

Reflecting on the experience of the pandemic

What has been your experience of 'journeying together' these last eighteen months – as parish/community?

At the beginning – shock, loneliness; but relief to stop and think, cheer from neighbours/phone calls/parish help – felt should do the same, so rang people – this helped me. Clapping NHS – invited neighbours.

Very sudden – from precautions to a full stop of all activities and shock. Phoned people would usually see. Grateful for live-streamed masses – togetherness. Tried other countries' masses too.

Sense of relief – took my children out of school one week early. Loved masses online, but felt for the priests.

Frightened – due to age profile of those affected – already affected by grief and other issues. No computer for masses. Phoning helped + CD masses.

Greater opportunity for seeing other parishes and appreciating one's own parish. I was upset by the disruption of the daily Masses. Online Masses, very good.

I went to stay with my brother for 3 months in the early days. We prayed Mass texts together – we would very seldom have prayed together otherwise.

Attending streamlined mass + meetings – missed social interaction, being cut off. Recording of hymns, challenging but rewarding. People working from home – had different focus. Support from neighbours evident during this time.

IT very important tool during this period – Facilitated contact + new meetings/friends. Meditation.

Isolated – limited groups meeting within parish.

Not receiving Communion – found hard to be positive.

Most people have been supportive – remote contact/sharing, greetings as coming into/leaving Church.

Listened to Mass when walking dog – peaceful.

Started using streaming services – our streaming service or other churches – adds to sense of universal.

Missed Communion/community – coffee time – but people don't know each other – just see each other. Spoke about events children got involved in.

So missed speaking after mass when you could come together.

Glad to be with someone, concerned about others' loneliness. Good to hear voices of priest of house – live stream – felt connected.

Closeness to those in house. Shared Mass.

Felt Church was alive to an extent.

Great shock that parish had to stop – all the clubs that made part of routine – opportunity to do things at home.

Missed the Mass but found other sources.

Didn't feel connected to senior members of community – would like to have seen more leadership.

Kept us from our loved ones. Life has to be lived to the full – must have boundaries of kindness + dignity + respect.

Be self-centred – walking, thinking + listening.

Frightening time – protecting ourselves.

Getting into new routines to ward off depression.

Biggest thing was finding strength in routine, at times felt insignificant. Had doubts about self-worth, generally had a positive outlook. Found new routine- Start with prayer/mediation finding strength in meaning. This will make sense one day- Not the end. Appreciate everything. Faith in humanity restored. Going through a cleanse reconnecting with faith. Felt lost COVID made us realize what is important. Found community through online groups-zoom. Now feel over stimulated, trying to find the balance in everyday life; had too much empty space.

Time away from others allowed concentrating on important that had value. Friends, family, and work remained. Reaching out to people who I spoke to not frequently to tell them how important they are. The inability to connect to people was a frustration, The RCIA journey was stalled. CLOSED CHURCHES were upsetting. Prefers to find acceptance in solitude, the good and bad is being truly present.

Health fine but had demanding job but was made worse by COVID. End of last year was a different person but had deep emptiness but felt more to life than this. I would have been lost if had not had fiancé to look out for me. I Expected other people to take that role but didn't. I starting to learn about faith filled a void to understand the world around me. The move to a virtual world is a double edge sword the ability to do deeper things like prayer, meetings.

The majority felt that in the wider community the pandemic has brought people closer and strangers were showing concern for each other. There was one dissenter to this

view, but their family was running errands for them, which conversely isolated them from their neighbours.

Live streaming through Zoom had been a great success allowing people to worship in their homes.

Virtual masses were greatly appreciated.

Our local Church made a big effort to keep in touch with parishioners.

People in the Parish reached out to those who were greatly affected by the pandemic.

- A feeling that God has been helping us through the awful situation, with offers of help and support from parishioners and others not connected to the church
- People have been very kind and even small gestures were very helpful and much appreciated
- The situation has felt very surreal and people have felt very sad and unhappy about not being able to hug each other and see their families, particularly during the periods of lockdown
- The parish community has pulled together, doing its best to find ways of supporting each other, and continues to do this. We have still felt like a community despite the limited ways of meeting and joining together in the early days of the pandemic
- The Mass online has been very important and has become a constant for those who have been fearful and unable to venture out
- Some have met more parishioners through helping and supporting where needed, as well as being given extra help and support themselves

Experiences voiced by all in the last 18 month were positive. Examples included:

- All were grateful for the joy that Zoom brought by bringing people together in faith. For example, joining daily mass online, listening to bible readings with Christians from different cultures and countries, discussing theology, or simply friends keeping in touch
- The pandemic galvanised new ways of working, including acquiring new skills to enable music to become part of the online mass recordings. Music meant a lot to many in their online mass experience and opened doors to the community.
- Feeling close to the parish and in touch via the gift of house communion from Eucharistic Ministers
- The pandemic afforded the God given blessing of having more time to reflect on matters of importance (the beauty of new and first-time motherhood and an associated appreciation and understanding of Our Lady in one case). Spiritual meditation was valued

*During the pandemic I felt down and sad.

*My Mum is deaf and felt even more cut off.

*I felt closer to family.

*I'm trying to get back to in person things. It is hard not being connected. One daughter was alone and isolated for 7 months.

