

## Summary of questionnaire responses 13.2.22

### 1 What do you feel are the main shortcomings of the Catholic Church itself that inhibit it from more fully engaging with its baptised members and with present-day society in general?

The Pope highlights the 'scourge' of clericalism. There are elements within the Vatican who are resisting his reforms. The Church is often perceived as judgemental, removed from the 'real world', lacking compassion. It is led by men, unmarried and generally older, who sometimes appear critical and out-dated and who cannot adequately empathise with the experience of the laity, parents of questioning teenagers etc. They tend to be inward-looking, concerned with the self and the soul, rather than looking outwards to the needs of society. Married priests were a suggested option and it was pointed out that married Anglican priests have been received into the Roman Catholic church and then allowed to carry out priestly duties. More lay ministries are needed.

Women were felt to be excluded. The Church should treat women equally with men in all roles, clerical as well as lay, and allow them a fuller part in the liturgy, with admission to the priesthood if they desire. Younger generations should be listened to and be given greater involvement in the liturgy and running of the Church. The Church should reach out to the many who are infrequent attendees at Mass or completely disengaged.

Generally, the laity should be consulted far more: 'consult the laity or lose them!' They have valid, important views to express and their experience should be embraced when formulating teaching. There is no comprehensive programme of ongoing, lifelong formation for them at parish level outside sacramental preparation. Retreats and days of recollection were suggested and teaching on prayer, especially individual prayer. Such a programme could help members feel more involved. The Mass was considered central to our faith, but in need of more varied liturgies. Within a parish, more people should be encouraged to contribute, beyond the 'usual suspects'.

The Church was criticised for its Canon Law, which can impede the action of the Holy Spirit and imprison the Church within its own rules. There should be an option for services of general absolution, rather than the individual confession on which the Church insists, apart from exceptional circumstances.

Many responding expressed deep concern over the handling of child abuse within the Church, which they felt had destroyed trust in it from both within the Church and beyond. The hypocrisy of the Church was condemned and claims of ignorance rejected as unacceptable.

Others disagreed with the Church's attitude towards divorcees, and it was suggested that special cases of divorce should be allowed, without the trauma of annulments. There were expressions of disgust that the Prime Minister had been allowed to marry in church, when this is refused to others in similar circumstances. There was also confusion about Communion for remarried divorcees, where in countries such as Malta it is allowed, while in the UK it is not. 'Many have left the Church unable to live honest lives according to the strict demands on good souls.' However, there was also criticism of the Church for relaxing its views and no longer holding a hardline stance on issues such as accepting the divorced and remarried and communal confessions.

Society, on the whole, does not hear the voices of the Catholic laity, but merely of eminent Catholic clergymen. Christian social work and preaching of the Gospel appear to be the domain of other Christian denominations. The Church is slow to respond to a changing world, it is insufficiently

inclusive and diverse. It needs to focus more on acts of charity and give a strong lead and guidance in addressing the climate crisis and our relationship with the natural world.

## **2 What do you feel are the greatest strengths of the Catholic Church that help it to engage with its baptised members and with society in general?**

The Church, empowered by the Holy Spirit and through its members, is a channel of God's love to all, especially the sick, poor, disabled and elderly. Its scriptural teaching offers a clear, moral code. Pope Francis, at its head, was considered by many to be the current Church's greatest asset, his pronouncements being incisive and setting a moral tone which is very influential, especially in times of crisis. Catholic social teaching was lauded, as was the lead given by Pope Francis in *Laudato Si* on the climate crisis.

Some cited the strength of the praying, welcoming faith community where we can receive much support in good times and bad, including through organisations such as the St. Vincent de Paul society. 'The Catholic Church must be seen as a place where everyone is always welcome' and one person was specifically grateful for the support received from clergy and parishioners when her marriage broke up. The monastic community at Douai, its Offices and Pastoral Programme, was appreciated. Church architecture and music are an important part of our heritage.

Our Church community is one that can look at itself critically and act accordingly. As it is on the work of this community that the Church depends, it now deserves to be given co-responsibility, starting locally.

Some valued the Church's Tradition, its apostolic succession and its clear teaching and range of spiritualities, also its dignified and reverend liturgy and sacramental programmes. As young families often move around, it was considered important that these programmes be well advertised and widely available. A dedicated team could be responsible for this.

Some mentioned the Church's universality, its international and interracial membership and its inter-denominational and inter-faith dialogue. Its baptised members are highly represented in public service professions. The witness of modern martyrs in serving the poor and oppressed and giving their lives for them was recognised, along with the compassion and dedication of good priests.

## **3 What is your relationship to the Catholic Church, or in other words, why are you taking the time to respond to this questionnaire? (e.g. go to Mass weekly/occasionally/never, no faith but married to a Catholic, baptised but non-practising, etc**

Many of the respondents were regular church goers, deeming their mass attendance as central to their lived faith and valuing the occasion to mix socially. However, a few now attend infrequently if at all, even though a couple were heavily involved in the past. The reasons cited were the current direction of the parish, lack of support during the pandemic, and an inadequate parish life. One parishioner lamented that the reforms envisaged by Vatican II, originally so energising, have not been followed through. Its vision of an inclusive church looking outwards, recognising truth and holiness beyond the organisational boundaries of the Church, should 'be operative universally in the Church and experienced by all the faithful'.

N.B. Concern was also expressed that the time scale for this synod consultation is too short and that our synodal process needs to be distinguished from the formal Synod approach to governance in the Anglican Church.