

SYNODAL PROCESS - OUR LADY & ST PATRICK'S CHURCH IN THE MEADOWS

Introduction

We welcome this opportunity to take part in the Synod initiated by the Holy Father. Our Lady and St Patrick's in The Meadows is an inner city parish of Nottingham, with a growing multicultural and internationally diverse population, including members of the original Irish population who built our current church and also now includes people of an Asian/Asian British and Black background. Whilst the parish joyfully celebrates this and benefits hugely from the many graces and blessings it confers, such diversity also brings challenges including how to fully integrate such diversities into all aspects and practices of our church community life. We are blessed to have St Patrick's primary school in our parish. The school population reflects the diversity of our wider community welcoming many children of different faith backgrounds.

The Process During three Sunday Masses every person in the congregation including children, was invited to take part and given time to consider their response to the Diocesan Synodal questions. On completion of this exercise, the Parish Pastoral Council met on several occasions, and carefully went through every response, to ensure every voice and opinion was taken account of, so that the submission could fully reflect views. Several themes came out of this exercise and are summarised below.

Session I - The Dream

We dream of a church that is inclusive and welcoming of all people; that engages with local and global social issues; that reaches out and exercises compassion, justice and mercy to all;

How can we achieve this...

By being open and honest (about past mistakes) and striving to understand different views.

By ensuring we are welcoming of all God's children regardless of sexual orientation, age, ethnicity or sacramental status (divorced and remarried, people in irregular relationships).

By ensuring decisions are taken as close as possible to the point-of-need; putting in place a "flatter hierarchy" which involves more lay participation.

By developing the role of women in the church.

By planning and adapting our practices in the wake of the covid-19 pandemic.

Session II - Can we identify the marginalised and/or separated from the Parish and Society?

The elderly, the housebound, those with reduced mobility, shift-workers. We also included lapsed Catholics in this category and BAME, immigrants and refugees; teenagers who have "dropped out"; drug- and alcohol-misusers; victims of domestic violence who are terrorised and unable to break free; the homeless; members of the LGBTQ?+.

How best can we respond?

Be befriending; by putting the corporal works of mercy into action (by listening, visiting people at home, etc.); by creating a social events programme to use our church hall for the wider community; re-establish the livestreaming of services; church to be more active in advertising, communicating the fact we are open. Ensure our parish registers are up to date. Exploring the possibility of creating a youth group.

Session III A) How do I hear and respond to the voice of the Holy Spirit? B) How is the Holy Spirit working in our Parish?

A) We hear the voice of the Holy Spirit in the people we meet at church and at work; and in the presence of each other in the Church and our sense of common purpose. We respond by giving and receiving forgiveness; by extending the hand of friendship; by accepting the Holy Spirit's guidance and acknowledging the good in my sisters and brothers. We hear the promptings of the Holy Spirit about trusting in God's plan for us, through listening to God's Word, and resolving not to repeat wrongdoings. We respond by reflecting on God's Word and in our daily prayers for other people in the world; and by giving of our time willingly and generously to others - meaning that the Holy Spirit is alive in me and in my life.

B) We see the Spirit working when we participate in the Sacraments; through the welcome we receive; through deeds and actions (befriending, supporting local foodbank, etc.). We see and encounter the Spirit working in the new members of our community and in the stronger members of the community enabling others to help. We also see it in our Evangelisation Group (Here:Now:us) reaching out to housebound parishioners and to the wider community. The Holy Spirit also works visibly through our clergy and lay ministers.

What steps is the Holy Spirit calling us to take together as a parish moving forward?

To care for one another in the Parish and to bring the Holy Spirit into one another's lives. By doing things together, holding celebrations and welcoming the wider community to share, thereby spreading the good news of the joyful things happening in our Parish. By stepping up our involvement in local ecumenical activities (Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, Women's World Day of Prayer...). By recruiting more volunteers from within our parish to take on roles in the lay ministry (readers, Extraordinary Ministers of the Eucharist, visiting the sick, etc.)

In conclusion, we would like to emphasise how overwhelmed and humbled we were by the generous, open and uplifting nature of the responses our fellow parishioners shared with us. We were also encouraged by the forward-looking nature of the comments. We now feel confident that we have a better understanding of how to become an active, missional, listening parish.

Two Practical Actions:

1. **(Immediate). Institute the practice of greeting and conversing with a neighbour at the start of weekend Mass. This aims to address the issues of welcoming, inclusivity, parish growth, and involvement which have been listed above.**
2. **(Long term). Develop the use of our church premises to include the wider community in the Meadows. This will help to consolidate the immediate action and further encourage growth, inclusivity, togetherness, and social well-being.**

Responses from St Patrick's Catholic Primary and Nursery School:

What is my dream for the church and my school? How can we make this happen?

PUPIL RESPONSE: Our pupils spoke of a desire to take the Church's mission and share it with others such as helping homeless people and to raise money for people and send it to those in need. Our pupils dreamed of a church where all are welcomed and invited regardless of gender or how people identify themselves (including LGBTQ?+)

STAFF RESPONSE: Staff commented on their dream for the church including a more universal opportunity for pupils to lead a life of Vocation to the Church, namely opportunities for females to lead others as Priests, Bishops etc. Our pupils want to serve others, they care deeply for the lives of those who do not have all they need, they truly believe and trust in the Lord, but sadly for many of our girls especially, they cannot see a future in the Church as they are not afforded the same opportunities as their peers. We feel currently some of our pupils have a barrier placed on them which limits their ability to be as effective as they could be in their faith.

Who are the people who feel left out and excluded in the church?

PUPIL RESPONSE: Our pupils spoke of their desire that they wanted ALL to feel the love and presence of the Lord. They felt that at times they, as children, felt excluded from the Mass as it was 'long' and the scripture and Mass content was a little 'out of their reach' Pupils recognised that although priests did a good job of explaining scripture to parishioners it was still at times little inaccessible.

STAFF RESPONSE: Adult responses seemed to reflect people who have experience of family members and friends who have left the Church or find themselves on the margins, whether through change in personal circumstances (such as divorce/separation) the result of bereavement/ loss or a change to work patterns etc.

How can we reach out, listen to and love them?

ADULT RESPONSE: Pupils asked that they could become more involved in the Mass and can lead on Mass parts in special family Masses; allowing opportunities for them to further explore their understanding of Mass. They also desired to be supported by older friends within the church to support them in understanding their faith.

STAFF RESPONSE: We would like to see a greater investment from the church to promote and support Catholic youth work, which is crucial to the growth of the Church.

For those who have left the church, views were expressed that it was important for those who practise their faith to know how to 'meet people where they are' without judgement or condemnation.

What does the Holy Spirit inspire us to do in our Church and school?

PUPIL RESPONSE: The pupils feel the Holy Spirit helps them to fulfil the mission set by Jesus. They spoke the Holy Spirit giving them the confidence to lead others in faith and be a role model to younger children starting out on their faith journey

STAFF RESPONSE: We feel we are inspired and guided by the Holy Spirit. Our community feels we are called to serve and use our talents and skills to serve others

What do you think the Holy Spirit is calling us to do next?

STAFF RESPONSE: To seek further opportunities to explore and 'exploit' the talents and gifts of those within our parish to make a very real impact on the lives of those in our school, parish and wider community.