

OUR LADY OF LORETO and ST WINEFRIDE, KEW

JOURNEYING TOGETHER

Pope Francis and the Invitation to LISTEN to the HOLY SPIRIT and EACH OTHER

Progress Report to the Parish Summer 2022

1 INTRODUCTION

Last year Pope Francis invited us to join in a LISTENING PROCESS to try to hear what the Holy Spirit is saying to us about the Church and her future with all the opportunities and challenges of the time. Many of us recognised that this is a God-given moment for renewal in the Church and in our parish. Here in Kew we accepted this invitation.

60-70 parishioners met in small groups during Advent 2021 and then after Easter 2022 in two parish meetings. There was a broad consensus around 4 issues which are seen as a priority. A start has been made on some of these issues and it would be good to move forward on the others. There is always the danger of inertia, waiting for people to come forward, and losing momentum. It is important that we get going, in however small a way, in the 4 priority areas.

It is very encouraging that so many of us have shared in these initial steps towards ‘renewal’ in our parish. At the same time, we have to acknowledge that most of the parishioners participating in the meetings to date are in the 60+ age range and above. We also have to recognise that the pandemic has had a major influence in all our lives. Things have changed – in many good ways – and habits of living have changed. This affects the life of the Church as well. The undoubted desire of many parishioners for renewal in our parish needs to be turned into active involvement by as many as possible in the life of the parish. As your parish priest, I share Pope Francis’ desire for all the Baptised to play their full part in the life of their parish in terms of co-responsibility collaborative ministry and ownership of the parish. This is OUR parish, not my parish. The parish priest exercises a leadership role and this cannot be avoided. But it is a leadership of service, enabling all of us to have a real sense of belonging to a prayerful, vibrant, welcoming and missionary parish – placing Christ at the centre of all we do and realising that all is His work, developing a personal relationship with Christ, and making Christ known in our world.

All this can come about if we all share in this adventure of faith. We have to recognise that we all face many pressures. We can only do what is possible and not place unrealistic loads on too few people. If we all play a part, doing what we can, so much can be achieved. If we want our children and their children to be part of a thriving parish community now and in the future, then what has been given on trust to us is ours to hold and develop in trust for future generations.

Throughout this Report I make reference to the National Synthesis Document of our Bishops’ Conference. This document brings together in a synthesis the reports from all the dioceses of England and Wales. Citations are given as NSD, followed by the paragraph number. The NSD, and the Bishops’ response to the NSD, can be viewed on the website of the Bishops’ Conference: www.cbcew.org.uk and also on our website: www.stwinefrides.org.uk

2 THE IMMEDIATE PRIORITIES identified through prayer and discussion:

[1] the life of prayer and adult faith formation; [2] youth and children; [3] the social life of the parish; [4] the parish buildings and property.

Despite the many obstacles and resistances which the synod has faced at all levels of the Church, and notwithstanding the low levels of participation, it has been a kairós for the people who have engaged in the process, allowing them to dream of a better future and a renewed understanding of the Church. What emerges is a dream of a loving, merciful, familial and missionary Church in which all are involved, a synodal Church open to the guidance of the Spirit that is better able to build the Kingdom of God in these islands. NSD 5

The majority voice in the reports focussed on a conversion of the culture, on the need for a transformation in the way of living, acting and operating of the Church at all levels to enable it to be more loving and welcoming, especially to particular groups perceived as alienated or side-lined. If there is a single, overriding melody in the synod symphony, it is in the desire for a more fraternal and sororal Church in which God's overflowing, universal love can be more palpably felt and lived. NSD 46

3 THE LIFE OF PRAYER AND ADULT FAITH FORMATION

For many, the dream of a Church of collaboration and shared mission goes along with a passionate call for "training for lay leaders to encourage the formation of missionary disciples". The thirst for formation is a striking and constant feature of almost every synod submission, suggesting at least that those who took part in the synod are offering themselves for mission and asking for permission and the means to carry it out. NSD 38