*I was in an accident 9 years ago which was life changing. Afterwards I was left by my wife of 32 years. We are still friends and have 4 grown up children.

*We lost 3 grandparents in three weeks. They had very different funerals. One I couldn't attend, one was a drive by, the other _____. My faith got me through by prayer and I asked others for help when I was in pain.

*My sister was very ill, alone and in care. She couldn't take phone conversations. When we could meet in person we sing together: hymns, Christmas carols.

*My experience of the Church during the pandemic was to do with all of you - I believe the Church is built on all of you and I hope the leaders of the Church also believe that. I see the privilege of being with you. It turned things around. I see you as Church helping me.

*I didn't realise what I lost until it was gone.

What strengths did I find in my faith and faith community?

Grateful to have a faith.

Felt strength from God, neighbours, NHS; missed mass and Holy Communion.

We can keep going in the faith without Church – for a time, at least.

To an extent my faith had to be strengthened because although I could attend Mass virtually I could not receive the Eucharist so my faith had to compensate.

Talks by Steven Wang.

Sharing belief in Church with other people.

Support from others – feeling of belonging resulting in peace.

Returning to Mass – gave sense of community – shared faith.

Awareness of other people – getting to know one another.

Spent more time alone but did not become an issue due to scripture involvement – reflective from meetings.

Concern for others evident during this period – uplifting to see.

People affected in different ways.

Felt if God meant it was to be – c'est la vie.

Some felt isolated & no comfort.

Being able to attend more funerals remotely means being part of a community at that key time.

Closer to God in my prayers.

Mass online daily & visited other places too. Felt together.

Touched by them saying Mass with no one in Church.

Eucharistic sermons online very helpful – online meditation groups.

Realised how important people are to me.

Strengths were finding the strength in me to deal with it.

Helping with food distribution was tremendous.
Time at home expecting our baby – had time to talk and be together.
Strengthened our faith.

I was aware of Mass in background – it didn't do much to watch Mass on the screen – offered reassurance & his joke made me smile.

Did not feel cut off.

Community offered itself – through FB listening + being present.

Parish opened itself & was accessible via media – great joy.

Daily reflections & photos were very helpful – uplifting & moving.

Moved to UK and new job most challenging feeling alone. Online is not the same as face to face. I have family nearby it's not about me it's about others. I Have family in my home country, I felt lucky to have vaccine because family is in a developing country. Still watch Philippine news, so I can check travel restrictions. It's about knowing how well my country is handling the pandemic.

Felt lucky because family worked from home and family and they are safe. What is inspiring is richer neighborhood came together to start community pantry. Felt disappointed by the government. The tax system is wrong, don't see the benefits of the taxes- roads are bad and the health system. Things I don't understand but God does.

The group felt this trial has allowed them to see their faith more clearly.

Also to know ourselves and the people around us better.

Lack of distractions allowed time to focus on what's really important.

- God has been with us when we have felt that we are on our own; we didn't have to be brave
- We have learnt to wait quietly in the presence of God and be patient
- We have been given time to think, reflect, be peaceful and appreciate and be awed by the glories of creation, particularly when the world felt so quiet. The wonders of nature were all around us.

The group were in accord with Hitchin being a good example of faith acting in the community by helping people and “Living Christ's Virtues”, in terms of pulling together and keeping connected. Initiatives including Helping the homeless and Eat up Warm Up are testimony to a positive outreach to the community.

Others spoke of finding their faith and a confidence to let The Lord lead them.

Post second lockdown the church is seeing a return of parishioners to the church.

Within “Churches Together in Hitchin”, our Catholic Church is regarded as approachable and unusual (as they are not as expected, namely stand-offish and remote).

How was I disappointed or sorrowful?

Disappointed – no contact with the priests as no computer.

That this was what it took to get to know people.

Missed funerals – paying respect.

Separation from grandchildren.

Sad about how some people behaved – conspiracy theorists etc duping people, people profiting.

Some sermons inspiring but others try to over investigate issues which are not relevant (Old Testament).

Children are the present – should be involved in all masses/activities.

Interaction including Mass limited – but may be because not aware of remote/zoom meetings.

Language needs to be 'modernised' to attract wider audiences.

Welcome wider audience – non-Catholics/non-practicing.

The Church is the people – avoid multi-tiered management.

Need to lose authoritative status/reputation – be more open to change/modernisation.

Enlightening to understand other religions – be seen to want to understand & share.

Not seeing people – in person.

Seeing people who love me, not able to be with loved ones when they were dying.

Discussed compared with war – but during war people could meet.

For those who could not be together.

Sad about the people I could no longer visit.

Missed the small groups I was part of.

When you heard parishioners had died & you'd never see them again.

Lost family in Spain – couldn't go there. Had a wonderful role model in the faith of my grandparents.

Not having Holy Communion & hearing sad news.

Being separated from loved ones, especially at special times like Christmas.

- There was a general feeling of great sadness and sorrow for each other, the wider community and across the globe.
- Particularly affecting were the numbers of people who suffered and died alone, the inability to attend funerals, no visiting friends and family
- Despair at still not knowing what will be happening on a day-to-day basis. A feeling of two steps forward and one step back.
- People continue to feel tired and anxious

In the main the group were positive of their parish and community journey. The importance of being together with loved ones was particularly reinforced on the very sad occasions of the loss of a close family or friend and being unable to attend the funeral. The pandemic-related drifting away from the parish of parishioners was also a sadness.

