

April, a group of approximately 25 parishioners from Spa Parish met to discuss questions arising from Pope Francis' call to listen to the people in preparation for the Synod in 2023. The session was facilitated by and six groups were formed. Six questions were discussed and each group facilitator fed back. Ground rules ensured everyone had a chance to speak before anyone spoke a second time.

The session was hopeful and there was a powerful sense that everyone there wanted to contribute their ideas to move the Church forward, expressing a love of their faith and a commitment to change. The questions were discussed and responses were challenging, with people being explicit about discrimination, betrayal and hurt, and critical institutional responses to the scandals. There was nevertheless a sense of sharing the reality of the current situation, allied to a genuine hope in the future.

The group recognised the urgency of the need for the laity to take on active pastoral roles, and were willing to do so after the appropriate training. There were many suggestions which could be implemented in the parish before the Synod, evidencing a strong sense that the laity are ready for change. Women and married priests were advocated as a practical solution and an important next step in dismantling the gender inequality in the Church. The role of the laity in the Church of the future was envisioned as being transformed.

The group's profile ranged from 30s to 80s, and each group shared a focus on the priority of engaging young people in the life of the Church. Every group raised the issue of inclusion of LGBTQ and others traditionally excluded from the Church, with a belief that Jesus would welcome everyone to his table.

The session was a call for greater support in developing faith and spirituality. Various traditional practices, such as the Stations of the Cross, were recalled, but also ways which are appealing to younger people, such as pilgrimages, and a desire for more opportunities in schools and in parishes for people of all ages to nurture their belief.

The session was a starting point, showing an impetus for change, participation and formation emerging in the lead up to the Synod. Before the Synod takes place, there is a will for the Parish to become more inclusive, welcoming and active, with a range of opportunities for the local community to engage in the life of our Church.

Below are suggestions which could be considered in the next 12 months

- Mass
- local area Masses
- Mass at residential centres
- Masses for groups eg men, women, youth, children
- Days/ theme weeks
- about inclusion
- laity to lead liturgies
- songs of faithful composed by laity
- Pastoral/ Finance councils
- lay workers from Maynooth etc
- Christian unity
- prayer and meditation and faith in sermons
- talks on faith and spirituality / bible study

SPA PARISH SYNODAL LISTENING SESSION

Monday 4th April 2022.

Question 1: What encourages you to participate in your parish community?

(Figures in brackets indicate the number of times it was mentioned, out of 6)

Our Catholic Faith that we were brought up with, and we turn to God when we are in trouble. (2)

To give good example to our children/grandchildren.

Fear of the Lord. Love of God. (2)

Sickness

Gratitude to God. To give back in gratitude for the blessings we have received. (4)

To help. To contribute to the community. (2)

The Parish needs all the help it can get. (4)

To encourage young people to get involved. (4)

A natural instinct to be useful. (2)

To meet and get to know people. Friendship. Enjoyment. (4)

To be involved in the community. (3)

A sense of belonging. (4)

To give back to the community. Receiving and Giving help. (3)

A cup of tea after Mass.

The Mission.

The Station Mass.

To use whatever relevant skills I have to help the community, e.g. singing. (2)

Sense of fulfilment by helping local community. (2)

We all struggle together in our community. We all feel other's pain, and we strive to make our parish a vibrant and welcoming place to live in.

Celebrate with parish/community

Being asked personally to help.

Spread the load, - don't leave it all to the same few.

To alleviate social isolation and loneliness in the community.

The need for an organisation for all ages.

The need to be involved in developing a strong faith-based organisation where everyone is supported to truly live the Christian ideal. ***(This could summarise all the answers. D.B.)***

Question 2: Are there groups or individuals within the Church who don't feel welcome or included? What can we do about it?

Groups or Individuals

What can we do?

Same-sex individuals, LGBT, (5)

Have got to be welcomed and made feel welcomed. Begin to make changes. Better attitude at top level in the Church.

Unmarried mothers & children born outside of marriage (5)

Should be baptised, no questions asked.

Divorced & separated people (6)
who are in second relationships

Those hurt by clerical abuse. (2)

Travellers. (2)

Young people. Teenagers, 20's 30's (4)
Institutional church does not reflect the values of young people

Must be encouraged to come back to church, and to come and help. Use sports stars as role models. Use social media.

Parents with small children

Mother & Baby survivors

Lapsed Catholics

Question 3: How should the Church address the shortage of priestly vocations; and what role can the laity play ?

Priests be allowed to marry or stay celibate – the Apostles were married. (6)
Married C. of E. vicars and Anglican priests who convert are accepted as RC priests.

Women priests (6),

Women deacons (5)

Women Bishops and Cardinals

Lay people to give homilies (3). Lay people can lead liturgies & services (2).

Lay people to be Pastoral leaders & fulfil many pastoral functions of the priest, (6)
e.g. receive remains for funerals, do First Friday visits, & read liturgy of the Word, & set up for Adoration.

Lay people can celebrate some sacraments

Prayers of the Faithful could be composed by the laity.

Youth council in the Church.. Encourage students to go down this road of Church. (2)

Form Pastoral councils and Finance committees to include lay members (2).

