

ST ETHELDREDA'S CHURCH ELY
SYNOD MEETING – 6 MARCH 2022

Mission

There were 19 participants including a facilitator and notetaker and some parishioners who had not attended the previous two meetings and had longer term, and some relatively new members of the parish. Father David was able to join for the second half of the meeting, once Confession had finished.

The meeting began with a prayer for Ukraine and the Lord's Prayer.

8. How well do we work as a team in parish?

How is leadership exercised and experienced in our parish? Are there positive ways in which we help to participate in the life and mission of the Church? What are the fruits of this collaboration? What are the obstacles and challenges?

The group recalled examples of some teams in the parish: cleaners; children's liturgy (pre-covid); readers; flower arrangers; St Vincent de Paul society. While the children's liturgy and cleaners had renewed membership in recent years, some perceived the issue had always been getting new people to come and experience working in the parish, it was not just an issue that originated in lockdown.

There was respect for the fact that some people probably wanted to just go to Mass but others would like to get more involved. The newcomers reported it was difficult to know what teams and opportunities to get involved existed. A couple had joined teams via chance conversations or word of mouth. One person reflected approaching people with a direct invitation tended to be successful; another person said they wanted other adults to be servers but had given up asking. Some people were confident to approach and offer themselves, others not so confident. One person commented he did not know how to find out what was going on; another stated she hadn't known how she could volunteer for a while.

Our parish is diverse, with people coming from various village communities and Ely; and various nationalities, language backgrounds and customs. There was a wish to get to know each other better and learn from each other. Some thought the parish divided into three sub-groups according to which Sunday Mass was regularly attended, and traditionally little mixing between those groups, although there used to be a social committee. In general, many people did not know names of people in the parish. When lockdown began, one person recalled a sense of panic that we did not have good enough records to contact people to check if they were well. One person stated it was possible to take for granted the work that went on behind the scenes, for example, to provide flowers.

Pre-covid the post-Mass coffees, which were just re-starting, had been a vital chance to talk to people for some. The synod meetings had been a pleasant experience of getting to know each other for the participants.

We recognised the work of groups and individuals, working outside of the parish, in the community. Examples given included the SVP; the Ely Foodbank, chaplaincy volunteering at Addenbrookes Hospital, visiting care homes. Some of these activities had not happened in the pandemic and needed to be restarted.

We discussed membership of charismatic prayer groups and bible study groups, which were not parish-based and some operated online. For example, one person belonged to a Polish prayer group.

While the liturgy for younger children (pre-covid) and the First Communion Classes were well attended, there was nothing organised for children after their First Communion. Therefore there were

no opportunities for young people to exercise their gifts and talents. A young person agreed it would be nice to be involved in a group of young people again.

There was a general sense that more people would probably like the chance to exercise their gifts, including as readers and servers, or in new parish based prayer and Bible study groups.

There were some links with other churches, examples included the recent Catholic Mass at the Cathedral; ecumenical services, Christians Together in Ely (although there was not widespread knowledge about what this group does), Stations of the Cross at different churches in Lent; and joint social action such as the Food Bank. Some people had negative experiences in the past which were difficult to overcome in thinking about bringing churches together.

In summary, greater transparency and communication would enable more people to be involved. Some people were very involved and might need help/helpers. They should ask for help.

Obstacles included:

- Lack of good records of contact details
- No Catholic schools, which would naturally help build a sense of community
- Dispersion between villages

There was consensus that we had a great opportunity as a parish, carefully and thoughtfully, to build on the foundation of existing and past team work, shake off the last two years and have a sense of newness. As well as renewing existing teams, there was an opportunity to start new groups or revive groups that had ended. There was a sense that, as the laity, this was our responsibility, we should not be relying on Father David to take the initiative or make us take the initiative. We should actively try to involve more people.

