

# THIRD SYNOD DISCUSSION MEETING

Held at St Luke's, 22 January 2022

The meeting was chaired by Catherine Knowles. Thirteen people participated.

## 1 Introduction

Catherine Knowles outlined the overall synodal process and highlighted the three key themes of communion, participation and mission. She stressed that there were no right or wrong answers and that, as synod means journeying together, we would be considering how best we do that as a Church - the strengths/ weaknesses/ our thoughts/views. She started by reading the synodal prayer to frame our discussions in that light.

## 2 Breakout groups

Participants were assigned to two breakout groups, which met with a facilitator and scribe. Each group met for 40 minutes, and the scribe then summarised the key points of its discussion after all participants had reassembled together. The summaries are given below. They record contributions made during the discussions; sometimes contrasting views were offered. A consensus was not sought within each group.

### *Group 1 report*

It was felt that all these meetings are encouraging, although there is some disillusionment as the laity has been side-lined for far too long and there is a need for the laity to have a louder voice in the church. The laity in the Catholic Church seem to have a lesser voice than in the Protestant Church. Pope Francis wants a synodal church where everyone's voice is heard and respected, but there was uncertainty about whether the hierarchy of the Catholic Church would allow this to happen, in part because of the clericalism embedded in some quarters.

The role of women in the church was seen as unequal. While women are relied upon to complete many of the menial tasks, they have no opportunity to be included in any ordained ministry. The hope was expressed that eventually the ordination of women as deacons and priests would become a reality, although this was seen as a very long-term prospect. The question of how we would want the role of women to be developed in our parish was left for another day.

It was felt that Pope Francis is the key stimulus to our synodal journey. He spoke from his lived experience and a deep humility. We are being asked to consider a significant change in the way we operate, and this is a challenge, as change is difficult. Often people can't imagine the future of a synodal church when they see a "brick wall" of current problems and things going backwards rather than forwards.

The synodal process, with its emphasis on listening to all concerned and being open to the Spirit, was a good example of how to bring about change and renewal. This took time and effort, but was likely to be more fruitful than a top-down approach based on rigid adherence to rules that often had little connection with the realities of most people's lives.

It was felt that the divorced and remarried were made to feel unwelcome in the church and that this needed to be addressed. It was inevitably the children as well as the adults who ended up being excluded. Those who have experienced divorce need a sense of belonging and to be part of a community. We are good at helping people on an individual level but not always at a church level.

In a parish with three distinct geographical communities, after years of work there was a real sense of belonging to a single entity, and it was felt that this is something to be proud of.

Due to the abuse and the institutional cover-up in the Catholic Church, Catholics are tarred by association and this puts them on the back foot with friends for not doing enough to take the hierarchy to task. It was noted that we were not the only organization with abuse issues; other churches, and indeed other organisations, also have the same issue. But the Catholic Church hierarchy has handled it very badly.

In general, it was felt that the church hierarchy have an ingrained structural way of dealing with issues. The hierarchy are all ordained men with virtually no laity in senior positions. They have taken a vow of obedience and, by extension, expect the laity to be obedient and unquestioning.

It was felt that if the male hierarchy of the church were allowed to marry, it would help them understand the more day to day life of the laity. The hard side of life where one must earn money to put food on the table and a roof over the head for the family is outside the daily experience of most clergy. The financial consequences of a married priesthood were mentioned. It was pointed out that the Church of England has self-supporting ministers earning a living during the week and running services at the weekend. The Catholic Church does have experience of worker priests.

Our journeying together has gone backwards in the recent past, with some so upset with the many abrupt changes that they have left or are considering leaving the parish. Some felt that they are not being involved as before and are very concerned that the PPC has been disbanded.

We considered how our voices could be heard at a parish level. It was felt that something like the PPC needed to be re-established in some form as it helped the laity to talk to each other and share views. Questions were asked as to how to assemble a group of people like the PPC and what would be its role. The PPC should be proactive in its thinking rather than reactive or waiting for the Parish Priest to ask them to do things. Being synodal is about sharing responsibility. The PPC should not be looked

upon only as an advisory body but should work with the clergy to get the community to do things together as we need a foundation to build our church.

