

**SYNOD 2023
FEEDBACK FORM ABOUT THE GROUP DISCUSSION**

“What changes need to be made - in myself, in our parish, in the Diocese -
to make the Church’s mission today more vibrant and effective?”

(Please complete this form clearly)

Name/Type of group (indicate parish)	Parishioners at Our Lady of Lourdes, Hungerford, Berkshire	
Date of meeting	Data derived and submitted in Jan-Feb 2022	
Particular details that you wish to be noted (e.g. ecumenical, school, university etc)	Catholic Parish	
Number (indicate males/females)	Females 4	Males 5
Age range: 30 - 70		

I. THE JOURNEYING COMPANIONS

How can we be more welcoming as a Christian community?

Seven years ago we as a parish completed the building of an imposing and beautiful (in its simplicity) modern Catholic church. This has been a wonderful sign of evangelisation to the Catholic and Christian community in Hungerford and a symbol for the welcoming nature of the parish and Catholic community.

Be genuinely friendly, open and available (not intrusive) to all Parishioners, Congregation and Visitors, irrespective of them being Catholic, another Christian Denomination another Faith or with no Faith nor Religious Belief. This also extends to people of a different race or colour, irrespective of their verbal and non-verbal demeanour or mode of dress. We should be non-judgemental, treat everyone with respect and ask open and welcoming questions when we speak to them.

Every church community is a microcosm of the Body of Christ and everyone in it should be welcomed and supported. We should be pre-disposed to welcoming everyone.

Do we have enough Mass Books, Hymn books and other relevant service sheets for visitors and new parish members. Do we have access to these in other languages when/if this is necessary ?

We should have more signage and information around the town explaining where the church is. Although we have made efforts to get this information into the Hungerford Virtual Museum on-line, and to visitors staying at local hotels.

More obvious welcoming signs at the church doors would be beneficial.

The church to be inclusive should have access, facilities or adaptations to provide seating for the physically disabled, sound facilities for the hearing impaired and clear visual signage for those with visual impairment.

Coffee and refreshments after Mass are an excellent way to welcome newcomers and visitors. Do we make ourselves aware of who is “new” or visiting as this a good opportunity to “catch-up” with friends and introduce new parishioners and visitors.

How do we address those who quickly leave after Mass - do they have personal commitments to meet? Are they shy, quiet or are they afraid they are not welcome? These situations can be better discerned if a friendly environment of welcoming is provided.

2. LISTENING

How can we be good listeners to those close to us and those outside the Church? To whom do we listen?

When we speak to others is it apparent that we are Christians and Catholics ?

Being a good listener requires us to be attentive, open to others and to listen without judgement to what they have to say.

It is an act of absolute love to put the other person first and listen without judgement to what they have to say.

Hard though it is we should strive to listen as much as we can, but we also need great discernment and wisdom. Remember we have one mouth and two ears and we should use them in that proportion !

Be available to speak and listen to people without being intrusive. Give them your full attention with appropriate eye contact, not looking around (unless in an unsafe situation). Don't interrupt their flow of speech, but give positive signs that we are listening, e.g. a nod, appropriate facial expressions. Engage and reflect back what we think we have heard, our understanding, as this gives the opportunity to correct mis-understandings and mis-interpretations.

Those outside the church also hold a position of faith, even if that faith is unbelief. Dialogues that are open, loving, non-judgemental and come from genuine interest in the other may lead to mutual encounter. We can share our faith position, but we cannot force feed it.

Being comfortable with periods of silence which gives the speaker time to collect their thoughts, reflect on what has been said, or what they wish to say.

Be careful to judge and know when privacy or a safe place is needed or when an introduction to another, more appropriate person, may be necessary to address questions or provide answers. Know also when to seek advice or direct people to our parish priest.

These are all important and invaluable skill sets for any relationship within the family, among friends, within the parish and the greater church community.

We need to be aware of the parish group dynamics; the 'cliques' or parish groupings that might arise or exist and how to handle them. These groupings may have implicit or explicit 'rules' which must be constructive and welcoming. How can we handle "Power Groups" if they exist in the parish, are they there for good reason and are they acting positively for the good of the community ?

We should listen to all, both inside and outside the church, but we should also allow ourselves time and space for quiet so that we may, with prayer and hope, hear God speaking to us.

3. SPEAKING OUT

How can we be more honest in our dealings with each other?

There needs to be provision or opportunity in any parish to be able to speak out. This may be a direct route to the parish priest or a way for parishioners if confided in to 'report back' in a way that will permit concerns to be addressed.

If situations are allowed to 'fester' it can be harmful to the Body of Christ in that community.

Be honest and open with people, if appropriate, but this must be tactful and done with respect. That means we must be more "self-aware" of our body language, tone of voice and manner so as to honestly convey our openness and inclusiveness.

