

Synodal Conversations for Our Lady & St Thomas/English Martyrs – Sheffield - Diocese of Hallam – collated by Anne-Marie Fletcher, Matthew Richardson, Andy Blinston, Beth Craggs with support from Charles & Jane Perryman & Kevan Grady.

As requested by the Synod Advisory Committee we submitted a full summary report on behalf of our parish on Tuesday March 8th; this included compiling a list of recurring themes, with quotes from the conversations, to animate & explain those themes. You may see your words or similar words quoted below.

Key Themes:

Love of Mass, Sacraments & Devotions

- **reverence for the centrality of the Eucharist**
- memories in Ireland as a child praying the **rosary** as a family walking to Mass & **fasting** from Breakfast
- **loves the liturgical calendar** of the Church **with its seasonal change & structure**
- sees the **streaming of Mass** as such an anchor over the past two years
- not being able to attend church [re Covid] made me realise how much I treasured my faith. The word of God, the Eucharist
- **importance of pilgrimages** as a time of reflection
- **thankful for the Sacrament of Reconciliation**
- **finding a wealth of value, meaning and wisdom in the ‘official’ teachings of the Church (Catechism) and in the richness of the Catholic traditions, and the Mass**
- **love of the church and all its teachings and traditions. Source of great strength throughout a lifetime**

Importance of Language

- **care over language use needed** within the Church
- demystify language & symbolism [to help us understand Mass better]
- use of **simple rather than legalistic language**
- speaking of love not of fear – balance talk of ‘original sin’ with ‘original blessing’
- praying for gift of **speaking language that ordinary people can understand & find attractive**
- describes language as dated
- from a non-Catholic – the idea that the Mass is inaccessible and elitist because it can’t be understood without preparation by just anyone

Experience of God – in nature, in others, in Eucharist, through prayer

- the **Holy Spirit is seeding “Future Church” one by one!** [said in relation to conversations with Young Intentional disciples around UK manifesting charisms – Called & Gifted Discernment Process]
- **feeling God in the present moment whilst walking in nature**
- **huge support from parish in bereavement. Holy Spirit has been present in the show of kindness and support**
- not being able to attend church[re Covid] made me realise how much I **treasured my fellow believers**
- some had reached a point of looking outside the church for spiritual sustenance
- the Holy Spirit responded to a man’s prayers for faith through the works of others to explore the deep questions around God, and now feels much more confident in his faith
- the [school] children think the church does lots well and ‘are good at welcoming people’ and ‘helping the community.’ ‘It is a time to think about Jesus and to reflect,’ and it is ‘calming.
- they like ‘hearing the preaching,’ ‘being with everyone,’ ‘singing the hymns,’ ‘the music,’ ‘coffee and cake,’ ‘the peacefulness,’
One child mentioned wanting more ‘displays of love’ - they described this as a ‘beautiful display showing love and kindness’ and I take this to mean show people the good we do as a community
Generally, there was a love of the community, reflecting time and the singing. There was an understanding of the mission of the church

Modernisation – Role of Women /laity– Priest Formation & Support

- concern over support of new priest not being mentored by experienced priests
- role of Women & lay people to be of greater significance
- priests being allowed to marry; Shortage of Priests; Women Priests
- the synodal process introduced by Pope Francis a significant sign of hope [“letting the Holy Spirit out of the box”]
- **prays for “Days of Grace” being established** to allow for divorced & remarried catholics to receive Holy Communion on Special designated Feast days
- was concerned about provision for the deaf, both in the Synodal process, and generally in the church. Felt that other denominations make better provision, including signed Masses, and that as a result deaf people are drawn away from Catholicism
- acceptance of different lifestyles
- the absence now of the opportunity to be consulted since the demise of the parish council
- staying within the church structures to try to bring about change was the Holy Spirits path for them
- we are the church, and we have to speak out, to preach the gospel to the world that has lost its way
- felt the **church was focused on obligation**. Gave the example of not eating meat on a Friday and wondered how this will be affected in modern times with more people becoming vegetarian/vegan