In what ways did the grace of God most clearly touch and uplift me?

Nuns at online Dublin Mass waved sign of peace at camera for online viewers. (Options for support – telephone calls, telephone from others).

Grace of God working through others helping – NHS, community.

People were going on, as near to normal as they could.

We all missed the human contact – and so God walking through others.

Not a good word to use because not used in daily life – should be the presence of God.

The use of technology to form community groups around roads/neighbourhoods was so strong – including young people helping out – we got to meet/know our neighbours, “Feed the hungry, cloth the sick” – as scripture said.

In what wonderful things people did – hearing it on tv & news.

Loved clapping for NHS.

Enthused about projects involved in.

God was with me in a special way.

God will prevail no matter what.

Walk – more time together. By living our faith. We don't know how our actions influence others. Some members of the group gave anecdotes where this was the case.

“Feed up, warm up” has been a success, as has” the pantry”

To continue the theme, reaching out to the wider community of Hitchin

Great efforts were made to retain normality, e.g. the choir and other musicians recording music for masses.

- The many ways we have still been able to meet and support each other through the parish and community; the choir has kept going through zoom meetings and independent recording of hymns for the online services - people have discovered

skills that they did not know they had! Singing together once more has been wonderful

- The sounds and sights of nature: birds singing: the glorious colours of the trees, flowers, skies and the extra appreciation of these things that we often take for granted
- Pleasure in the small things in life
- Other people, often strangers, being so willing and able to help and support us
- General kindness of others

One member spoke of experiencing more emotion on receiving The Lord having devoted more time than pre-pandemic to really thinking of and feeling and trying better to pray to The Lord.

Communion

Thinking about the pandemic, and perhaps more broadly, when does journeying together in the Church bring joy?

Singing/praying together in the Church; Pilgrimages e.g. Walsingham.

Made you value what you'd lost.

Deeper personal relationship with God.

Pope Francis has shown bravery and good leadership in speaking out for the underprivileged including in pandemic.

Using one's gifts to do something for the parish or other community – especially, but not only, if others show appreciation.

A greater appreciation of the joy of praying in person with others.

The efficacy of groups in the Church, spiritual Communion.

Sacraments in general – baptisms – first communions – weddings online.

Family coming back to Church, seeing light in others.

Being together to help each other, to listen & offer support.

Worshipping together. Homecoming when we could go back into Church.

It's a way of life – tangible.

Joy preparing children for First Communion + Confirmation – loved their Masses.

Online platform – Can help us journey together.

Inspirational funerals & sharing of these occasions which had not happened before.

Music – choir & other musicians – share & develop - quite exciting.

Sharing.

Taking communion to the sick

Spreading the word/news to the people who don't have social media

Generally a positive experience of our church community was perceived by the group.

Lots of individual involvement in various groups in the church that helps to create a sense of community

Priests are also part of the community rather than a separate group

There was some discussion about individual worship than can exclude others this approach can discourage a sense of community.

The church size lends itself to creating more sense of belonging to a community, friendlier as compared to large parishes.

Shared values, philosophies important in a community

Despite being physically separated we still felt connected, e.g. by the virtual masses. We felt a sense of togetherness.

- Singing together
- Joining together once more in sharing the Mass and communion
- Finding strength in belonging to the church community
- The willingness to embrace change and be flexible in approach. It has been an uplifting experience finding ways of reaching out which would have taken much longer to achieve without the pandemic forcing the issue
- Finding new challenges, such as reading at Mass
- Attending meetings such as these, which the group found to be uplifting and rewarding, speaking to previously unknown members of the parish, learning about each other and sharing our thoughts
- The church starting to embrace flexibility and change

Church life on Zoom brought joy. There was joy to praise the Lord amid the anxiety of the pandemic. Worship and coming together was important.

When might it bring pain or sadness?

Sad for those not getting vaccinated, e.g. developing world – inequality, mismanagement by Governments.

Losses of other people in the Church (deaths of relatives etc).
The inability to have physical Eucharist.

Political issues, restrictions on Mass.

Just loss of parishioners.

Inability to go to funerals very difficult.

Distress of others not coping – more problems than solutions.

Don't know about prayer.

Our Church isn't as inclusive as it could be (Global Church) – gay community – divorced – those feeling there are barriers.

It's a bit like a mill pond – in the 60's the Church was challenged – things have now become still – not challenging & moving things forward.

Not being able to say goodbye to those we loved when they died.

Hierarchy of Church – re teachers – in our parish – not being EM to others.

Sad to not see people back at Mass.

Linking Schools back into parish community.

