

FEEDBACK SHEET – ALL SOULS PARISH

WALKING TOGETHER

Describe what happened in your parish, how you went about the Synodal process?

Approximately how many people were involved in your parish, including those who have stopped coming to church or who never come.

A leaflet was prepared and given out at all Masses, describing the process and containing the questions and a page for written feedback if that was preferred.

Three meetings were scheduled at weekly intervals to discuss each set of questions. Two parishioners were asked to facilitate the meetings, make notes about the discussions and contribute to this report. There were around 23-24 people at each of the meetings. Most were regular Mass attenders and one or two had recently either returned or joined the Church. We also received a couple of written responses. It was striking that these made almost exactly the same points as those which came out in the meetings.

All Souls parish is different to others in this deanery in that the Coventry Ordinariate Group is based here, and the group pastor, Father Paul Burch, is also the parish priest of All Souls. All of the Ordinariate groups in the country have been asked to submit their own synodal reports and the Coventry group have had their own process for this. Although one or two Ordinariate members did attend the parish meetings, this report should be read as reflecting essentially the views of the parish community.

PARTICIPATION

What was your experience of listening and discerning? How did this feel?

Did you have a feeling of participation in this journey?

Many people commented at the end about how much they had enjoyed the meetings. They felt hopeful and enthused, wanting to go on and start to deal with some of the issues raised straightaway. They found the discussions interesting and sometimes challenging although some felt constrained by the nature of the questions. Most agreed that that they did feel a sense of involvement and participation in something bigger. There was definitely an air of hope, coupled with a strongly felt concern that this should not end here.

ENRICHMENT

How did it feel to be a part of this process? What were the joys? What did you find enriching?

Explain how you felt the Holy Spirit was at work in your parish during this time.

What was particularly significant, surprising, or unexpected about this process? What new perspectives emerged from the process?

What was surprising was the level of enthusiasm for the meetings and the urgent desire to get on and begin to do some of the things we had talked about. Many people remarked on how much they had appreciated being able to talk about these things and were very keen to have more opportunities to do this in the future.

There was a noticeable degree of agreement on the main issues and on the concerns raised in the different discussion groups. At the end of each evening there was a sense of energy in the room, and it became apparent that there was a pent-up desire to serve and grow.

It felt like the beginning of something.

RESPONSES

In the box below outline which of the questions your parish discussed/dialogued about, the responses made, and issues raised.

Q1. In what ways does the Catholic Church enhance your life?

Key responses emphasised the benefit of providing a structure for the exercise of faith, a focus and a framework for life, worship and moral behaviour. People valued the richness and diversity of the tradition and the sense of being part of the universal and global Church. They also found strength from being part of a community which shares the same values.

Q2. Reflecting on 20 months of the pandemic, how has participation in your parish been affected? Were these issues and/or opportunities there before and how can participation be strengthened moving forward into the future?

There is no doubt that some did drift away, and concern was expressed for the elderly who were fearful and at a loss without the structures they had before. It is also noticeable that as we 'emerge' from the pandemic, there is not much going on in the parish at present. Much of the discussion was positive however. The Church/parish was 'something to cling on to'. Many cited the team spirit which emerged, the setting up of daily online Vespers and having teams of stewards every day. We acknowledged how fortunate we were that Mass was available every day, online at first and then in person. There was a generous giving of time by many people to make this possible and it contributed to a greater sense of community. Some also noted that the restrictions led to an increase in attentiveness and reverence, such as the lack of chatting before and after and the orderly procession at Communion. Many would like the positive aspects to continue, especially the role of stewards.

Q3. What are the means by which different voices can be heard in your parish (particularly those on the periphery of parish life)? Which groups and individuals are least included in your parish?

The general feeling about the first part of this question was that there are very limited means for different voices to be heard, and that we should be reviewing the use of groups like the Parish Pastoral Council. (There are further comments about the needs of the homeless, young families and those who drift away in the answers to later questions.) Some definite concerns were raised about people who are housebound for any reason, especially those whose family don't understand the importance of faith.

Q4. How is the Church perceived by members of your family, your friends and work colleagues?

There were a whole range of responses and most were negative and dispiriting. People thought the Church was seen as irrelevant, out of touch, tainted by scandal, too wealthy (referring to Rome), misunderstood and misrepresented. We acknowledged the tussle going on between secular and religious values. There was a strong desire, voiced by many, for better adult formation which would equip people to better understand and defend the faith.

Q5. How might the Church improve its decision-making processes?