- the [school] children had several comments specifically about their experience of Mass: Some children mentioned not liking 'sad hymns' and wanting 'loving hymns. One child did not like the change of position in Mass i.e. kneeling, sitting, standing. Another said Mass was just sitting and standing. Several children felt that Mass is not interesting to them. One mentioned wanting to do 'more fun things' and talked about role-playing whilst the Gospel is being read and another spoke about Mass being more interactive. Some mentioned not feeling included and many wanted more people to read. Another said Mass is 'very hard to understand'
- one child wanted the church to be brighter and another wanted a private place to 'say hello to Jesus.' Generally, there was a sense of wanting to be more involved than being a passive part of Mass

Hierarchical church & return to roots

- pondered on "**Imperialism**" creeping into the Church
- **yearning to return to roots**
- '**Online Church**' has been an **excellent** substitute (Universality of the Church)
- the leadership has moved away from the simplicity of Jesus
(a man who served, had few rules, no power, no money- the Church is now bound by rules, immense wealth, controlled by power)
- having known and worked alongside Catholics, a male non catholic 30+ Christian's **general impression had been that they didn't have such strong personal relationships with Jesus, or such a reverence for the Bible, seeming more strongly attached to their rituals.** More recently however, he's met Catholics who don't fit that model, and he's developing greater respect for the teachings and traditions of the Catholic church
- think **too much focus on dogma and doctrine not enough on good we can do** in the world
- concern that people wanted to change church doctrine, and that we will lose what makes the Catholic church unique and what makes us Catholic if we change. We should be clear on what Catholicism is and isn't
- **where has leadership been** in global crisis? **not leading by example**
- [Covid] **a time to step back and take stock of where they stood in relation to the institutional church**
- feelings were of **anger, sadness and deep hurt about the institutional church.** The **abuse crisis** and its subsequent denial and cover up
- different members spoke of their **great disappointment at the failure to fulfil the hopes of Vatican 2**
- a desire for power at the highest levels of the church as corrupting, obscuring its mission, and undermining its moral authority
- saw the Catholic Church as being faithful to the teachings of Christ and the early church
- the Catholic Church not active enough in the wider community. When one man became a Catholic, he said that the Church did not seek him out, he sought them, and that many others would not be so proactive themselves that may respond to the Church's message
- was unsure what the Synod process was and was concerned that parishioners' concerns wouldn't be heard/listened to by those high up in the church

Focus on Young People & Music

- **inviting young people to be involved in music/ 'young choir' & have youth responsibilities**
- inviting young people who are **gifted musically**
- young Catholic 'Intentional Disciples' are being raised up around the UK with **charismatic gifting**
- [Ecumenical Faith leaders] showing **real interest in Youth movements within the Church especially around "Youth 2000"**
- hopes for development around Youth Work

Ecumenical Spirit – Unity

- time to engage with the more local community, neighbours, and friends
- an increased hunger for Unity & a real excitement expressed by non-Catholic Christian leaders that **Catholic lay are willing to join in the 'ecumenical spirit'**
- non-catholics do not feel particularly welcome to mass because they cannot share in the Eucharist

Parish life & Social Activities & Care of Elderly

- hopes for fuller local parish life to resume the secondary activities of lunch club; youth club; Lenten talks
- elderly members- are they cared for? Family- are we providing?
- single person, regarded the parish as "family"
- expression of gratitude for the welcome received in the parish community and for the opportunity to participate in parish life
- encouraged by the week-by-week witness of members of the parish
- more evidence of parish school at occasions needed
- huge loss of community/unity [pandemic].... wanted to get this back, including hoping that people would return
- more could be done to support those in need, particularly those not affiliated with the Catholic Church, but there are barriers to even identifying who was in need without feeling too intrusive
- concern over those isolated that the parish used to support before the lockdowns, and they felt the Spirit was moving them to do more to re-establish links with those isolated in the community