

Walking Together in Catholic Leamington:
St Peter's – St Joseph's – Our Lady's



For a synodal Church
communion | participation | mission

Catholic Leamington

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DREAMS

If you were asked to “dare to dream” about how you see the Church in the third millennium, what might your dream be?

From the rich and prayerful responses of the participants in the Synodal journey detailed in this report, a picture emerges of the Church we would like to become. While the Church deserves our love, we also think of it as a flawed institution **in need of reform and renewal**. There is a shared openness to major change of many kinds: change in the openness of the Church to the world; change in the inclusion extended to the many who today feel marginalised within it; change in the sharing of roles and responsibilities beyond the narrow confines of the clergy; and change in the confidence and vitality with which we embrace our mission.

The greatest change respondents dream of is in the welcome the Church extends to those outside it. The Church we dream of would be a **sign of loving welcome**, no longer known in public perception chiefly for the language of obligation and proscription, or for a history of scandal and cover-up, but for a genuine openness to all those searching for, and in need of, God’s love made known in the person of Jesus Christ. Parishioners of Catholic Leamington love the Church and are proud of their faith. The confidence and courage to declare this to the world, and to invite people to join us, would come with a Church more determined to show its openness to all.

This openness would extend to many who now feel excluded or marginalised. At the heart of the Church we dream of is a **greater inclusiveness** shown to the many groups of people whose lives are untidier than the institutional Church has tolerated in the past, yet who for all that are no less in need – and no less deserving – of God’s mercy. Respondents see the divorced and remarried, those in irregular life situations, those with diverse sexual identities and orientations, and the young who are still finding their way, as people with no less a place in God’s family and with many gifts to offer. There is, too, an overwhelming and uncontested sense that the time has come for women to play the fullest part in the life of the Church, with avenues of leadership and responsibility – lay and ministerial – that have remained closed off down the ages demanding to be opened.

A new relationship between clergy and the laity would better equip the Church of our dreams to face up to the crisis of dwindling vocations. Priests will be, indeed are already, a scarce and precious resource, and **the laity will need to shoulder burdens and assume responsibilities that now fall on our priests**. Mutual trust and mutual respect are earned gradually and built slowly, but they will be more and more essential to the prosperity, even the survival, of living parish communities.

The Church we dream of would have vibrant and joyful liturgical celebrations, engendering a deep relationship with God and nurturing the gifts and vocations of every member, fitting each of us for our essential mission: to live out the Gospel message, eager to share our faith with others. There would be powerful celebration and exploration of the Word both in gatherings for prayer and in those for ongoing formation in faith and sharing of understanding. Our parish communities would be known for their **commitment and determination to stand with the poor and the marginalised**, with refugees and strangers, with the homeless and the abused. We would eagerly embrace modern communication in all its forms, to connect us to each other, reconnect us to those who have fallen away from the Church, and reach out to those waiting to hear the good news we have to offer. Fruitful cooperation and respectful dialogue would be the defining traits of our relationship with other faiths and other Christian denominations, and with the latter we would come together eagerly in shared acts of worship.

A synodal pathway of honest reflection and prayerful discernment will continue to shape and form the Church of our dreams. It will **renew our confidence and resolve** to embrace the message of the Gospel that binds us together, and to look outwards to a world that needs to hear it.

PREFACE

The three churches comprising Catholic Leamington have worked and prayed together in our Synodal journey. Our clergy requested volunteers to form a Walking Together team. As a result, the whole process has been led and discerned by ten lay parishioners.

In November 2021, we started to prepare our parishes for the Synod journey. Articles were published in Catholic Leamington's monthly magazine and on its website. These explained the ten thematic 'nuclei' of the Vatican Preparatory Document and urged parishioners to reflect and pray to the Holy Spirit for guidance.

Phase 1: questionnaires were handed out in December in all three churches, and published on the website, for completion and return by 30 January 2022. The returned forms (137) were analysed prayerfully and compiled into this discerned report.

Almost all respondents supplied the (optional) age and gender data requested: just over 50% of respondents were over 60 years old; 64% of those disclosing their gender were female.

(The questionnaire can be found as Appendix A).

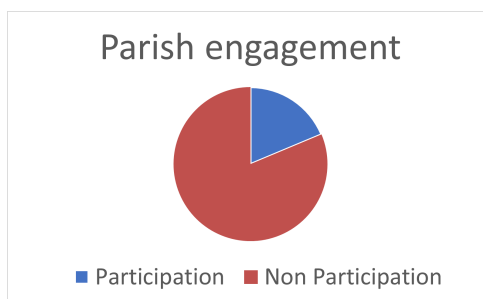
We estimate that over 20% of the parish engaged with our Walking Together Programme.

Phase 2: seven open meetings were held between 11 January and 2 February 2022 (two in each of the parish churches and one online). In addition, there were five meetings of existing parish groups: SPAN (St Peter's Aid for the Needy), Catholic Leamington Justice & Peace, Young Adults, and two SVP groups.

Each meeting covered two or three questions derived from the ten nuclei (*Appendix B shows the main meetings schedule and questions for discernment at each meeting*). There were 160 participants at these meetings (excluding enablers and convenors). Many individuals attended more than one meeting so, overall, 88 different people took part. The Archdiocesan guidelines were followed: one enabler (usually for up five participants) who subsequently wrote up a separate discernment. The enablers' discernment feedbacks were then aggregated separately for each of the twelve questions.

