

St Thomas More Parish Consultation
Synod 2023 RESUME of the
First meeting 14 November 2021



The parish held its inaugural Synod meeting on Sunday 14th November here in the church. Twenty people attended and actively participated in the open discussion along with responding to the questions posed for deliberation. A number of people were unable to attend and have submitted their personal written responses to the diocesan site.

The group were asked to consider three particular questions:

1. Communion:

What are the ways in which your parish most successfully brings people together in liturgical, charitable and social events?

In what ways can you build up communion effectively and authentically in the coming months and years, particularly in relation to those who have drifted away from practising the faith?

The group agreed attending Mass is central to their faith. The beauty of the Liturgy helps people feel connected, binds the congregation together in one place in holiness, worship, mystery and praise. Daily Mass was mentioned with a suggestion that more opportunity be made available for those in full time work who might wish to have a later Mass. There was appreciation too of the dignified way mass is conducted along with the well prepared and thoughtful sermons, although the length of sermons can be too long. People are pleased to be back celebrating mass together in the church after lockdown. The role of the choir and music was identified for its enrichment of worship combining Latin chants with traditional hymns. One of the comments suggested that the congregation should be encouraged to have a weekly or monthly hymn practice enabling their fuller participation in singing the hymns and responses. Many in the congregation enjoy being able to praise through singing. It was felt there is need to reconnect with those who have drifted away from practising their faith and it was suggested having 'A Welcome Back Mass' as a way of reconnecting and welcoming their return.

In addition many respondents would like more inclusion of the primary school in the celebration of the Mass having the pupils participate in readings, bidding prayers, and music along with the idea of having a children's Mass. The provision of a crèche for children and a toddlers group is much needed by parents to enable their attendance and opportunity to develop friendships.

The group expressed gratitude for the twice weekly Adoration on Saturday mornings and the newer addition of the Wednesday evening Adoration. However, there is poor attendance at the latter and this needs more promotion.

2. Participation;

How can participation in our parish be strengthened moving forward into the future after the pandemic and past issues by identifying and using the gifts of our people?

How can we invite families and young people to participate in the life of the parish effectively?

How can we broaden the way we encourage people of our parish to participate in the life of the Church, whilst always keeping true to the Gospel and our core Christianity?

A parent described the positive effects of 'Families meeting families' as a way of bringing people together'. Currently this happens only through the preparation for and celebration of the sacraments of Baptism, Holy Communion and Confirmation.

The discussion highlighted the present lack of 'follow up support' for Confirmation candidates resulting in too many of these young people being forgotten and drifting away from the Church. This needs attention. The role of parents and families in passing on the faith was recognised as being critical in fostering and developing family faith most especially for the young. The challenges of today's secular world increases the need for the church to be more relevant in young peoples' lives. Therefore formation of the faith requires more education, catechesis, witnessing of faith, and ongoing support combined with an active social programme for all.

The group identified a desire for creating groups; prayer groups, adult catechesis, meditation, bible study groups, women's groups alongside more interaction with interfaith groups and other churches.

There was consensus that many parish activities have been dismantled because of the evolving pandemic. There is a need to actively rebuild our parish's social life and re-establish past links with associated groups e.g. Little Sisters of The Poor, UCM, youth groups. One parent reflected how successful and significant social

activities had been in families lives in past years. These were clearly highly valued sociable events which are now seriously lacking. Social groups in particular have fallen by the wayside, activities have been cancelled and clubs become dormant. The more recent Alpha club led during Fr Joe's time had been an excellent opportunity for young people to meet socially, share topical discussions and strengthen friendships. The exceptional parish grounds together with the JPC have much to offer in providing facilities for both recreational and community activities this to will need revaluation in the future along with possibly reviewing disabled toilet facilities

Ours needs to be a welcoming church, by getting to know one another better, being more aware of how other people are experiencing life, being ready to meet people in their difficulties and vulnerabilities. There's a need to develop listening opportunities, being more open to having conversations, visiting the elderly, the ill and housebound, being aware of the poor among us and discovering how to help them.

This a large parish, rich in diversity representing people from all 5 continents, with a wealth of professional experience, individual talent and creative skills ready to be used for the benefit of the church and wider community. This should be explored and work done to establish what groups are needed with a recruitment plan to have leaders in place

There was brief mention of the current climate emergency needing more energetic attention given to it by building on the principles of 'Laudato Si' while working for the protection of our planet, our common home. This will need further discussion, action and involvement within the parish.

The scandals that have rocked the wider church have caused serious hurt and disillusionment for many in the universal church. The harm done has resulted in deep pain, lack of trust in the higher echelons especially, and deep disappointment in the Catholic church with many leaving the faith. Ours needs to be a church of truth and honesty built on through prayer and community service.

One comment advised staying true to our Christian beliefs by living the gospel in our daily lives and people will come.

3. Mission:

Given what you see of the Church's words and actions, in the parish and beyond what would you say is the Church's mission inward and outward looking?

How do we set up our parish for evangelisation, so that we see the needs of the local community and respond to them?

How do we positively support formation of parishioners as missionary disciples?

Firstly there was a sense of the need to grow as a faith community built on prayer, being confident in our own faith in the first instance and living the gospel message through our actions.

There was reference to the weekly 'Lectio Divina' meetings held in the past as being a positive encounter for learning more about Sunday readings for example. The need to increase knowledge of our faith through catechesis alongside various courses would be beneficial in strengthening our faith and how we live it. Again the need to support charitable organisations through raising awareness, fundraising functions, and support was highlighted as an essential area to concentrate parish efforts.

Collaborating and working with other Inter-faith groups and churches near-by was seen as a necessary way forward. It might be that the parish could concentrate on a particular charity, rally behind it with a strength of purpose and be committed to making a positive difference in the chosen cause.

The meeting concluded after two hours of discussion. The group expressed their grateful thanks and appreciation to Fr Bart and Fr Peter for their care and guidance of our parish community all through the challenging time of this evolving pandemic being mindful they both arrived at St Thomas More in the months just prior to the pandemic.

Further meetings will be arranged in the very near future when it's hoped to welcome a greater attendance from all ages especially families and young people. The Synod offers us all an opportunity to accompany each other on this new journey of discovering and re-invigorating our faith. It is hoped this will be a fruitful experience for all to participate in, to enjoy and learn from as we build on our efforts over the coming years.