**St Mellitus Tollington Park SYNOD feedback – Parts A and B**

1. **Feedback from Synod ZOOM listening events.**

Two zoom events were held: on 14 December and 9 January (moved from planned in-person gathering because of covid). Each meeting had 7 participants. The feedback below is collated from both meetings. \* Denotes said by several people, \*\* denotes said by many or all.

**Communion: *What is your experience of being catholic – in our parish and in the wider church?* *What are the joys and what are the sorrows or disappointments?***

***Experience***

* Growing up in the church in catholic family\*\*. Seeing it from the inside. Just who we were. Different experiences growing up in different countries. For some the Church taught not a loving God: dominated by guilt and fear and unquestioned authority of priest. Others grew up with loving God and active, involved priests, acting as guides and role models.
* Exposure of sexual abuse among clergy changed things, people realised they had a choice and unquestioning obedience ended.
* ‘Drifting’ in early adulthood before returning to the church. \* Didn’t go to church in years when parish was lifeless. Wanting to change the world we live in, not the hereafter, and seeing the Church as about maintaining, not challenging the status quo.
* University chaplaincy was full of life, hope and experimentation.
* Feeling a cultural connection.
* Not being sure we believe what everyone else believes. \* Assuming no one else has doubts.
* Like being on a bus – we know each other but we’re not the driver and don’t know where the bus is going – it’s driven by the bishops and the destination is not in our hands.
* Coming to London from another (catholic) country – encountering diversity and many different religions. Felt sad, no joy.
* St Mellitus is strong community. \*\* (see below also)
* Pope Francis seems really different \*\* – really like the direction he is taking the Church. But worry about what happens next, when he is no longer Pope.
* Anglican background – my experience was it was ok to just turn up and not be active in the world. I didn’t agree. My experience in this parish is different.

***Joys***

* The people I meet and sense of community\*\* Being part of a parish community and a world-wide community. Sense of belonging. To be part of community that makes people feel they belong.
* St Mellitus \*\* More sense of community than some others. Diversity in our parish community. Different views and opinions but one community. Warm and welcoming. More mixed and less of the ‘high and mighty’. Sense of people looking out for each other. Connect well with the priest and enjoy his sermons – food for thought. Teaching on the tough questions and putting them out there. Priest being human and admitting doubts is very helpful – encourages me. Felt welcomed on arriving in the parish – people seemed open and pleased to get to know us, even in the pandemic.
* The Church’s role in social justice\*\* Global participation – peace movement is international, and we have justice and peace partners around the world. Hearing stories from round the world of people doing what the Church is for. Presence of the Church in the world. Being active in changing people's lives. Putting teaching into action. Bringing down to grassroots level what we believe in – e.g. by signing petitions, having campaigns, building community. I like messages about Live Simply and refugees – feel if more people heard that message more people would be interested in the Church.
* Richness of spirituality. \*\* Music and liturgy. Prayer – when you can’t see a way out. Faith helps with complexity and loss. Having a sense of something bigger, gives perspective. The mystery and depth of faith makes people hang on in a Church that disappoints and frustrates. Communion of saints – ordinary people trying to live out the vision through time.
* Wonderful experiences e.g., with SVP and Pax Christi
* Sticking at it and not giving in

***Sorrows***

* Feeling I don’t have the same level of faith as others
* Challenge of being with non-Catholic family or friends\*\* Having to defend the Church or feeling we can’t defend it and are embarrassed to be catholic – e.g., because of Church’s attitude to women and gay people.
* Hard to reconcile identities as modern woman and catholic. Church’s preoccupation with issues mostly affecting women – e.g. birth control.
* The way the church is run. \*\* The people in the pews *are* the church but they are ignored or not listened to. The system is very formal and doesn’t release the best in people. We have had 4 parish priests in 5 years and no-one from the diocese has been to talk to us – bad management. The synod process is limited too – we need to be able to ask questions, not just listen. Discussion and debate are needed.
* Historical events in the Church and the actions of those who are supposed to be our leaders. \* Abuse of children and women.
* Clericalism and misogyny
* Not allowing women and gay priests.
* Focus on private morality rather than public good.

**Participation: *Who is included and who is left out or marginalised?***

***Included***

* Those who ask no questions and make no demands.
* Those who share joint perspectives and have the gift of leadership.
* Believers and those who fit the mould

***Left out***

* People outside the Church \* The local community. Non-card-carrying Catholics. Far too narrow a constituency – preoccupation with people who are ‘inside’.
* People who break the rules – left out decisively and rigidly.
* Those who have had wounding experiences
* Young people \*\* – don’t feel the Church is for them. Fall away because there is so much more for them to do and it’s boring. Young people whose parents don’t take them to church see it as a scary place
* Truth speakers and those with different perspectives.
* Those struggling with faith and doubt.
* Lesbian and Gay people \*\* Feel the Church is set against them.
* People struggling with mental health issues and social exclusion – the Church has a social responsibility and role and could make a difference. But we need to get people in.
* All groups marginalised in society can also be left out in the Church – e.g. racial minorities, people with disabilities, drug/ alcohol or mental health problems, homeless people, gay people.