They desire formation in Church teaching, Spirituality and Scripture, as well as practical tools and skills to enable discipleship: missions, retreats, adult catechesis, spiritual formation, and so on. The failure to provide these and to teach well is cited as a principal cause of shrinking parish congregations. Referencing Matthew 7:9, one person spoke of many people who had left because their faith had not been nurtured. "When they asked for bread, they were given lumps of rock. When they asked for fish, they were given a serpent." NSD 39

Feeling ill-equipped is a main reason for not responding to the call to evangelise, especially in the face of cultural hostility. "Respondents struggle with the fact that the starting point for speaking about faith is often an attack on the Church or her teachings, which limits conversational possibilities". People are asking for a stronger understanding of the teachings in order to articulate them with confidence. NSD 40

[a] The Eucharist – especially the Sunday Mass – is the most important moment in the life of the parish. It is crucial that we come together to celebrate the Sunday Mass. We are not truly a parish if this is not our central focus. It will be important to look at the way we celebrate the Mass so that it is reverent, inclusive and joyful, taking into account the different congregations.

We need to encourage as many as possible to return to the regular/weekly celebration of the Sunday Mass. This is a responsibility in which we all share.

House Masses - celebrating the Mass in and for smaller groups can be a very powerful experience. We can start with already existing groups in the parish. In time, perhaps we can extend this to prayer/house groups in the parish. If the Sunday Mass is at the centre of who and what we are, then this network of 'house' Masses feeds into and enriches the larger parish Mass.

A desire for churches to be places of closeness is a striking feature of the reports, expressed in the word welcome, along with related words such as integration and inclusiveness. There is a constant call for the Church to embody God's unconditional embrace of all, not least the stranger and the marginalised, and criticism that the Church is often unwelcoming either to specific people, or to new ideas and inspirations. NSD 23

[b] Those involved in the Advent 2021 groups shared the experience that these gatherings not only stimulated sharing of faith experiences but they also enabled parishioners to get to know one another better – meeting people they had not met before and, importantly, communicating at a deeper level. It is important that we build on this and encourage new house groups to meet, perhaps initially for a fixed number of meetings but, we hope, continuing if found to be worthwhile. Coming together to pray and share our faith in small groups can revolutionise a parish in prayer, faith and a new relationship with Christ.

Group conversations that included silence, prayer and scripture led to a deeper and richer experience, as well as much better material for discernment, which is reflected in the reports. NSD 11

Beyond the impact on particular groups or individuals, the joy of the experience lay in experiencing how the Holy Spirit is poured out on each person and encountered in spiritual conversation. NSD 20

[c] There was a clearly expressed need for adult faith formation. Many Catholics do not feel sufficiently confident in their faith and sense that they are ill equipped to discuss the faith with others. The Sunday/daily homily has a part to play in this, as does the life of prayer, but more opportunities for adult faith formation are needed. We will plan to have regular adult faith formation sessions (evening and day time in the hall). These could include looking at Scripture, the life of Prayer, the Sacraments, etc. A variety of media resources are available. Such sessions would include input and discussion, together with a social element.

4 YOUTH AND CHILDREN

[a] Thanks to the generosity of a small number of parishioners we have already made a start on making our parish a more welcoming place for our young people and children. The ACUTIS CLUB meets on Sunday afternoons and attracts a growing participation by young people. The re-instated JUNIOR CHURCH (CHILDREN'S LITURGY) is now serving a group of children of pre-First Holy Communion age. Feedback from parishioners indicates that it is also enriching the Sunday 9.30am Mass for everyone, as an act of family worship.

Both have potential for growth. This could be encouraged by expanding the range of activities and types of learning – for example, activities and a prayer group for the older teens. But such provision will require additional members to join the organising teams.