Not getting together to participate
Fear of infection is keeping people away

Restrictions on receiving sacraments
Restrictions on funerals and weddings
Restrictions on personal contacts at difficult times
No nativity play for reception children

- Some people may have found it difficult to engage with church services during the pandemic and have drifted away.
- Although numbers of people attending church have begun to increase again there was concern that the church still felt empty on occasions; it was noted that numbers had significantly decreased on the previous Sunday. Perhaps this was due to the latest variant beginning to take a hold and people might be feeling anxious again
- People have a desire to know when/and if this will change. People are feeling very emotional about the uncertainty
- There was a sense that the church can never go back to how it was but will develop and thrive under different circumstances
- The drifting away of younger members of the parish. The older members of the group felt that 'Catholic guilt' still weighed heavily upon them and is one of many issues that needs to be addressed to encourage more young people to want to become active members of the community again
- The loss of loved ones during Covid; journeying together without those you hold dear is sad and very difficult

The world is in pain – and a concern that solutions posed to address this are not in accord with the Gospel.

The lack of physicality in church and the lack of access to Communion brought sadness.

There was a recognition, an acknowledgement, that the church comprises all of us, not just the clergy. A sorrow of the lesser role of women in the church both in countries where women are demeaned but also the democratic developed Western world. The position of women and the lack of women priests does not resonate with today's world.

Celibacy was considered not relevant for the clergy in today's church.

We asked how the voice of the young could be brought to the Synod – did we invite them? Suggestions of involving schools via RE lessons were mooted. Simplified versions of some of the questions posed in this sharing could be asked of younger children.

The Church must address the matter of clerical abuse and be seen to do so, as to date it has failed in this. All such abuse was perpetrated by men.

The Church is seen typically as detached from the laity; women have a role to play and can do more.

What has the experience of 'journeying together' taught us about what it means to be Church?

Church should be more 'Family' – should attract others in.

We should be a joyful example to them. – 'Actions speak louder than words'.

Not a building – but the 'Body of Christ' – the people, 'us' – especially so when we couldn't all be together.

Unity in singing.

Looking forward to getting back to a new better normal with changes/lessons learnt.

This parish has many Masses + people can feel isolated. We could learn from that we need to provide more opportunities for all parishioners to get together.

There is value in 'home' churches, and small groups meeting.

Being the people – without them you don't have the Church.

Communion between them.

Parish as a whole.

Like being an active part of this parish.

People of God gathered together to worship together.

Extended family.

We should try to join in as much as we can.

Not too much thought given to the youth and not enough listening to young people.

Not enough young people.

Too many of the same people volunteering.

But it was felt this is a good parish. After mass coffee mornings getting a special mention

- We felt that we were still journeying together despite everything. Church is not a building; it is the people who embrace being together as a community who have faith and belief in God, regardless of their own personal religion or denomination.
- It is an acceptance of each other, and a willingness to reach out and learn from one another

We are all one in Christ's love. The Church is "us". Whatever we do is key. Joy is having a Christian family

*A few months after my accident and realising what had happened and how my life was changed, I returned to my faith. I look forward to coming to Church.

*It is a solution for me to deepen, to not have the prominent voice be the news.

*I missed people during the pandemic. The Church...brings me nearer people.

*precious - to share common beliefs

*I have many reasons for going to church

*Church was a natural big part of life as a child, then I wandered off. After the accident I returned. When I am at Church, I forget myself and everything.

Participation

When we say 'our Church', who is part of it?

- 'Our Parish'
- 'All Faiths' in the Christian Community.
- Our Parish and the world Church in all countries.
- Diocese and dioceses nationwide.
- Churches together in Hitchin.
- The housebound, the elderly, the care home residents, hospital patients, prisoners.

All of humanity – God there for everyone – the whole world whatever denomination. We are the Church & there are others that follow.

All baptised people are part of Church.

Can be a bumpy journey – God sees all of us + our journeys.

Those who answer the call – those who want to be part of it.

Bigger community – people of faith and not.

All created beings.

Other Churches are more approachable and welcoming (not OLS).

Lifting of Sunday obligation – it isn't all about being there on a Sunday!. People live their lives very differently now.

Women in the Church, married priests – Are all our rules and regulations which can limit inclusion, are they important?

Enjoy RCIA discussion without as I don't feel judgment- I enjoy coming together and been given the space to interrogate the faith. There is genuine interest and thoughtful discussions and support. However, I haven't found the wider parish connection; even before the pandemic as no one reached out to me as a new member of the church. The childhood memories were good now not as good as it was. Now it has changed no family not feeling welcomed. I have missed coffee after mass. That was community- MASKS Cover communication, there is not any networking. I want to Group with catholic who are young adults in the church to feel a sense of community. Who is the church of tomorrow? I would like to see more social activity and trips- pilgrimages.

Enjoyed learning about faith and meeting other members. To me church is more than on Sundays what does devout look like? People can choose what they do. I want to be exposed to all parts of Catholicism might feel that it is not for me but it is just a small part of Catholic spectrum (traditional/ Charismatic).

Catholicism strong mystery tradition- avocado on toast (trendy phase) spirituality.

Cannot water down traditional theology sense of identity. Strong movement within spirituality- yoga has a whole ethos. However, this is not everything. The Church gives us everything.

Church teaches values when faced with dilemma go back to values. It is easy to get lost, people have different ways of coping, and life is not an easy journey. There is an element of coming away from yourself. You have to make an effort to go to church which means actively disrupting your life to go to church. Watched online mass but joined another parish and had a different experience of church.

Safe space not alone. The homily is the best part of mass, like mass in the Philippines as they are longer. I personally didn't like online mass easily distracted. You need to be in a place that you are ready to come to church as you cannot come if you're not ready.