**Mission: *Dreaming about the future, what might need to change in our ways of doing things, in our parish and in the wider Church?***

* Want to see something come out of Synod \*\*– radical alternative, from grass roots. Participation and democracy. Being able to say what we think. Less hierarchical. More transparency and openness. We need to see the inner workings – e.g. how bishops are chosen. We should see our local bishop regularly for open discussion about the future of the Church. These days we are used to participation and consultation, not the antiquated ways of the Church. The exclusion of women, top to bottom, cannot go on.
* Church should be outward looking. \*\* Has to have a political conscience and set a direction. Building the Church beyond the walls. Reaching out to our local community and being active in the wider world. The Church is the people in the pews but the people outside too. Should be at the heart of everything the Church does. Recognising needs. Going back to the roots of what our faith is about. Putting into action what it means to be of service to others. The Church should be about rights, justice and compassion, not policing sexual behaviours.
* We should be open and actively welcoming to all young people \*\* – not just Catholics or Christians.
* We should be openly welcoming to gay people \*\* and celebrate their faithful loving relationships.
* Ways of preparing clergy for their difficult role. There should be more emphasis on personal development, so they are equipped for the challenges they face. And more support.
* Change in who is accepted to the priesthood. \*\* Married priests should be allowed – celibacy and loneliness are too big a burden. Waste of a huge resource in not allowing women to be priests. Nuns were involved in my school and church and were the most wonderful people and led the best services.
* Diminishing numbers of priests means governance of the Church has to change. No reason why most of the work has to be done by priests.
* Recognising the gifts of everyone.
* Have to be inclusive of everyone. \*\* People see Church as judgmental, of people within and outside the Church. We want to be seen as a Church that is accepting and welcoming of all.
* Getting to know each other better in our parish. \*\* Sermon time could be used to hear from other people. This (synod) process is really good – need to do more of it.
* Let’s be the change we want to see in our own parish. \* Keep the conversation going. Listening to each other and building community. Look outwards to our own local community and issues in the world.

**B. Wednesday in-person Synod Meetings:**

16 members of St Mellitus Parish attended 1,2,3 or all 4 of these 1 hour meetings: SUMMARIES

**DATE: 1/12/21. JOYS AND SORROWS OF BEING A CATHOLIC**

The group members’ Catholic Faith gives them joy, and the possibility of being able to practise it - both at Church and privately. Devotion to Mary is a joy to many, and the Rosary which can be said privately.

A joy during the recent lockdowns was to see how the local community could be really good to one another, volunteering, the clap for the NHS each week. It brought the community together.

Specifically, during COVID closed churches was painful for many, as are our currently reduced services.

More sorrow was expressed about the violence in our society, amongst young people as well as other violence, and wars.

Further sorrow was expressed by the clerical abuse scandals which have become known in recent years.

Joy and Sorrow: Where there is Faith there is also Doubt. Continuing to believe through our doubt is difficult, but we persevere.

**DATE: 8/12/21: COMMUNION/COMMUNITY: JOYS AND SORROWS**

People felt a great enthusiasm for the community which membership of the Church gives - a common worship, a common faith, people pulling together by responding to appeals for help, within the Mass or beyond it: Eucharistic ministry, reading ministry, Music ministry all give joy. WELCOME cards for newcomers at back of church are important!

A variety of responses as to what makes a COMMUNITY: some happy that we just communicate inside Church with each other, with many people coming from a variety of nations and backgrounds.

Others questioned: Does our community reach outside our Church? Sorrow was expressed when the locals around our parish do not know what goes on inside: no visible signs of our outreach although there IS some, but pleasure was experienced when St. Mellitus acted as a Vaccination Centre and a Scrubs Hub, which took place in the church hall - during pandemic.

We heard how some members fear that people might feel excluded or exclude themselves from our Church because they don’t think they are good enough. We had a mixed response, too, to the welcome (or not) the Church gives to people who are: LGBTQ+, but most members wanted our Church to welcome ALL-COMERS.

**15th December 2021. PARTICIPATING:**

We are on a common journey and we talked about this image as a bus-full: some of the group are happy to think of the members travelling as if in a bus, taking an active or passive role in the Church.

Others see the journey as towards a high mountain, perhaps an edifice on a high mountain, which we must all reach.

I heard that people like participating, like offering to help out and having their offers accepted. People particularly like helping in the Liturgy, but also in practical things in the parish, happy to respond to the appeals for readers, to give communion, to take communion to the housebound, join the choir.

Those who pray seemed to think that it does not look as if they were participating; but they were convinced that they are.

It was thought that some priests were more open to receiving help and more encouraging of participation in every way. Some members have felt discouraged if they were not married to their partners and as a result their children were refused baptism.

Because of the importance of the Mass in our church, people were most happy to be invited to participate within the Mass.

Could there be even greater participation? Could women be encouraged to be leaders in our Church, by being ordained, for instance?

I heard that the months of Covid 2020/2021 have been experienced as diminishing the contribution people feel able to make, as there was less Church-life.

**Final Synod Meeting: CHURCH’S MISSION 22/12/21**

as given by Jesus … The Church’s mission was thought to be a challenging question: some thought it to be about doctrine, others about outreach, quoting Love one Another, or Father Forgive Them. Members listened carefully, as one person spoke of Jesus as the one who addressed people’s needs - for healing, forgiveness, comfort, acceptance- and that meeting people’s needs, therefore is also the mission of the Church. Prayer is also a part of the mission of the Church as it was of Jesus’ mission. Some thought the Church currently pursues its mission in too narrow a way - toward those inside the Institution. Some were of the opinion that people living in irregular situations did not feel welcome by the Church. One member of the group, quoting Old Testament, said the Church could not overlook the ‘irregularity’ of gay couples and some other modern lifestyles. One member felt that the Church had the mission to come up to date in many ways, e.g. in accepting women as candidates for ordination to the priesthood.