

OUR LADY AND ST JOHN, GORING & CHRIST THE KING, WOODCOTE

WALKING TOGETHER

These are individual responses from a range of individuals within our parish. There is obviously a variety of opinions and views.

FEEDBACK FROM THE FORMAL MEETING

How does the Church enhance our lives?

- “Gives, purpose, focus and hope.”
- Sacramental life is strengthening, giving courage
- Community – Body of Christ – others with us, together in our spiritual lives
- Joy of worshipping with other Christians not alone.

Lockdown

- Made us examine our priorities.
- Streaming kept us in touch with God and with each other.
- Catholics should be proud that churches were open more than other denominations.
- Need for equal publicity to be given to re-opening as it was to the closure of churches.
- First time in 800 years. Must not underestimate the seriousness of churches being closed.
- Closure for structural reasons at Woodcote made us realise what we missed. Open-air Masses attracted people. Reminder that we are alive.
- Importance of the sanctuary lamp remaining alight and the Blessed Sacrament in our communities.
- Made us reflect on things in new ways.
- Sense of intimacy from streamed worship as well as international links.
- Despite a wide range of Masses available online, people kept coming back to their own community, parish and church.
- Encouraged bible reading and prayers at home.

How is the Church perceived?

- Word “Synod” means “together.” Modern technology has allowed this (a success and a blessing of recent months) but ... Church is irrelevant to many modern people. They have forgotten not just the details (e.g. the words of the Mass) but so much else.
- Parents with adult children see a common pattern of family Mass-going when the children are young not being carried into their 20s. Many are doing jobs with practical application of Christianity (e.g. medicine) but without a regular worshipping life.
- We do good things within our circle but are less good at welcoming people in.
- Danger of navel-gazing. Example of a Liverpool parish where now there is one church where 50 years ago there were 8. 6 buildings now have secular uses, 1 is a thriving Pentecostal church, 1 is the parish church with 1 priest where there used to be many.

- Secular restlessness and hunger seen in things like wellbeing and mindfulness overlapping with the Church's ancient wisdom. People seek secular answers to spiritual yearnings. The Church has those answers.
- Pope Francis displays a rhetoric and a behaviour about humanity.
- Church seen as rigorous to the point of restrictive. Examples given of difficult situations re faith and morals, many to do with morality e.g. what guidance is being given re LGBT or divorced people?
- Abuse crisis means the church is seen as hypocritical. Need to acknowledge that and move on. All that people see is the scandals.
- Interesting example of the BRIT awards. Striking that many young people on stage started acceptance speeches by thanking God. Would young English Catholics do the same?
- The world tends to be becoming more religious, including Christianity in Africa and Asia. We seem to be going in the other direction.
- Dogma cannot be changed but rules can.
- Fear that this will be filtered by the clerical echelons of the church.
- 2018 Synod for Youth was calamitous. Showed how disengaged youth is.

Vision for the parish in the future

- Parish church must not be a carcass saying "exit via gift shop."

EMAILED SUBMISSIONS AND CONVERSATIONS

- Striking quotations:
 - o "Weekly and occasionally daily Mass attendance is a central part of my life ... Through receiving Christ I feel spiritually nourished for the trials of life."
 - o "Daily prayer, individually and as a family, helps to strengthen our bonds with Christ ... Christ should be an everyday friend not an occasional acquaintance."
 - o "The Catholic Church is central to my life and throughout the last 2 years it has been there for me in whatever form and supported the parish as much as it possibly could."
- We are called to know, love and serve God. Simply coming to Mass on Sunday is not a wholehearted response to this.
 - o Know – study, reflection, catechesis, formation, building a community which learns from and about each other. Need chances to speak, listen and work together.
 - o All are called to do more to build the life of the parish and share the joy of the faith.
 - o Synodal Pathway should not be a one-off. Continuous need for building trust and confidence between different parts of the Body of Christ.
 - o Untapped pool of lay talent lying idle and unused.
- Ecumenical concerns
 - o Importance of local Lent and Advent groups.
 - o Relationships with other local churches essential.
 - o Progress towards unity seems glacially slow.