Outside of mass the volunteering part.

People who give their time to the Food bank and Pantry

People who give lifts

People who visit the sick.

Widening participation ideas:-

Identifies a gap associated with a lack of young people participating.

Perhaps a social club but practical implementation, challenges were acknowledged. Young people of today have a strong sense of social justice perhaps they could be supported to take the initiative on particular projects / issues child poverty needs in hitchin some appropriate mental health concerns?

Welcoming new parishioner's suggestions to improve this:-
Have people who meet and greet introduce a "buddy" system

Perhaps involve the scout group more

Look after ethnic minority groups better again through buddy system

Encourage the young and diverse to join the choir

Help the young to read at Mass

Parishioners may welcome opportunity to share their faith journey either written reflection in News Letter or verbally

Everyone who wants to participate in it.

- There was a strong sense that church should mean 'all' of us. It was felt that our local community excels at trying to include everyone, reaching out to support those who need help and working together for the common good.
- However, 'the church' needs to move towards including women in all key roles, alongside men, in order to develop and ensure its future growth. Women feel left out as vital decisions *may* currently be made on their behalf by men.
- Marriage within the clergy should be allowed
- 'Antiquated' and 'out-of-touch' were key descriptors of how 'the church' currently functions, although all were full of praise for our own parish community
- All felt that regular meetings like these would be invaluable in journeying together, although accept that it can be difficult to engage with many people, who are, perhaps, happy to continue with the status quo

The Church is not as inclusive as it should be.

When in doubt on this or any issue, we should consider "*What would Jesus do?*" – who would Jesus say is part of "our Church"?

*I think Hitchin parish is good, very active. I get included a lot. I moved to Hitchin 7 years ago. For a while I continued to go to Mass in Stevenage. Then was invited to be involved by Trish in various ways. (Sorry Helen I missed some things here). This is my first time facilitating.

*I like music coming back into the in person Masses.

Who is missing on this journey?

Lapsed Catholics/Christians including teenagers.

Homeless.

People with addictions, mental health problems.

Gay/lesbian/transgender people.

Divorced/remarried.

Refugees etc, e.g. Pope Francis embracing asylum seekers.

Prisoners.

Young carers – children/teenagers assisting parents/siblings.

All God's Children; Jesus might come to these people first.

Synod for the youth. – Listen to them and the ethnic minority communities.

Divorced and remarried people feel unwelcome.

Those who are not in our immediate community of Church.

People who have lapsed and don't go to another faith group.

People who don't receive a sense of belonging.

People who don't realise what they are missing – something to endure rather than being a part of.

Not enough participation from people who volunteer.

Those who have had something hurtful in their lives + don't see how to come back.

I am missing in my own journey when I sin & reject God's love & plan.

Those who didn't have a chance to ask for faith.

More broken families.

Families at present – people who have never had a chance to connect at all or reconnect.

Trying to come back on the journey can be hard because of what we have gone through.

People – come and go in the Church – live their lives according to the values of the Church even if they don't acknowledge.

Those separated – have remarried – can't receive the Sacrament through no fault of their own – annulment process.

Those who feel they would not be welcomed back in.

The group felt that the 20- to 40-year-olds were light in number.

We may have lost some people during the pandemic (people who have lost the habit of going to mass etc.).

- Many women
- Young children
- Young adults
- Although there are still many families who worship together, over the years there seems to be fewer young people who enjoy being part of the community

Women

The young

Victims (e.g. of knife crime)

The lonely or housebound

Those whose faith has waned or gone.

We must work together.

“Who would Jesus consider?”

*We are part of the Church but not included, in deliberations on changes in language used in our liturgies, the lectionary.

*A young gay man I have spoken to doesn't find the Church makes him feel he belongs.. or is included.

*Young people, look at who is here today. Notice our ages.

*The young are missing. We wander off at the time we are becoming sexually aware and active. The Church is not good at celebrating the gift of sexuality. There is a lot of fear rather than seeing it as part of natural human development.

*Lay people and participation in the Dicasteries of the Vatican. The Curia are very set in their ways. The language used. This can drive people away.

*Pope Francis is aware this needs changing. That's why he has called for these synod conversations.

*The world changes. I went to the library for information as a child. Now it is all on a phone.

*Hopefully through these conversations we will be adding our voice.

*We need to listen to young persons. Bring in the 30 year olds and listen to them - their outlook - listen to them.

*The people who we don't have here, those missing, we need to go out specifically to them, and listen to them.

*Young people are not involved because of the language we use.

*Schools will be having their synodal sharings.

*You need a guy who has a good sense of young people - not too heavy.

*These listening conversations are a start. They will develop.

*Robb will have ideas.

*We are in a changing world. Very different. Different from even three years ago. We were used to travelling to work, and then this stopped due to the pandemic. We were then working from home.

*Technology was allowing people at a distance to come closer.

*But seeing fears to rejoin, go out. Losing the art of face to face conversation.

*Mum's out with their children, but Mum is on the phone.

*adult children present but on the phone. I like to knock on the door, have a real conversation with someone. It lifts the spirit. That's community.

*How can we move from subcommunities, (the different Mass time communities), to more mixed communities?

*More mixing and sharing with other churches and other faiths.