Recruit lay workers from Maynooth University.

Promote Christian unity, and share ministries with other churches.

Question 4 : How can we provide opportunities for strengthening faith and deepening spirituality?

Retreats (2)

Missions

Stations / Area Masses (2)

Sermons relevant to today.

Encourage Kindness – one simple idea.

Church activities in places other than the church itself.

Modernise the Church curriculum

Be nice to young people – the backbone of our society.

We need to be taught how to pray (3) and how to meditate (2).

Explain what the gospel is all about. Explain why we believe the key items in the Creed.

Keep praying (2).

Promote the 10 Commandments (2) and a sense of moral life.

More Children's Masses (in addition to "Do this in Memory" masses), with music provided by young people.

Role models sharing faith stories.

Spiritual journeys (e.g. Walk with Charlie).

Workshops on topics like "What is Spirituality?" Make time for faith & Spirituality.

Discussion (What do you believe? What are your values?)

Organise events for young people (Donal Walsh at Knock), with local speakers and people who can engage with youth.

Studying the Bible/Gospels. Bible study within a social context (e.g. after Mass).
Organise Sunday schools.

Education on faith matters.

Encourage neighbour/ friend to participate in Church matters

We need people to defend Christianity and the existence of God in the media, to combat secularism and atheism. Use social media to communicate the Christian message (2).

Opportunities for Children to discuss and get an understanding about what faith is.

Helping all, both young and old, to develop a personal relationship with God. Give them the tools to develop that relationship.

Provide more opportunities for people to practise their faith in a meaningful and sociable way.

If Catholic religion ceases to be taught in schools, can parish community provide this?

GAA should not have youth training on Sunday mornings.

Engage in practical help to one's neighbour in need. (eg. during Covid).

Promoting prayer in parish life.

Question 5: What hopes or vision for the future of the Church do you have?

Modernise the Church.

Make it more relatable to everyone.

Area Masses in the Community, followed by refreshments.

More affordable sacraments

Opportunity for youth pastoral workers.

Don't judge any individuals

Respect every religion

We need to let it be known that we are a ***Catholic Country***.

Take the commercialism out of the Church, e.g. Mass cards, etc.

Hope that women would be more central and equal in the life of the Church.

Equality of women/races/sexuality/class.

More inclusive of all colours, creeds, divorced etc.

All-embracing Church, welcoming all minorities. Jesus would not turn anyone away.

An inclusive Church that is welcoming to all.

Open door, a welcome for everyone.

Reach out to people of all faiths, and none, and welcome the stranger.

A Church where all individuals and all families can develop their relationship to God.

Priority: Young people connected with the Church

More education in school

Universal Church – united but not uniform.

Join with other Churches in Christian unity.

Life is a challenge, everything is not perfect. We should learn to forgive more, embrace more, love more, and leave the rest in the hands of God.

We hope the Hierarchy will be united in their commitment to change to become truly inclusive.

Until the Cardinals in Rome change their ways, it is difficult for the Church to change.

Would like to see Church as a "Flatter" organisation – less hierarchical.

Non-Hierarchical community. Continue the "bottom-up" approach – it will encourage more participation and inclusion.

Decision-making needs to be changed at the core, which is Rome, and for it to be more localised.

Our hope is that this *Listening* will be taken on board and that changes will be made.

Our hope is that we will all be part of strong faith-based communities, living the Christian ideals of Love and Inclusivity.

When our Paschal Candle is lit, we hope it will fill our hearts with hope for the future, and bless our parish with many graces and blessings.

The expression of our faith will reflect more our Celtic and diverse society.

Question 6: Any other issue you would like to have discussed at a future meeting?

Support for the older generation – Help them use technology to watch Mass or a funeral service. Organise a social gathering about once a month.

Rotation of lay adults to go with the priests on house visits.

Provide supports for parents and children with special needs.

Youth: We must target the 13 -18 age group.
Music for young people (Gospel Music?)
Youth Ministry and Music.

Discuss how to encourage people to come back to the Church.

Discuss how to involve the people who did not attend tonight, especially the children of the local schools.

Discuss how to encourage families to pray together.

Discuss how to ensure the faith is passed on to future generations

Hope that this report is not relegated to a shelf.

Process / time-frame – or all talk?

How will we get change?

Services: Our church services need to reflect our culture, e.g. more music, more life, more creative.

There should be one community mass in the parish every week where the whole community comes together.

Can we have a Mission in each parish every few years?

Can we restore the Station Mass?

Change the wording of the Lord's Prayer from "*Lead us not into temptation*" to "*Let us not be lead into temptation*".

Make talking to a priest more accessible to ordinary people – it can be intimidating.

We need to discuss the Church's attitude to human sexuality and the body.

Laicised Priests

People who have taken a wrong path in life.

Foreigners

Reach out and make contact.

Those distanced from church because of
clerical abuse scandal.

Women in general.

Remove male-dominated & misogynistic
thinking at all levels of Church

Some General Suggestions:

Special Masses for different groups; e.g. for men, women, family Mass, Youth mass,
Community Mass.

Welcome Days; Theme Weeks.

Be loud about Inclusion.

Show humanity & Mercy, less judgemental.