

Bede Partnership Synod Responses

Process

The Dean called a meeting with some members of the Partnership forum to look at how to proceed. Sr. Michael was invited to lead a meeting explaining the Synod to parishioners. The process was also introduced to people at Mass.

All parishioners were invited to give written responses to Synod questions which were circulated on paper. Responses were then collated.

Meetings were also held for the eastern and western Parishes of the Partnership, using the written feedback as a starting point to trigger further responses. Discussion took place in small groups and feedback was recorded.

Churches Together in South Tyneside also contributed to the Partnership in their own way and fed back to the whole community.

Some of the Primary Schools from the Partnership and all of the Secondary Schools of the Bishop Chadwick Catholic Education Trust were circulated with questions to which they could provide written feedback and they gathered, by Zoom meetings, to share their views.

We have collated the responses to form this report using the three headings but were aware that there was much overlap.

We heard Communion is found in:

- Family members: practising and non-practising;
- Friends and neighbours;
- School;
- Meeting other Christians, especially in projects centred on the vulnerable;
- Discovering the radical message of Jesus in the local community rather than the structures of the Church

And, during the pandemic:

- People realised the importance of community;
- Surprisingly, Covid regulations, which have led to worship in smaller communities, have resulted in the people knowing each other better;
- Experience of online Mass has been seen as a positive and it enables housebound, who had felt excluded for a long time as well as some of those who are young who might be embarrassed to express their faith, to feel included. Something from this needs to be maintained, even though it was recognised that 'virtual worship' does not meet the need for Eucharistic community. We heard that one single type of Liturgy does not satisfy everyone's spiritual needs.

Barriers to communion are perceived by:

- Those seeing themselves as not belonging in the Church community, such as: those suffering from poverty, addiction, mental health issues, the housebound, members of the LGBT community.
- Youth feeling unwelcome, disengaged and embarrassed to demonstrate their faith overtly.

Other barriers we heard about include:

- Rules that can cause of exclusion and lead people to reject the Church;
- The perceived wealth of the Church;
- The Church's response to the historic and ongoing scandal of clerical abuse;
- Training needed for catechists;

And there was a mixture of opinions as to whether some of the traditions and practices of the Church foster or damage communion.

We heard Participation is:

- Recognised in Mass and the Sacraments;
- Experienced by many people who simply enjoyed being present;
- Valued in communal singing, which was missed during the pandemic and welcomed in its return;
- Apparent in the appetite for lay leadership and ministry in parish worship and communal life;
- Seen in Worship in schools giving students the opportunity to hear about the Church and having the opportunity to discuss their beliefs;
- Enabled by schools making liturgy and worship child-friendly;
- Fostered through social connections that lead people to spiritual growth;

We also heard recognition of the need for adult formation, and that during the Pandemic access to adult formation online showed a possible way forward.

Barriers to Participation is heard from:

- Children telling us that the Pandemic has severed their link with Mass (parents may not attend Mass but children had appreciated school Masses);
- Some people feeling neglected by the Church during the Pandemic;
- Some people who do not feel a need to return to Church;
- Loss of joy in worship, feels dead;
- Sometimes it is difficult to volunteer within the parish community as it is perceived as being a "closed shop";
- Those who do not normally come to Mass but arrive as part of preparation for receiving the Sacraments can feel they are not welcomed;
- Those excluded from the sacraments because of marital status and sexuality;

- Some perceiving exclusion due to early life, lack of preparation or family circumstance;
- Decision making in liturgical practice seeming to be disconnected from people's needs and lives.

We heard Mission is found where:

- Hospitality, friendship and welcome is recognised as the first step;
- Being named and known within the community has a positive impact;
- Individuals and the parish community are seen as living the Gospel message by neighbours, work-colleagues and the wider society;
- Young people who may not come to Church but lead lives of Faith;
- Pope Francis is an effective witness in World Culture. Although, there are times when the institutional Church internationally can be seen as giving a negative witness by promoting a one-sided, at times even politicised, agenda;
- Parents are the first teachers of the faith to their children - based on family life and teaching them to love Jesus;
- The use of Media and Technology promotes positive messages of faith - we need to develop expertise in this area.

Counter to Mission, we heard:

- Individualism in society, but for older people their experience has been built on a sense of belonging: forming social and spiritual support;
- The Pandemic has intensified isolation and there is a need for the Church to encourage a sense of belonging;
- Some parish social and action groups nurtured a sense of belonging and faith. As these have disappeared, we failed to create new opportunities for the next generation;
- At local level many women feel valued and engaged in their local church however at decision making level women feel excluded and this hinders the mission to the church;
- Lack of ministry of women is undermining the mission of the Church with some suggesting ordination should be open to women;
- Some suggested celibacy should be an option;
- The Hierarchy in many ways have lost touch with grass root problems.
- Tension (or lack of trust) between the laity and hierarchy about 'practising what is preached' was expressed and tension between clergy and laity about expectations of one another was recognised as a barrier to the collaborative mission of the faithful.

Reflecting on the process

The hope was expressed that language used could be more accessible to ordinary parishioners. Parishioners look forward to all of the responses being taken into account. The process of gaining public responses was made more difficult by the restrictions due to Covid. It has been a challenging journey, especially given the time-scale.