*Churches Together holds its AGM this week, They will be part of this synodal listening.

Whom do we need to listen to?

Children especially in need/danger.

All those we identified overleaf on a different tack:

+ listening to priests/bishops/the Pope.

Youth. We should have a better way to help newcomers – perhaps the priest at the old Church could tell the new parish and someone could be sent to greet & assist the newcomer.

Holy Spirit.

Pope Francis – great valid piece for the Holy Spirit.

Those who don't come.

Anyone who can evangelise & say this is what you are missing.

Listen to each other – we don't give enough time to listen.

Everyone inside + outside the Church.

Act of acknowledging the dignity of being created by God – respecting each other – act of love.

Listen to everyone – people have left because of not being listened to and have left because of non-action.

No one listened when the teachers were going through their case – and found innocent.

Very much need to listen to those who are missing.

Those who have been caused stress and pain by Our Church.

We will lose younger people.

Those values of Jesus – not rules and regulations of the Church.

Young people they are the future.

Minority groups

We need to listen to those who have lapsed, or whose faith has diminished.

We need to listen to those who are searching; they may want to come and see what the Church is all about.

- God
- Everyone who wishes to make their voices / actions heard and seen
- Young adults and children - the future of our church
- It's not just 'listening' to, but watching and engaging with others. Young children are very good at making their wants and needs known, but not only with their voices. It's so easy to 'see' if they are engaged or not

Young people

Mission

What would you wish to celebrate about how your parish/community lives its mission?

Welcoming refugees.

Fund-raising.

Greater involvement of the Laity – especially due to less priests.

People seeing Christ in how we live.

This parish provides the location of food bank and various groups that campaign or raise funds on behalf of poor and marginalised.

Hitchin Pantry, Feed Up Warm Up & similar works.

Outreach to wider community is visible – e.g. Foodbank, Feed Up Warm Up, Hitchin Pantry.

Outreach to people who needed help during pandemic.

Communion to those who needed it.

Families must feel welcome.

Hitchin has so much to celebrate – FUWU, coffee mornings, etc, Bethany Club, ILSSG. Parish priest and his humility.

Newsletter shows how the parish lives its mission.

Hitchin Pantry, etc.

People take things from the parish into their lives and workplace.

Great enrichment.

All the effort put in to continue to communicate.

Keep everyone together.

I have been able to bear witness to the gospel through sharing the video of reading at Walsingham. I have started to work with people of faith by coincident.

Feel displaced due to being new to the area. The growth in diversity; native people find it harder than young people because young people mix with more people. I found it difficult when joined the new work environment in the UK.

Can we ever be united through a race maybe not; however, we are united by the fact that we are human. Feel misplaced more when at home amongst own people in Italy. Find

the common ground in different communities. Growing sensitive to different communities' flip side too sensitive everything is bland and corporate. We need to find the balance and with this common sense.

A lack of clarity about our mission perhaps defined by responding to the needs in the parish

Needs many and varied

Food bank / feed up warm up

Live simply / One world

Gardening

Prayer

Music groups

The Parish community is good at helping people in need; e.g. Feed Up Warm Up. There are lots of examples of people stepping up to help, co-ordinated by Trish, when there is a need.

- We feel very fortunate that we have such a wonderful 'team' at our church, including all of those who work, teach, support and care for us, in whatever capacity.
- The community is always very welcoming to newcomers and visitors, as well as to those of us who have been attending our local church for many years
- One of our group felt that she had 'come home' when she first joined our parish
- There are so many ways of enjoying being together and supporting others, from a variety of clubs and societies to the food bank and Hitchin Pantry
- People are very friendly and approachable and will do their best to help out whenever they can

Mission was considered to mean "Spreading the word". Hitchin parish does well and shows 'by example'. For example, the food bank.

As an individual starting by being a loving caring person.

The world has changed and will continue to do so. Therefore, how to celebrate? Find and communicate a softer more inclusive appealing subject.

One voice commented the Catholic church remains unique – by remaining close to the original church, authentic to the Word of God.

The "Pause for Faith" series of lessons by Father Stephen Wang (the new rector of the English College in Rome, previously in Walsingham) are inspirational. His sermons on YouTube (<https://www.youtube.com/c/PauseforFaith/playlists>) state the importance of building up the community first. Then faith will follow.

In the area, the Hitchin parish is visible compared to others. This should be valued and should continue.

*The Passover Meal when the hall is filled with families, young and old.

*The Michelmas Fayre, run by all sorts of parish groups.

*Maybe by summer of 2022 we can have a big social, with people offering party pieces.

*The beautiful Stations of the Cross led by the Confirmation Group.

How does your community decide priorities for mission?

Parish Council?

Grass roots groups set up by parishioners.

Hitchin at large? – Churches Together, Councillors/MPs (lobbying them etc), Twinning Associations, Grass roots groups and charities. – Food Bank, Hitchin Pantry, Feed Up Warm Up.

Second collections, so many for Cafod.

What about Aid for the Church in Need etc?

How do we encourage families to stay? This is home from home – need to make this a priority. Meet the need.

As they emerge – as things cease, e.g. Chapter 26 – caring for earth. M + D and their work. Needs of the community – calls us to engage and look to what we can do. Little involvement.