[b] It has been encouraging to see the beginnings of small teams of altar servers at the weekend Masses. The involvement of both girls and boys as altar servers has always been an important way of encouraging faith development in the next generation. Although small in number at the moment, our altar servers are a visible sign that the Church belongs to all generations. It would be wonderful to see more altar servers and I would welcome hearing from parents and children who have received their First Holy Communion in recent years, and, indeed, those who were servers before the pandemic.

[c] I am keen to consider re-instituting a **Sunday evening Mass** aimed particularly at the needs of young people and those who would find it easier to celebrate Mass on a Sunday evening. **If this were to become a regular aspect of the weekend Mass schedule, there would have to be adjustments elsewhere, since simply adding another Mass is not a realistic option.** However, we could try the Sunday evening Mass as an experiment and see what results from that. If it seemed that there was support for such a change, it could be incorporated in the work scheduled for next year on liturgical development. Naturally that would include a consultation exercise. **Meanwhile, I would be pleased to hear from anyone who would be interested in helping to organise a youth Mass in the near future.**

5 THE SOCIAL LIFE OF THE PARISH

The social life of the parish figured prominently in all the discussions and there was a great desire to see social activities restored, primarily to enable parishioners to get to know one another better. Parishioners, as a general rule, attend a particular Mass at the weekend and may never meet parishioners who attend other Masses. The social life of the parish helps to bring people together and this can only be for the benefit of the community as a whole.

[a] There was much support for the re-introduction of **coffee mornings/cheese and wine** after the Sunday morning Masses and Saturday evening Mass. Mimi Harris has agreed to co-ordinate a team to make this possible and the first coffee morning has been held. The plan is to hold coffee mornings after the Sunday morning Masses and a cheese and wine social after the Saturday evening Mass. These will take place on a rota basis and will be advertised in good time in the newsletter. **Mimi would be glad to hear from anyone who would like to join a team of volunteers.**

[b] Pre-Covid, the **annual Parish Mass** proved to be a popular innovation and the plan is to continue this in 2023. It also included a coffee morning/social and this will continue. It might also be a good idea to have name badges to enable everyone to get to know each other better. The name badges worked well at the parish discussion groups. It may well be the case that we can have more than one Parish Mass in the course of the year, the aim being for as many of us to get to know more parishioners and so develop a deeper sense of community. It will be interesting to see how the one Sunday morning Mass in August works, although it has to be acknowledged that many parishioners will be away.

[c] Communication is essential in building community. We need to improve our parish database. Work has started on this and, after the summer holidays, we will ask parishioners to complete an electronic on-line survey. This will be very user-friendly and will enable the parish office to have up-to-date information. Privacy and data protection guidelines will be in place to protect personal information. We need this updated parish database to communicate effectively (via email, for example) but also to identify skills within the parish

and the needs to be addressed (age range of children and teenagers for sacramental preparation and youth work, for example). Full details will be made available in September and Julia Muirhead, our parish secretary, can be contacted by those who are not able to complete the electronic survey.

The lack of co-responsibility was critiqued also in terms of the Church's communication, which can either be an enabler or a barrier to synodality.⁵³ Communication within the Church – within and between parishes and schools, within the diocese – involves how information is transmitted, the language that is used, and the culture of accountability and transparency that it reflects. NSD 41

... a Church that listens is key to a Church that teaches. NSD 43

The desire to be formed goes hand in hand in the reports with a desire to be informed about the life of the parish, the diocese, and the universal Church. Failure to communicate well was seen as another symptom of a remote, clerical Church. Traditional methods of communication – parish newsletters, bishops' pastoral letters – rely on a small number of gatekeepers who control the flow of information, contradicting a synodal Church in the era of social media, which calls for a more horizontal, two-way, reciprocal flow. There are many calls in the reports to become savvier in the use of communications technologies, and to make use of the pandemic-induced crash-course in digital platforms to increase the involvement of the People of God in the life and decision-making processes of the Church. NSD 44

6 THE CHURCH ESTATE

[a] The parish has responsibility for three buildings: the church, the hall, the presbytery and the surrounding grounds. As a parish community we need to keep these buildings and grounds in good order. This includes ordinary maintenance and the planning and implementation of the refurbishment of the estate. In 2021 we were able to undertake the refurbishment of the presbytery. We now need to look at the much larger project of the church and hall, as well as the grounds. We are all aware that the church and hall require a major refurbishment.