There was a strong perception that things are being done by the diocese which affect the parish, with little or no consultation. The opinion of the laity doesn't seem to matter at all. This lack of involvement was especially apparent in the decision to move the Ordinariate of Our Lady of Walsingham into this parish. Whilst many acknowledge the positive aspects of this move, there was considerable resentment at the way it was handled in being simply imposed on the parish without any discussion or preparation whatsoever. We should add that this criticism is directed at the diocese, not at members of the Ordinariate, nor at our parish priest. It seems like it is 'high time to start taking the role of the laity seriously, and give them the respect of at least consulting about major changes'.

Many also felt that the gifts and 'real-world' talents of parishioners need to be recognised and utilised by the Church, especially regarding practical matters. This is happening to some extent but there is room for considerably more involvement.

Within the parish, there was a clear desire for more structure – for example, a renewed parish council and finance committee and a group to organise outreach. (More on this in later questions.)

Q6. Which of your concerns does the Church fail or struggle to respond to?

Many of these have already been mentioned above, but the key items which kept coming up included: too little outreach to the housebound and people on the 'edges'; too little reverence in Church (and too much noise); more support for certain groups of people who struggle to live their lives according to Church teaching.

The introduction of Divine Worship (the Ordinariate Rite) into one of only two existing Sunday Masses was an issue for some, and again brought up strong feelings about how it had been handled. The language of some texts was considered to be a problem, especially in the context of children's catechesis. There was a feeling by some that their concerns are not being heard.

Q7. How do you believe your presence at Mass makes a difference?

Many commented that although the online Masses were valuable, it still didn't feel 'right' or as 'valid' as being there in person, and there is a greater appreciation of being able to attend Mass in Church. Several felt that being there gives encouragement, to themselves and to others, that we are part of a larger community of faith. They recognised the truth that 'where two or three are gathered', there is Christ among us. There is also a strength to be gained from praying with others, and giving witness to our faith.

Some of the group had particular roles – readers, servers, stewards, musicians etc – and some did not. There were conflicting opinions on the degree to which those without a public role are participating or feel that they are an 'audience'. But the general view was that our presence makes a difference to everyone else. Many expressed appreciation for the homilies and readings.

Q8. Explain what difference does it make in your life to receive the sacraments?

There was a widespread appreciation of the value of the sacraments, which was heightened by the experience of deprivation during the pandemic. This obviously applied primarily to Holy Communion – many spoke of their reliance on this and on Confession in order to live their faith and grow spiritually. But they also mentioned the other sacraments, especially the Anointing of the Sick, Confirmation and Marriage. Some felt that Confirmation is given far too young, and that it would have more impact if people were older when they received it. Some spoke of the drawing on the grace of marriage to sustain them in their relationships. There was also recognition of the importance of attending Baptisms and Weddings because of the public witness this gives.

Q9. What part does prayer play in your life and your relationship with God/the Church?

Many of the participants described have some kind of daily pattern of personal prayer and spiritual reading. Some also found value in the Liturgy of the Hours, especially Morning Prayer and Vespers. They valued the sense of community when praying these with others. There was a definite sense that people appreciated how important it was to pray, both alone and with others.

There were also some suggestions for re-starting practices which existed before the pandemic, such as a Lectio Divina group, occasional Evening Prayer in Church, and Stations of the Cross. Some remarked on the value and beneficial effect of Exposition in Church during the pandemic.

Q10. How do you currently participate, personally, in the life of the Church? How much responsibility do you have as an individual?

A variety of roles were described, including: reader; cantor; counting the collection; acting as a kind of 'site manager'; extraordinary minister; steward; catechist.

Most of the discussion centred around ways we could improve visibility of who does what and what tasks need people to do them. Strong support for a clearer parish structure which would enable more people to be involved, and more discernment of gifts.

People are also keen to have organised spiritual activities such as weekend retreats, in order to provide formation and build community.

Q11. How do families and young people effectively participate in the life of your parish? What do you do to support them?

We have a First Communion preparation group for those not in a Catholic school. There are regular school Masses and there is a fellowship group for students at college/university. There is an area in Church for families with very small children where they can be more relaxed. Some of our stewards (during the pandemic) were teenagers and these were very good.

There was general agreement that much more needs to be done, especially for older teenagers and students. In particular the group thought that opportunities for young people to meet socially were important, to give them the support of peers and help counteract the negative influences around them.

It was also pointed out that families have older people in them too and that sometimes the emphasis on 'families and young people' seems to overlook this. Many older people would welcome the chance to develop their faith more and become better models and teachers of the faith. There was also a feeling that we should not be 'dumbing down' or trying to entertain young people with the liturgy – we should be authentic in our faith and practice,

which may well be more attractive in the end. There was discussion of the opportunity to bring in a salaried Youth Worker (perhaps in conjunction with other parishes or our schools).