Parish council

Liturgy group

Individual initiatives, e.g. Hitchin Pantry

- Through the Parish Council
- Volunteering
- Questionnaires
- Emails
- A very helpful weekly newsletter
- Our Pastoral Assistant does her utmost to keep everyone informed of all parish affairs, so that we can be part of the process in decision-making

This was not known. It was felt we should listen to the Laity as to how we determine priorities for mission.

*Parish Council.

*Trish!

*We are open to needs that arise, that the Holy Spirit offers and we respond. The Food Bank, Feed up, Warm Up and getting food to hundreds of families during the pandemic.

*Have meetings to get together, get ideas. Not be fearful - but to meet, encourage suggestions.

What areas of mission are we neglecting?

Young carers – among many.

Young people generally after Confirmation when they start questioning/leaving the faith.

The 'Bigger Picture' – big issues in the world e.g. climate change, injustice, inequality.
Stand up against what is wrong/speak up for the voiceless.

Need to be more welcoming to minorities.

Need to make minorities more inclusive

Teaching in Theology. Fr.Euloge.

Reaching out to those who are not returning.

Evangelisation – use opportunities in our other missions to reach out + talk about faith matters more.

Need to consider keeping families in the Church to keep it alive. Should be a top priority.

Can't do everything – we can do what is within our reach.

Covid keeps – what have we done which is worth keeping and retaining?

Listening more to each other. Parishioners could reflect on their journey to celebrate after Mass

Diary Entries could be made by parishioners

The issue of Women priests was raised. The group was not opposed to the idea, open to further discussion.

The opportunity for different perspectives could be considered such as married priests could offer more gifts.

A feminine perspective on the Gospel perhaps

Women priests' proper preparation is crucial.

We may be missing some good ideas.

- At the moment the children are missing out on their own shared part of the mass. As with many other things this is due to Covid and will resume when possible
- Women, who are unable to develop their roles in the current 'ways of doing things'. The title 'Pastoral Assistant' does not come near explaining the important, extensive, and ever growing, role that is covered. It has increased exponentially during covid.
- The parish is doing its best under very difficult circumstances, reaching out to all but especially the most vulnerable

*We need to reach young people better. We need their presence. We need to develop more gender participation ie women.

*Christian unity. Churches Together has made a big difference. There is progress.

*Interfaith sharing. We are all human beings

Discerning

What might the Spirit of God be saying to us through our reflection on these experiences of journeying together?

It's time to stop, think, talk, reflect and learn from the pandemic and before that – and change for the better/decide what our priorities should be.

Offer our lives & put them into God's hands.
Problems – not just up to us – up to God.
Bring hearts to God.
Through prayer that things are changed.
Fearful of our Catholic Church being watered down.
Be compassionate to those around us.
Making decisions which lead us away from the teachings.

Role of women.
Looking at other faiths – growing Churches into the spirit – that lifts, unites, inspires and energises us.
All inclusive priesthood.
All back to WWJD.
Going through it together.
Sharing.

We have to get together to know a wider world, especially looking out for the poor and isolated.

May be, have an engagement in the mass, perhaps a discussion group during the mass.

Biggest thing during pandemic rethink how prolific we were with travel, meeting and indulging. The Holy Spirit brings us back to basics. How else will you be productive? We should be connected more, speak to people who are ok, may not be? You don't know what tomorrow will be like. How we talk to people. We should have grown a little with emotional intelligence. We should change how we change how we approach people. - 'Black Lives Matter' is the spirit present? Is he trying to tell us something?

So much society media is polarizing, everyone is divined on topic and everyone has opinions. Something is always going on or cancelled. The one thing that is good is the Catholic Church because it is a constant and not changing to the trend. Important to maintain. Today we are all live matter has not the church been teaching us how to live 2000 yrs. if we would have followed the way we are called we would not have got into this mess. Religion is personal but may not be into it.

Church has role in shaping Young People. Young People might get the impression that everything comes from social media but this is a fad. But God gives us everything.

How important it is to have contact with other people.
We can't be people of faith in isolation.

- We should talk and pray together more; there is a lot to be learnt from each other
- It has been interesting, beneficial and comforting
- We need to do all we can to help and support each other. Even those who appear to be managing well might be hiding their sadness and real feelings and need help
- Take time to call each other

Jesus listened to the crowd. The crowd is 'all of us'. We must seek a forum for all to input into. The pandemic reiterated the importance of a church; it sharpened awareness of our need for a spiritual community and faith. We must not lose this opportunity.

The importance of better education of the Laity in faith was discussed, as was the importance of the family in this regard. Action, Communication, Community, are all key.

Current controversies in the church and the need to rectify them were repeated in this discussion (e.g., celibacy of catholic priests and the 'betrayal' of allowing married Anglican priests; power struggles in the Church).

Pope Francis writes of the need to ensure the Church's "customs, ways of doing things, times and schedules, language and structures" are geared towards mission not self preservation.

So true – shouldn't be about self-preservation (so many of the traditions we have are not scripture-based).

'Mission' needs to be the driving force even if some traditions fall away (as some aren't actually that important and may even hinder).

Women + married priests needed.

The Church is like a juggernaut or a large ship – takes a long time to turn around.