[b] It would be very good if we could establish an advisory group to look at these matters, to discuss the recent site survey, the commissioning of necessary professional advice and/or works, the raising of funds, etc. We need to look at what needs to be done in the church (heating, lighting, windows, redecoration, for example), the hall (kitchen, meeting rooms, for example), outside (permanent disabled access, for example).

[c] This has to be a matter for the whole parish to consider and discuss. **I do not have the expertise or competence in this area and very much hope parishioners with such expertise will come forward to establish this advisory group, working in partnership with the existing parish Finance Committee.** It may be that we will need two advisory groups – one for buildings and grounds, the other to raise funds to make it possible for us to do the necessary works over the next few years.

7 FURTHER ISSUES

As a parish, we have identified four priority areas. Progress has already been made on some of them. We hope to have made a start on all of them between now and the end of the year. We can review progress on them in early 2023.

In 2023 we should look at other areas of parish life which parishioners felt needed attention:

[a] Developing ongoing co-responsibility arrangements – including the formation of a new parish pastoral council / mission team. We may also be able to form other committees, such as those for estate matters, for example. Above all, as a faith-filled Catholic parish community we are outward looking and mission oriented – living and sharing the Good News for all people.

Priests are most often praised when they enable collaboration and co-responsibility. The term clericalism is constantly invoked in the reports to describe a resistance on the part of priests and some lay people to the exercise of co-responsibility and the missionary discipleship to which all the baptised are called. The reports highlight the need for a change in the way priests and lay people relate in order to see themselves as both responsible for the mission of the Church. This was one of the strongest constant themes in the submissions. NSD 26

The abuse crisis is cited as a reason for people leaving the Church and as an issue constantly raised by non-Catholics who see it as proof of the failure of the Church “to live up to what Christ has called us to be.” Shame and anger over the crisis also lead many Catholics to keep their faith private. “Students felt that people were now scared to attend Mass & be labelled Catholic because of all the adverse publicity around abuse in the Catholic Church”. The abuse scandal was frequently described as destroying the Church’s credibility, especially in sexual matters. NSD 31

Running through the reports is a clear vision of how the future can be different when all the People of God – lay, Religious, clergy, bishops – act together, in their distinct roles and functions, but all as missionary disciples. A call for greater participation and collaboration is a constant. NSD 33

[b] Developing already existing contacts with the Churches in Kew, and the local community, to establish how we might work better together in meeting the needs of the Kew community and the wider world. Possible and fruitful areas of cooperation are ecological/sustainability issues and youth work.

The absence from the Church of young people was another common theme, but often spoken on behalf of rather than for themselves. Present in almost every submission was the pain in the older generation at the absence of young people from the Church, along with a bewilderment that the means of passing on the faith in a previous generation through family and parish had broken down. The question was often voiced: “how can we encourage them to come back?” NSD 62

[c] Taking stock of the social support work/outreach done by parishioners at present and involving more of the parish in this work to expand it and reach more in need.

[d] The weekend Masses are THE times when parishioners gather in large numbers over three Masses. A parish music/liturgy group will help to ensure that the celebration of the weekend Masses encourages as full a participation as possible, give praise and worship to God, encounter Christ more deeply in Word and Sacrament, build community, and encourage us to make Christ known in our world by word and action.