Be aware of the wise expression "know which battles to fight and which to ignore".

We must try, if at all possible, not to be judgemental. This includes not being negatively influenced by other peoples way of speaking, their dress, their financial position, their housing or educational level if these are different from our own, and indeed their differing religious beliefs.

We should be aware of the skills people have learnt through life's experiences or through their ongoing professional training and development. We should as a result open ourselves positively to these skills and not have a "superior" attitude that we know better than them.

Dealing with negative comments or indeed gossip, 'calumny' and 'detraction' is a challenge in a parish and not easy to deal with - some parishioners are clearly not dealing honestly with others. The sad thing is that they either don't recognise what they are doing or are being grossly dishonest.

We should try to offer support and/or care for others as a Parish Community otherwise people will turn elsewhere.

Do we have sufficient Parish Pastoral Care to deal with these situations?

As a Parish and individual do we ask The Holy Spirit, Our Blessed Lady and the Saints to intercede for us for Wisdom and Guidance in these regards.

4. CELEBRATING

How might we celebrate better the Liturgy in our parish?

Many cradle Catholics have not developed their faith beyond their First Communion and Confirmation, which for some was completed before the age of 12. We should encourage all who wish to develop their understanding of our Faith to have the opportunity to do so.

In recent years I have made wonderful discoveries about doctrines concerning Our Lady and the Holy Eucharist that has informed and blessed my experience of the Holy Eucharist. It would be wonderful as an adult to share our Faith and grow that faith with others.

As for the Liturgy at Mass, the more you put in, the more you get out of it. Taking the time to look through the Mass readings, even just the Gospel, would give the individual an opportunity to obtain their own personal reflections, reinforced by the readings and homily at mass.

From a personal perspective, I could be regarded as a “Happy Clappy” Catholic, having participated in a Charismatic Prayer Group in a Catholic convent within a previous urban Parish. This group was started by a Catholic Priest, who was always present even though it was an ecumenical group. A member of the team, which usually included one of the Religious Sisters took turns to lead and co-ordinate the hourly meetings, but anyone was free to participate (share a short prayer, short experience, suggest a hymn or Scriptural Reading). This team also met and prayed together, for the hour before the weekly meeting, imploring the presence and protection of the Holy Spirit during the meeting. For a half hour after the meeting the same team were available to individuals who wished to have personal prayer for physical or emotional healing.

Readers should take time to practice and ensure that they can be heard by the congregation by having the opportunity to receive training as a Minister of the Word.

Room should be made for silence. Especially before Mass and after Holy Communion.

It is impossible to “please all of the people all of the time”. We need guidance from the Holy Spirit.

We need our younger people to continue the knowledge of Jesus’s salvation for all mankind, alongside His teaching on how to live. How do we make our Liturgy appealing to them? We need their input, but where are they to ask ?

We must listen to different groups within our Church Community so that we do not alienate anyone.

Music is a wonderful tool for worship and a varied style should be encouraged.

It is worth bearing in mind that post Vatican II “Cradle” Catholics, some Converts and attendees at Mass who are from other Christian denominations, or have no Christian beliefs, have expressed feelings of exclusion when the only Sunday Mass has Latin content.

My childhood was pre-Vatican II, so I was well used to the Latin Mass. Post Vatican II the “Vernacular Mass” gave the Liturgy more meaning for me, but I am comfortable with the occasional Latin Mass.

5. CO-RESPONSIBLE IN THE MISSION

How well do we work together as clergy and laity for the mission of the Church?

This greatly depends on the outlook, personality and skill set of the incumbent priest (and Deacons if present). Some strongly encourage the Laity to undertake more ministerial roles - such as Eucharistic Ministers and Ministers of the Word, while others have “quashed” or given little support to more administrative and Adult Catechesis Roles (not RCIA) for the laity.

How much do the Laity understand the role of Catechesis and Mission?

Many, myself included, are afraid to “go out and teach all nations” as we don’t know what to say or are afraid of the reaction we will get in a society that has an implicit rule that “we don’t discuss Religion nor Politics”.

We forget to rely on or to place this problem in the hands of the Holy Spirit to guide us for He can often resolve problems we see but cannot solve.

In 'polite society' it is often the case that people tend to ridicule anyone who mentions Christ or religious beliefs however it is important for people to know that you have such a belief as there can also be a quiet respect for someone with such beliefs.

Listening to our neighbours, offering to pray for them especially offering to light a candle at Mass. Taking an active and committed role to prayer. When we become informed of the needs of others, spiritual or corporal, and can help them even if only in part, we should strive to do so.

6. DIALOGUE IN CHURCH AND SOCIETY

How can our group, parish, diocese and the Church be more outward-facing?

Pray more to the Holy Spirit for Guidance and Direction. Then discuss as a group where we think there could be opportunities and how we can address these. Ask for local training from the Diocese.