There are some things in which many Catholics now take little interest but which appeal to others – e.g. Gregorian chant, which soothes people and is used by secular organisations for that purpose. Have we become too national and are we neglecting things that could appeal aesthetically?

Look at first Christians – strong community – pray deeply – asked for intermission of those who had died – financial support for community. Don't see that in the Church today.

Holy Spirit – get us to be more open to development – we love traditions but may not lead to stronger Church.

Church does not open itself to change.

Suffers because of not having women in higher positions.

Mission regarding child abuse.

Attitudes are changing swiftly + fast.

Has to be much more inclusive.

The Church should consider allowing priests to marry and accepting female priests.

We need to jettison what's superfluous and keep what's important.

Different solutions may be needed in different parts of the world.

- The church must be all-embracing and inclusive, open to all, understanding and welcoming their opinions, and embracing change
- Covid has shown that the church can, and should, be flexible
- People should be encouraged to talk about and question their beliefs, think for themselves and not simply accept what, historically, they have been told

What 'ways of doing things' may the Spirit of God be calling us to change?

As overleaf – Women and married priests (some feel as 'Deacons' first).

There is too much control, not enough consultation.

Hierarchal structure of Church is damaging.

All offices of the Church open to those who have a vocation.

More welcoming Church to those who have fallen by wayside.

More acceptance to those in other relationships.

Bishops turned down inclusive lectionary.

Equality – Be open to change.

Non-celibate priesthood.

3 years training, not 6 years.

The Church needs to address more modern ways. It is a very patriarchal system.

Be more inclusive of women and minorities on a global scale

It needs to promote women and minorities into more positions of authority.

Consider the importance of the role of the laity, shaping and reshaping thoughts around this

Concerns around the editing process of these comments; will it be filtered as it has been previously?

Commonality of humanity has been highlighted

How will the future of the Church accept the voice of the people?

How do we ensure inclusion and support those traditionally at odds with our teachings?

Society has a very self-centred focus, where can community minded help?

How can we help people be included and support those in need?

What is the future place of the church in society – where does our supportive role come in?

This is a request for the voice of the church to be heard. We are 10% of the UK population (circa 6 million) and yet have been effectively silenced. The church needs to have a clearer, louder voice on ethical issues.

We need the materials to form decisions and be allowed to do so.

Encourage the church to address the questions and accept that we do not have to have all the answers.

A grown-up child is gay

It is their hope and dream to be “married” and to have children in the future -perhaps via adoption.

What is permissible in a lifelong same sex relationship?

Can this “marriage” be blessed by the church?

If this is not marriage, what is it?

Challenges on more modern issues – how do we reconcile our faith/teachings with what children will be presented in the media.

There is something that guides us, a spiritual dimension that is often ignored in favour of science. Sometimes felt as a niggle that just won't go away until action is taken.

During the pandemic there has been an increase in actions for the common good, without intervention from Government. We have been lucky to recognise our common humanity and this is the spirit moving through us. The actions of others have had an

uplifting effect during a difficult time. Like the wreath at Christmas, it says nothing yet represents so much.

The church has often been misunderstood/led to misunderstand and appear as though it is not in touch with reality. We need to feel confident and feel safe to raise issues. Attending church has helped me feel safe.

We're missing the social side of the church - coffee mornings and groups which have had to stop during the pandemic. And isolation has been difficult but reinforced we're stronger together.

We're missing that welcome – where we used to be able to see the priests and greet them at the end of Mass. There's also no visible sign of the safe space that we are – no nativity scene like at St Hugh's or even a star or wreath.

Other groups had considered a buddy system or introductory fayre. There is a faith phoneline/helpline. Perhaps it's just publicising what we do have - maybe 10 minutes at the end of a mass so each group can speak about what they do.

The stewards we have had during covid are a welcome for new people and could be considered to continue post covid.

- People should be encouraged to talk and question, pray for guidance and think for themselves and not simply accept what, historically, they have been told. An example of this: as a youngster, being told that to be a 'true' Catholic you had to accept and agree with every tenet of the catholic faith; nothing less was acceptable. Frightening, if you had any 'wobbles'.
- Coming together in groups and talking honestly has felt liberating and the beginnings of a greater process.

We discussed new ways of working, reaching out and mission in our changing world. Using technology more is an easy first start. Podcasts are a popular vehicle for communication, especially with the younger generations.

Mention was made of the following potentially valuable resources:

- podcasts such as “Ask Father Josh”, who is an American priest, (<https://media.ascensionpress.com/category/ascension-podcasts/askfrjosh/>),
- The benefit and joy from Christian meditation and spirituality outside of the church walls (e.g. the sermons by Father John Main OSM (1926-1982) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PcMzQvYjuuw>)
- the French mass in English and nourishment brought from the Bonnevaux Centre for Peace (<https://bonnevauxwccm.org/>)
- The Sycamore course (authored by Father Stephen Wang) was also mentioned as a resource which could be of value to the young (<https://www.sycamore.fm/>)

Pope Francis has recently written a book entitled "Let us dream" which may help catalyse how we could change to improve a better mission (as opposed to self-preservation) of the church. The group also voiced an interest to read this book.

A question was posed as to the availability or not of "Young family activities" within the parish. Currently, the pandemic has prevented the activities that had been in place. Such activities are evidently a kind which would be welcomed within the parish.