Many reports link a perceived failure of the Church to evangelise with the lack of participation of lay people, especially women, in the life of the Church, suggesting that the Church's mission to the world cannot be separated from its interior life. A large number of responses call on the Church "to enable greater participation of the laity in the governance of the Church by providing places and situations where their voices can be heard. Lay people "should be part of decision-making in areas that affect them in their life of faith." Parishes that do this are singled out for praise. NSD 35

Where these are mentioned there is a hope that parish pastoral councils be concerned less with "business" and more with the building up of the community and its pastoral needs, allowing the parish to develop the charisms of the faithful and to "utilise effectively the human capital that exists within the majority of parishes". This is one of many examples in the reports that reflect a perception of a disjuncture between, on the one hand, the gifts being poured out by the Spirit on the ordinary faithful and, on the other, the way leadership and other ministries are exercised in the Church. NSD 36

[e] Sacramental Preparation Programmes – Baptism, Confirmation, First Reconciliation & First Holy Communion, Marriage. It would be good to have an honest and realistic discussion about these Sacraments as Sacraments of Faith. Should we be concerned that so many no longer attend Mass after celebrating these Sacraments? If so, what can we do?

8 JOURNEYING TOGETHER AS A PARISH

The process of listening to the Holy Spirit and each other has already borne fruit in terms of initiatives under way and ideas for practical action. I hope that all described here will take us further along the path of parish renewal. I think it is worth sharing with you some overall principles that I see as supporting our realistic planning.

[a] Sharing the load: it will make things work better and be more enjoyable if groups of people can share responsibility for areas of work rather than one person carrying the load.

[b] Parish renewal has to have sustainability as a prime objective. We are very lucky to have in the parish a number of people who are giving valuable service and have done so for many years. We must ensure that we take steps to involve those in the parish who are of a younger age group as well.

[c] Our top priorities will be addressed by people who volunteer, for a limited period, to help share responsibility for areas of work. Creating permanent structures to ensure that the parish can thrive in the long term despite a shortage of priests is a challenge for the next stage, as described above.

[d] This Progress Report does not include many other issues which are relevant and crucial to the life of all parishes and described in Section V of the National Synthesis Document,

specifically with reference to 'marginalised' groups. This has to be part of our future reflection as a parish community.

Shining through the reports is a strong desire for a Church that better performs God's mercy in Jesus Christ, who did not make moral conversion a prerequisite of His embrace, but whose love and acceptance triggered that conversion in those who came to Him. The vision of such a Church, one that does not firstly judge and exclude but unconditionally embraces, lies behind strong critiques in the reports of the way the Church teaches, presents itself, and operates. NSD 48

[d] I believe that building a community has to involve us getting to know each other better, but I am also certain that working/belonging together, volunteering for the Gospel work we all know needs doing itself creates bonds of friendship.

Synodal conversion will be merely or superficially structural without a commitment to facilitate personal conversion, enabling an encounter and relationship with the person of Jesus Christ through prayer, retreats, pilgrimages, eucharistic liturgies, spiritual accompaniment and faith-sharing in groups. Participation in mission flows from a deepening communion: for the faithful to see themselves as missionary disciples, they need to experience the joy of belonging, which is in turn fruit of participation. An ever deepening synodality will both reflect and enable the journey of faith. NSD 81

"A striking feature of the submissions was the widespread desire for mission and outreach." "Let me out! the Spirit cries". An ever-deepening synodality will be reflected in greater attentiveness to the peripheries of suffering and need, both locally and globally, such that parishes and schools become ever more outward-facing, evangelising, and mission-oriented. A synodal Church in which the faithful assemble, listen and discern is more likely to recognise Christ in the cry of the poor and the cry of the earth, and to respond in concrete apostolic actions that make visible God's compassion for all His creatures. NSD 86

Thank you for all the support and kindness you give me as your parish priest. Together we can all look forward to working together to build and releasing the great gifts God has given all of us. In so doing, our parish radiates God's love for all God's people.

fr Brian Coyle

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