Ask other Christian groups/denominations how they approach this task.

Pre-pandemic the Newbury Baptist Church had a mixed denomination team of trained laity **Street Pastors** who went out every Saturday Night between 10pm -4am to physically minister to those young people leaving nightclubs.

They did not preach, they had a supply of flip-flops and cheap trainers for girls who could no longer wear their high heels. They looked after those who were distressed, drunk, vomiting, and accessed appropriate services, or help where needed, or ensuring that they had access to safe transport home.

They were Christ's hands to the needy young people, while back at the Church, a group of people continually prayed for their companions on the street, that they would be helped and supported by the Holy Spirit.

There are also trained **Waterways Chaplains** who minister to those on canal boats. Boat dwellers are not people on the edge of society but often professional salaried people who choose this lifestyle

There are roles for the Laity as Hospital and Prison Chaplains or just Visitors to those who have no visitors. Alive Publishing - publishers of the Daily Reflections linked to the Catholic Daily Liturgy - have produced articles for these Prison Visitors.

Local Food Banks. As well as food and other household and personal hygiene donations, volunteers are needed to pack the food, offer refreshments, listen with empathy to the clients' needs and direct them to other statutory or voluntary services that may be able to give support.

7. WITH THE OTHER CHRISTIAN DENOMINATIONS

In what ways might we improve our dialogue and relationship with other Christians?

Through discussion groups and attending ecumenical services, Bible Study Groups, Alpha Courses and Prayer Meetings - focus on our shared beliefs but define the differences.

By participation and learning what others believe we are better equipped to understand the similarities and differences and be able to comment knowledgeably about Authority.

Understand the background and history to our various Christian beliefs to discuss sympathetically and supportively and give an informed opinion.

8. AUTHORITY AND PARTICIPATION

How can we make the Church more participatory and increase co-responsibility?

Have a well supported and functioning Parish Pastoral Council.

Encourage the Laity to undertake various Ministerial and Administrative Roles - as in an earlier response - get to know the congregation and their skills - who is a “good fit” for each role? Encourage and ask the help of the youth and younger members of the parish

Provide Training and instruction in the Faith. These could include but not be limited to -

Initial and Refresher for Readers and Extraordinary Ministers of the Eucharist.

For those taking Holy Communion to the sick and housebound.

Youth Catechesis (Catechesis in non-catholic schools in the area)

Training for First Holy Communion; first Confession (Reconciliation), and through the RCIA adult Baptism, Communion and Confirmation.

CAfE Courses for Ongoing Adult Catechesis

Safeguarding training (for Responsible Person plus laity)

Health & Safety instruction

Better Financial reporting to the parish (Finance)

Bereavement and New Parishioner Support Groups.

Infant Baptism Preparation and Visit Families.

Marriage Preparation - through the parish and the Catholic Marriage Care group.

Encourage men to enter the Diaconate, the Priesthood and the Religious life.

9. DISCERNING AND DECIDING

In a synodal style Church, what new processes of decision-making and decision-taking are needed? How transparent and accountable are the decisions made?

Diocesan, Parish and individual continuing prayers to the Holy Spirit for guidance regarding the Way Forward and discernment. This should include parish discussions of the process and these submitted comments.

We need at Parish and Pastoral area level to provide a forum for discussions on the Vatican II and more recent Papal documents e.g. “Lumen Gentium”, “Laudato Si”

We need to read and devise strategies for addressing the Diocesan surveys of lapsed-Catholics and the more recent “A Thousand Voices” survey.

All views are important -Clergy, Laity, Lapsed Catholics, Hospital, Prison & University Chaplains.

10. FORMING OURSELVES IN SYNODALITY

How do we form people to make them more capable of “journeying together”?

We should grow together in Faith as a parish and then employ strategies to evangelise at four levels:

Learn and teach our fellow parishioners

Reach out and welcome back our lapsed-Catholics

Welcome other Christians and non-Catholics

Address and inform non-Christians and non-believers of the importance of Jesus and Salvation

Pray collectively especially for guidance from the Holy Spirit.

Help people to form a real relationship with the Triune God with a parish that enables them to have a more balanced work/prayer life

Considering more the unique place of women in the Church and empower them more.

Perhaps many people are unfamiliar with post-Vatican II developments in the Church and might therefore benefit from adult courses of instruction to better formulate responses as individual and collective Laity to questions such as the ones being asked here.

Setting up Parish Discussion Groups to address aspects of the Catholic Faith, Adult Catechesis, evangelisation and address some practical and spiritual applications.

Catholics in general are probably poorly informed with regard to the Five Strands of Moral Theology. An understand of these principles might help us to understand our own journey and thus aid “Journeying Together” and help our mission to evangelise.

Collated 18/02/2022

Our Lady of Lourdes Parish, Hungerford