



Parish Report

Our Lady Immaculate and St Etheldreda, Newmarket and St Philip Neri, Kirtling.

Process

- 1) Team of 7 gathered late October 21
- 2) Plan for publicity to encourage wide engagement
 - a) Letter to all people on parish database (993, mailed second week November)
 - b) Invitation to get involved sent to all school parents and guardians via the St Louis ParentMail platform
 - c) Announcements at the end of Masses for several weeks early November inviting sign up for small meetings
 - d) Posters and explanation on dedicated notice board in Narthex and at school
 - e) Dedicated page on parish website
 - f) Newsletter piece every week
- 3) Small group meetings
 - a) Facilitators trained 6/11/21
 - b) Meetings available for booking from 15/11/21, initially 4 options per week
 - c) Less interest than anticipated, meetings not heavily booked, reduced to 2 per week Dec 21
 - d) Small group meetings ceased through lack of participation 13/1/22
- 4) Further explanation and encouragement to participate given at Parish forum 28/11/21
- 5) Diocesan questionnaire
 - a) Published on parish website with hard copies in Narthex from Jan 2022
 - b) Newsletter piece each week
 - c) Informal discussions around the 10 questions encouraged at coffee after Mass by Synod team from Jan 22
 - d) Announcements after Masses encouraging completion of questionnaire 29 and 30/1/22
 - e) Existing parish groups (music, SVP, finance etc) encouraged to discuss Synod and Diocesan questionnaire
- 6) Open meeting to allow final sharings and to discuss steps suggested in the small group meetings 27/2/22

Outcome

- 1) Six small group meetings provided feedback from a total of 20 participants, all regularly attending Catholics; final open meeting with about 25 attendees, all regularly attending Catholics, discussed steps Church should take, mainly concerning youth exit from Church
 - a) **Positive** experiences of journeying together (in no order)
 - i) Praying together, serving together; meeting goodness of God; different parish groups beneficial to growth; Holy Spirit meeting the need when steps to serve taken; personal experience of God confirmed in the community; welcome at the door of the Church is very good; cultural disparities less obvious in Church; children playing together; children's liturgy; good education in the Catholic school; parish community important when you don't know anyone else; men's group; personal contact with others; COVID pandemic has brought some parishioners closer into community, deepened sense of community.
 - b) **Negative** experiences of journeying together (in no order)
 - i) Lack of transparency; strictness; lack of trust; people seem to focus on the negative; making the judgement not to offer help if someone looks bitter or sad; divorced not being allowed blessing of new 'marriage'; past hurts are obstacles; lack of acceptance by priests in the past; 'politics' of parish a challenge to nascent faith; slow and inadequate response to Vatican 2; Evangelical churches seem more in touch; too many negative rules, humanly imposed; cultural disparities; poor outreach during COVID; insufficient opportunities to share our personal experience of God; no 'house groups/fraternities/cell groups'; not enough people to serve;

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clerical abuse scandal a huge obstacle; priests on pedestals – they climb, we put them there; priests micro-managing; Church appears to offer little to youth – old-fashioned, rule-based, joyless; Church seems irrelevant to young even while they strive to care for the environment, tackle injustice, and feed the poor – so youth are often Christian in ideal and action even if not in faith and liturgical practice;

- c) **Steps** the Church should take (in no order but loosely grouped by theme)
- i) **Social:** welcoming at entrance; social gathering after Masses; need to get to know one another; invite people to get involved, to serve – they like it; understand each other's cultures; learn to give and take; remember the commandment: 'love one another'; listen to one another – invest the time to do so
 - ii) **Youth:** get a good youth service going, with good social activities; focus on the young to bring them back to Church; broaden the musical offering; livelier liturgies; restore children's liturgy; teenagers' social activities; intercessory group for lapsed offspring – 'St Monica's prayer group'; aim not to make youth conform and fit in but to give them purpose and mission; let the youth know Church and world need them rather than telling them they need Church; small personal initiatives can be effective, e.g. vigil Mass music group gathering a growing band of young musicians; initiative lies with us (we are the Church) not with 'them' or 'it'; to keep the youth the Church must attend to, care for and form their parents – 30-40s;
 - iii) **Spiritual life/formation:** more formation needed; more sharing about our own everyday life of prayer; small sharing groups or 'house groups'; formation to make our faith more conscious and active; deepen our own interior spiritual life; personal growth in holiness; adult growth in faith; spiritual guidance; spiritual reading; personal prayer
 - iv) **Organisation/communication:** better publicity of what goes on in the parish; establish teams or services to which parishioners can invite lapsed acquaintances, or direct people in need
 - v) **Laity/clergy:** lay people to speak openly to clergy and vice versa; priest needs a team around him which includes lay people; more delegation;
 - vi) **Priests:** there should be more discussion of rule of celibacy for priests; married priests
 - vii) **Women:** discussion about the role of women in the Church; greater and more just roles for women; ordination of women
 - viii) **Ecumenism:** more contact and shared activity with other Churches; much to learn from other denominations; much to offer other denominations.

2) Questionnaires

- a) We hope many have been returned direct to Diocese, online or by mail
- b) So far, we know of one hard copy returned to the parish (forwarded to RCDEA)

Reflection

- 1) Too much haste in October: we started with too great an urgency and would have done better to share the idea of Synod widely and to allow time for more discussion before planning a pathway.
- 2) More attention to building and developing the Synod team may have started the ball rolling and created wider discussion in the parish, and may also have led to a better introductory letter with simpler explanation and more direction.
- 3) Clergy absence from Synod meetings was understandable, and the motive laudable, but it was not desirable, in fact accentuating lay/clergy separation.
- 4) Have we learned a new way of speaking and listening? Perhaps a small step has been taken - we have a millennium, so a slow start is ok!