

Summary of Synodal discussions

St. Mary's RC Church, Julian Road, Bath

This document is a summary of the full notes from St. Mary's, with a few salient themes picked out from each heading.

Journeying together

- The extent of journeying together seems minimal, though there are examples of people working together very well. The history and geography of the parish account for some of the difficulties.
- It is felt that the centrality of prayer and the sacraments are a way to God and if God is at the centre, participation and communion will follow.
- There needs to be more communication.

Listening

- We need contemplative listening to support each other and to gain inspiration from others.

Welcoming and friendship

- The importance of welcoming and friendship have been highlighted.

Community

- The central reality of Christ in the Mass is and has always been present, even during the lockdown, but there is a joy associated with churches being reopened and the opportunity to come together as a community.
- We need a sense of being social in our way of being the Church.
- We are being invited to do things differently and we need to rediscover community.
- The Church is not just Mass and not just the church building but is a community. The busy-ness of life stops us from participating and we lack reasons to meet and socialise.

Families and young people

- Need to find a way to engage children, young people and families. We need to pass on our faith even if we are still growing ourselves. The children's liturgy is very inspiring and a joy. In fact, vital. The future of the Church depends on it.
- The teenagers today are "left out" – the Church must try to make it more attractive, useful, and more necessary so that they will want to attend church.

Mass and worship

- Mystery is at the heart of faith and mystery is what will draw people (especially young people who are searching) back to the church. Consequently, services should strive to include elements that incline us towards the sublime.
- Live streaming has positives and negatives as an outreach tool. It is in prayer and meditating on the scriptures, privately or in groups, that we are helped to grow as Christians and given the motivation to share Jesus with others.
- Mass is the central pillar unifying all. The parish structure, with its emphasis on attending Mass as the primary objective, can be seen as arid. You cannot create community: it needs to (and will) emerge. But music is helpful.
- Prayer life of the individual and the Mass feed off one another.

- There are three sides to the church experience (sacramental/numinous; organizational; social/family). Do the last two distract from the spiritual or are they the true spiritual reality?
- It should be easier for lay people to play a part, e.g. to perform a Eucharistic Service (Mass without Consecration).

Speaking out

- Some people love speaking about their faith. But there are inhibitions about speaking out: lack of structures to encourage it or to question practices. Need forums for open conversation. The general experience of parish life is that there is little or no invitation to speak out. We miss this both in the parish and in the Church.
- We can participate in the mission of the Church by our witness and behaviour when we are out in the world.

Parish governance

- Many people want a Parish Council, but others note that such bodies can and have been problematic in the past.
- Contemplative prayer is vital in bringing us together. It could be at the centre and a starting point, but we also need action. Consultation is lacking. Authority and governance are not clearly understood in the parish. Authority lies solely with the parish priest.
- It is difficult to know how to reach inactive members of the parish.
- How do we avoid polarizing intractable opinions? Is unanimity a desirable aim?

Holy Spirit

- We hear the Holy Spirit in unexpected ways and at unexpected times, often not recognizing His presence until afterwards. The Holy Spirit works through others in a variety of ways.
- Prayer is a mysterious agent, but surely the Spirit is in prayer somewhere. We can recognize the Holy Spirit at work in other people's acts of kindness. The Holy Spirit can also speak to us through our consciences and help us to be an inclusive Church.

Inclusivity and reaching the peripheries:

- Love is the key to supporting the marginalized and the difficult-to-love in society. When we neglect the marginalized, we neglect to listen to God, and this may be the most exciting and alive way to hear God. Pope Francis says that the periphery should be the centre. We should include other Christian churches, other religions and those who have none. We need to reach out to those who are different.
- We need to reflect on how the church, its saints, etc. are not always representative of people of colour, women, those with learning disabilities. We need to rediscover others: the poor, the marginalized (as well as ourselves). Pope Francis is initiating changes to make the church more inclusive. God speaks to us through Pope Francis and his all-inclusive message is that all are redeemed through Christ. He reaches out to all, including prostitutes and sinners, the non-religious, atheists, homeless, people who are rejected by the Church because of sexuality and so on.
- People can be hidden out of plain sight. We in the parish and in the Church are facing a crisis and need to re-invigorate ourselves. Let's put a banner on the railings inviting people in.
- We need to make the effort to listen to other voices as our social circles can be restricted and we should educate ourselves on social justice issues.

The future for the Church

- There's a feeling of a need for some radical things to change in the Church before we all fizzle away. The laity will be needed more than ever with fewer priests. More women need to be visible (including as priests). We need more ecumenism.