- Theological questions. There were some comments about changing the Church's stance on
 - o Compulsory celibacy for clergy. Religious vows would still give Christians the example of a celibate calling. Orthodox church practice mentioned.
 - o Male-only ordination. This largely was focussed on the diaconate rather than priesthood and episcopate.
 - o Contraception. Lack of large families in church implies that teaching is largely being ignored. Natural FP may not work; abstinence may damage relationships.
 - o Mass obligation. Young people do not see non-attendance as a serious sin. Virtual attendance during lockdown has helped the elderly.
 - o The filioque means little to people in the pews. Christian unity means more.
- Church decision making
 - o Need for the perspective of lay people, esp. women, and young people to be involved.
- At parish level:
 - o Delighted to see many young families at Mass. Time for a children's liturgy? Other people are strongly opposed to this – the danger of moving children “out of sight and out of mind” at Mass. (NB. This is a topic not raised by parents with young children at present.)
 - o Opportunity for occasional lay testimony rather than homily? E.g. sharing experiences of charity work
 - o Eucharistic ministers for housebound visiting?

ECUMENICAL PARTNERS

- “If the emphasis is on unity and joint initiatives between different churches, then it strikes me that this remains difficult given the different theological positions that exist. There are obviously areas in which we can ‘unite’ but other aspects in which we may well agree to differ!”
- “I appreciate the communication that exists between us as churches in this community and hope that we can continue to build on our relationships.”

A NUMBER OF PARISH FAMILIES ...

- ... submitted point-by-point responses to the 16 questions in the diocesan handbook. Comments included ...
 - o [The Church] allows me to practise my faith and is a manifestation of God in the world.”
 - o “The last 20 months showed me that the sacrament of the Mass was a vital part of my happiness.”
 - o [The Church might improve its decision-making processes] by clearly delineating between human and spiritual decisions and by apologising for any errors it accepts.”

- “I have children. They and I are supported by a variety of Mass times and locations as well as sensitive and energetic preaching.”
- “We wish to encourage our children to give of their time, skills and youth to those in developing countries and would welcome to opportunity to participate in and develop any Church-based avenues of doing this. I will be encouraging my children to volunteer in Lourdes.”
- “We moved mid-pandemic and found our parish to be welcoming with many opportunities for participating in sacraments ...
- “Our parish is welcoming and the Mass is inclusive.”
- “Any process of decision-making must be first and foremost rooted in trying to fulfil the Church’s mission of preaching and living the Gospel, faithfully listening to the voice of the Holy Spirit, as well as discerning the spirits of the age, so as to confirm the world to Christ and not the Church to the world.”
- “We have struggled with a lack of clarity from the Church on what it teaches on how to live as a Catholic ... We want the Church to be less ‘self-aware’ and afraid of the world and spend more time exhorting us to live holy lives, because it is very hard and we need the help!”
- “Perhaps the creation of a society such as the SVP. ... Hosting events like Alpha might also provide opportunity to welcome new people and meet the needs of spiritual poverty.”

THE PARISH PRIEST OBSERVES

- The public meeting was attended by 20 people. 9 further submissions were made by email. Average Sunday Mass attendance is approximately 130 (including children) drawn from approximately twice that number of regular Mass-goers. 3 friends at the meeting mainly attend Christ the King with a few others attending both churches from time to time. The meeting was attended by friends who were over 50; younger parishioners submitted email responses. 1 ecumenical partner of the 2 in Goring responded by email. We did however, talk about the Pathway at our fraternal meetings. These relationships are indispensable.
- The line between what is doctrine and what is discipline can be a difficult one to establish. What to one person is change of fundamental doctrine is an adaptation of regulations and canon law to another.
- The ecumenical experience of synodal processes in other denominations is important, both where they are fruitful and happy and where they are more controversial.

Fr Kenneth Macnab

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