Some ideas in relation to (re)building teams and starting new groups were proposed:

- A parish register, where people could tick a box to express an interest in what they would like to do
- Communication of opportunities at the end of Mass (as a rotation of announcements, a different one each week for a few weeks), in the newsletter and on the parish website.
- Inviting people to the Parish Forum on 24 March to learn about opportunities.
- Telling people about opportunities at the tea and coffees after Mass
- Finding out what talents people had and what help they would like to give.
- Inviting First Communion Parents to join a parish group or team.
- Holding a recruitment fair with stalls of information about the different groups, for example leaflets about the SVP were already ready.
- The possibility of a young SVP group (“mini-Vinnies”)
- Having a youth committee, with some young people to recruit others, as this would be more engaging than older people.

9. How open are we to the will of God and the guidance of the Holy Spirit?

How do we discern the direction in which the Holy Spirit is leading us rather than just following our own private enthusiasms or agendas? Is there freedom to exercise our particular gifts in the service of the Church? Is my local community accountable and transparent when it comes to making decisions and, if not, what would help to remedy this? Do I support the bishops and priests in arriving at their decisions?

In general, the group thought the Holy Spirit did lead us, through prayer, listening and being open to unexpected opportunities. In the Philippine tradition, it was recognised that people needed to be active to seek the will of God. The Synodal prayer to the Holy Spirit encouraged us to be careful and listen well. A personal enthusiasm could be inspired by the Holy Spirit.

There were some personal recollections of bad experiences of the Church in the past giving rise to a feeling of being unable to move on in life. A discussion developed about the need to ask for forgiveness and to forgive ourselves. Pope Francis had said he would like a Church that goes out into the world and sometimes makes mistakes, above a Church that does not go out into the world. We needed healing of life's hurts for the Holy Spirit to act through us. We could be inspired by the example of other people to reconnect with the Church. There was a desire for an ongoing opportunity to discuss personal issues, the Holy Spirit and forgiveness, perhaps a prayer or Bible group. We were grateful for the grace to share our experiences and for the trust of others in hearing them.

Some people strongly felt there was little accountability and transparency in national or local public life and it was hard to know what to do about a political culture which had apparently low regard for truth. But as Christians, we had to work out how we fitted into our society and how we could make political leaders aware, when we could not get near to them. A first Communion child had asked if it was necessary to forgive people who do bad things and are not sorry for them. The answer being, yes we have to try. The following ideas came forward:

- The early Christians were an example of following a good and holy life, despite living in a hostile society
- We should continue to pray every week for leaders
- We should listen to what God wanted us to do, love each other.
- We can set a personal example, by speaking the truth and rejected the idea that truth does not matter, and saying 'no'.

The Synodal process was an opportunity to support the priests and bishops. A priest was a source of both leadership and support for the initiative that lay people could take in their Parish.

10. How well do we hand on the faith?

Are we effective in sharing and passing on the faith as individuals, as parishes, and as a diocese? What would help us to do this better? Can we see ways in which we might continue to work in a 'synodal' way – praying, discussing, and discerning together, not reliant on majority votes, but on a genuine consensus – a coming together of hearts and minds under the guidance of the Holy Spirit?

Some of the discussion under question 8 is also relevant to question 10.

Additionally, there was a discussion including many examples of what brings together Catholics and other Christians in a common belief in good.

In summary, the facilitator noted there was a common link between all three meetings, which had been hopeful and directed towards practical outcomes. She thanked everyone for their time, and was thanked for her leadership.

In conclusion, Father David reflected the discussion he had heard had been very encouraging. Hope is important. It was hopeful that numbers participating in the synodal meetings had grown each week, rather than dropping off. This was a moment of grace and we should not let it go. We should pray as if everything depended on God and act as if everything depended on us. Thanking the individuals who had organised and facilitated the meetings, Father David encouraged the formation of a group to get on with putting the actions in place. The first step would be to summarise the three meetings into a short report for the Diocese and to publish in the Parish a longer report of the meetings containing content of interest to ourselves.

The meeting concluded with the Hail Mary.