Q12. How does your parish effectively identify and use the gifts of its people? How can we better enable full participation and co-responsibility in the life of the Church at the parish and diocesan levels?

It was generally felt that recognition and use of gifts is patchy. Clearly some people *are* being used, but there is a lack of awareness of what is going on and what help is needed. We spoke again about the need to do a kind of 'inventory' of talents, abilities, availability, professional skills and general willingness to help in the parish. We should consider if funding is needed for some formation and training needs.

While the group recognised that the Church is not a democracy, there was still a strong sense that we should not be 'done to' but 'done with'. The Church is still seen as too distant and hierarchical – this needs to change. The burden of leadership should be carried in a new, collaborative way.

Q13. If you could describe your local parish fulfilling your dreams and concerns for the whole world and the local community, what would it be like?

The most common words mentioned were openness and welcome, both in terms of the building and towards people. We imagined a church that was always open and a place of refuge, peace, prayer and support. There would be various forms of adult catechesis and scripture faith/study groups. There would be much more practical support for each other, and outreach to the community in a pro-active way. There would be more social activities, including those which would be for young people.

There would be a recognition that all parishes are not the same – our strengths and challenges are our own – and that the people in them have different needs in terms of spirituality.

Another key idea was that of peace – that we would be at peace with each other, within our families, in the country and the world.

Q14. How does your experience of parish life allow you to reflect, develop, act on and speak about your faith?

In this question, many points which have previously been mentioned were re-stated. Most felt that being part of a parish and attending Mass regularly was a big help in terms of supporting their own faith and keeping them going. The need for more teaching, especially on difficult topics was raised again, and some acknowledged that they simply don't know enough about some aspects of the faith. Catechesis, spiritual formation and forms of prayer such as Vespers were mentioned repeatedly. In summary, we acknowledged that parish life does help us, but that we are keenly aware of how much more we need in order to truly live our faith and defend it.

Q15. In what ways is the call of Jesus to serve the poor a priority in the Church and especially in our parishes?

Most felt that it was not the priority that it should be. There was discussion about the outreach which is currently happening. This includes involvement with the local foodbank, a hardship fund, a winter night shelter (pre-COVID) and some visits to the housebound. Some pointed out that it can be quite difficult to know who needs help and in what way, and perhaps more importantly, for those in need to know who to go to for help. The need for a structured and better organised approach was clear.

Q16. What more can we do in our parishes to address the needs of the poor, both in our area and in other countries?

There was a great deal of overlap with the answers to Q15, especially the need for some kind of organising team. Most felt that we should pick two or three causes and focus on them, being mindful of those organisations that already exist to provide assistance so we don't duplicate effort. There was strong support for setting up a bereavement group (which does not exist at present) and also consider a support group specifically for men who were widowers.

There was much discussion about practical steps we could take, such as operating a minibus service on Sundays. The overriding impression was that people urgently wanted to get more organised and get on with some practical steps as soon as possible.

We then asked some final questions:

What has been most on your mind as we walked together?

From all you have heard, what has stayed with you?

We saw that there was a great deal of agreement between us about what was important and what we wanted to happen.

We were all pleased that so many had come every week and that it had been an enjoyable experience – lots of comments about how interesting it was.

There was a very strong desire for a more visible and organised parish structure consisting of teams with different responsibilities, and there was a sense of energy and desire to serve. Some noted the people who were *not* represented at the meetings, especially young adults, and Black and Asian parishioners.

There is a genuine thirst for knowledge and spiritual growth – people want to be better informed and challenged.

People felt both encouraged and hopeful about the meetings, because they realised that there are quite a few people in our parish who really want to see the Church thrive and be part of her mission. All were extremely keen for there to be a follow-up where we can start to take practical steps to take forward some of the ideas we heard and harness the enthusiasm.

DREAMS

If you were asked to “dare to dream” about how you see the Church in the third millennium, what might your dream be?

The following summarises the most heartfelt and widespread aspirations from the meetings:

That the Church would be seen as (and become) a place of genuine help, support, inspiration, refuge and welcome to all.

That Catholics would be continuously formed in their faith throughout their lifetime and that adults especially would be equipped with the knowledge to defend the faith and to develop a deeper and more mature life of prayer.

That the hierarchy would begin to ‘work with’ the laity and find suitable ways to include them in the decision-making process, especially when this affects them directly.

That the parish would have a well-organised and resourced structure for outreach to various people in need, but especially to the sick and housebound and to some local and more distant causes.

That the parish would have a vibrant programme for outreach and catechesis of non-members and those on the periphery of faith.

That the parish would have people and programmes which aim to support young people and foster their faith.