Serious concern was expressed about the way the church is failing to keep the youth of most communities engaged.

It was agreed that meetings like this one, where we openly discuss our aspirations, concerns and the growth of our faith, are very valuable. It was suggested that regular opportunities to be together in similar events could really benefit our parish, and provide a foundation. If this happened and there was a more collaborative leadership process between priest and laity, then this could really move us to being a synodal church.

### **Group 2 report**

#### **(a) Communion**

In the broader sense, it is about fellowship. This includes other Christians - when you are very involved (e.g. week of Christian Unity) you get a lot out of it. They also use extemporary prayer (prayers in your own words) - it is not formulaic - in this way you get a lot out of this sense of fellowship.

Communion is about coming together - you take communion and are united with God; but it is also about uniting with other people. The taking of communion is an important part of the Mass, but community is also important. Some feel less strength in their belief in communion (the host) as the body and blood of Christ.

The Church is as good as it was 2000 years ago. But problems with the human church - the rules and regulations. The Church should be providing the right climate for young people to get involved. Instead, it makes it harder. There is an increase in young people getting divorced. They feel the church is frowning on them and then stop practising. This can also have an impact on their wider family, who may also stop practising.

RCIA was not very welcoming to divorced people (non-Catholics who wanted to become Catholics) - in effect, they were turned away.

Some Catholics have difficulty with the infallibility of the Pope.

When young couples who were previously lapsed start going to Mass just to get their child into a Catholic school, it can seem irritating for other practising members of the family. But it need not be. The child then learns about Jesus, and other practising members of the family can have conversations with the child about God (especially grandparents).

#### **(b) Mission**

We need to show we are Catholics by our deeds and actions. If people don't go to church (reference to non-Catholics or those of no faith), they find people who go to church a bit strange - so we need to show them God/our faith through our deeds.

We have a lot of rituals in the Church - incense and bells etc, which can seem alien to those outside the Church. We can't go back (e.g. current issues over the Tridentine Mass) - Tridentine Mass seen as archaic and deliberately obscure.

The Church needs to look at areas relevant to the 21<sup>st</sup> Century - particularly in welcoming people - the divorced, LGBT, the homeless etc. When we are all sinners, why are we discriminating against other groups?

In the context of young people - we need to think of ways of bringing them in. For example, if we have a quiz night, invite them along - and then find ways of talking to them.

Fundraising is a great way to involve others (non-Catholics). When we were raising funds for our parish charity, neighbours (non-Catholic) would see us doing so many things and ask about it. They ended up coming to so many of our fundraising events. When our priest said a few prayers, it seemed to have less impact on them.

#### (c) Participation

There needs to be a mindset change - to involve laity in the decision making. There must be two-way communication between the priest and the laity (e.g. practices removed from the calendar without consultation, such as the service of reconciliation). Can't now think of last time went to confession (in the confessional box) - because they got used to the service of reconciliation (and now not accustomed to going to confession in the confessional box).

For parishes with a number of churches, there should be a Parish Council for members from each to come together.

If there is a shortage of priests - allow priests to marry.

We like it when the priest explains (in summary) what we will hear in each of the readings at the Mass (briefly at the start of Mass). Equally, some priests need to learn more about homilies.

We like the warmth of our priests and those with a sense of humour and those who have an openness (openness makes them very approachable about anything).

For us to have confidence in the whole synodal process, there must be transparency at every stage, with everything being published and open. We need to be sure that our input reaches our Bishop, and we need to see what then happens, ie what goes from the Bishop to the Bishops' Conference and what the Bishops' Conference then sends on to the next stage.

### **3 Future meetings**

Catherine Knowles reminded participants that the next meeting would be hosted by St Bernadette's at 10.30 on Sunday 30 January, and encouraged as many as possible to participate. This would be followed by a meeting on Zoom on Friday 4 February, and a synthesis meeting on Sunday 6 February. Again, everyone would be welcome at each of these meetings.

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PMDC

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