other Christians? Talks about other faiths were appreciated. Do we share common concerns with them? The importance of Catholic schools attached to parishes was noted.

3. **The wider Church**.

3A. **Love versus Rules**. Emphasis on an authoritarian model of Church has led to an emphasis on rules that sometimes obscures Christ's central message of God's love and mercy for all. Distinction should be made between central truths and arbitrary rules which are interpreted and applied with inconsistency.

3B. **Shortage of Priests**. The spiritual life and dedication of consecrated celibate priests is valued but many suitable candidates leave seminary and priesthood because of celibacy. Its necessity is now questioned. The acceptance of married ex-Anglican priests seems contradictory. Married priests may be more likely to understand the pressures of modern family life. Other creative alternatives to the shortage must be sought (Not enough to hope and pray!) - for example, women priests/deacons and other roles for the laity. Some felt a sense of loss at the changing role of the priest who has less time for pastoral visits to homes and schools and they miss the easy familiarity with families and children which used to exist. But the scandal of the abuse of children and the vulnerable has shamed the Church and it was felt that the hierarchy has been slow to accept responsibility and take effective action.

3C. **Hierarchy/Laity**. Male hierarchy felt to be a significant factor in the way the Church operates. Laity feel they are not listened to and that their baptismal vocation of priest and prophet should be recognised. Women, in particular, feel that the equality of persons is not recognised in Church law. In some cases women seem to be seen as a threat to male clergy. In fact, the spiritual expertise of the priest should sit at the table alongside the expertise of the laity. The efforts of theological institutes to have certain issues (priesthood, sexuality, marriage) re-examined have been thwarted by Rome. The Eucharist should be available to all who believe.

For more details and examples please see the display board at back of the church. With many thanks to all who contributed to the Reflection.

For the full report to the diocese, please contact Freda Rockcliffe (frockcliffe16@gmail.com) If you need a printed copy, please sign the sheet at the back of the church. (Copy also on porch noticeboard).