The meetings pattern recommended by the Vatican *Vade mecum*, and the Diocesan Handbook, is based on Ignatian practice designed to give maximum opportunity for guidance by the Holy Spirit. It might seem to provide more reliable discernments than questionnaire responses made under less controlled conditions. In fact, the outcomes of the two phases – completed by the end of February – were very similar.

Phase 3: outreach. Comments were invited from outside our church community. We started with a half-page article published in our local newspaper on 26 November encouraging open participation (with a link to our Synod website with more detailed information). Parishioners were asked to give a questionnaire to neighbours and colleagues. Fourteen other Christian churches or church groups and four other Faiths were contacted: *"What did they appreciate about the Catholic Church? What barriers did they feel stopped us working together more effectively?*



What changes in our approach or attitude would enable us to better approach mission together?" We also produced an online survey aimed at non-Catholics. A Facebook survey by Young Adults was tailored to non-believers in the surrounding area and submitted separately to the Archdiocese.

This outreach work had limited feedback. Comments from a local Christian minister can be found in the section on Mission p13. A response from the Al Ahmadiyya Muslim Community expressed a great willingness to work with the Catholic community provided respect was always given to all prophets (which, in Islam, includes Jesus) and the Holy books of all Faiths (*see Appendix D*). The Diocese also requested the views of young adults in the 16-30 age group (*a separate discernment of their ten questionnaires and meetings was sent to the Diocese*).

Finally, the Walking Together Team brought together all input: 86 discerned reports from meetings; 137 questionnaire responses; and other responses from our outreach via the internet. Different team members were involved in summarising and discernment at each stage and this report has been prepared for our Parish and Diocese. It will be available online.

PARTICIPATION

The overwhelming response was to rejoice in this overdue process of engagement with the laity; to look forward to continuing a journey with both laity and priests, hand in hand. Participants commented positively on this experience of synodality:

- ◇ *When we put [our] thoughts into words to others, it helped us to really find out what we think.*
- ◇ *Informative and hopeful. We will want to see change happening as a result [of this process].*
- ◇ *Bounce ideas off each other and then develop ideas from those sparked within the group.*
- ◇ *It was good to talk freely. More opportunities like this are needed to discuss and share [our] faith.*

ENRICHMENT

The following comments reflect the views of the enablers.

How did it feel to be a part of this process?

- ◇ *Very grateful for the opportunity and pleased to participate.*
- ◇ *Enlightening and encouraging to hear what others had to say.*
- ◇ *A common desire to make things better.*

What were the joys?

- ◇ *That there was no confrontation.*
- ◇ *Everyone took part in a calm and measured way.*

What did you find enriching?

- ◇ *A feeling that, if the process allows our contribution to get through, the laity were being listened to, to a greater extent than previously.*
- ◇ *This might lead on to something good.*

Explain how you felt the Holy Spirit was at work in your parish during this time.

- ◇ *There was a feeling of hope for the future.*
- ◇ *Rather than being a diminishing church in this country, we might see it grow.*

What was particularly significant, surprising, or unexpected about this process?

- ◇ *The honesty of people.*
- ◇ *Willingness to talk openly and frankly and to share their experiences.*
- ◇ *Surprised at the liberal views of older people at my table.*

What new perspectives emerged from the process?

- ◇ *A genuine desire to be more ecumenical with other Christian churches.*
- ◇ *The complexities of our faith are man-made, traditionally entrenched, and mostly unnecessary.*

RESPONSES

Our parishes were ambitious, tackling all the twelve questions we had formulated from the ten Areas of Reflection (*nuclei*) and having Questionnaires and Surveys from which we could analyse and discern. We have ordered our responses with sections for each of the Three Pillars: Communion, Participation and Mission. We present the responses from the questionnaires and the meetings under each Pillar heading.

“... continue a journey with laity and priests, hand in hand ...”

COMMUNION

Questionnaires

About 60% of all respondents said they were ‘*Catholics in full communion with the Church*’. When asked what they most appreciated or valued about the Church, many mentioned:

- ◇ the feeling of belonging to a worldwide community;
- ◇ a single faith;
- ◇ sharing in patterns of worship essentially the same globally;
- ◇ a consistent approach to life;
- ◇ valuing the Eucharist and Sacraments above all else;
- ◇ the continuity of tradition over 2,000 years; and
- ◇ the peace and beauty of Catholic churches.

“... belonging to a worldwide community ...”

Many, both inside and outside the Church, saw Catholics as generally friendly, kind and caring individuals. A few saw them as welcoming others to Catholic services and good at integrating members of minority ethnic groups. However, the majority, including elderly practising Catholics, recognised that there was much about the Church regulations, and some attitudes of both clergy and laity, that was unwelcoming to outsiders and seen as excluding them (e.g. non-Catholics, Catholics who had lapsed, or those in irregular life situations). No attempt was made at weddings and funerals in a Catholic church to explain to non-Catholics when and why to stand, sit or kneel. Importantly, it would be considerate to allow other Christians to receive communion if they received it regularly in their own churches.

Some felt that our parishes simply do not make it clear that non-members of the Church are welcome to Catholic celebrations, promoting our activities only to existing parishioners and projecting an image of exclusivity. Respondents contrasted this with other local Christian churches who advertise their activities much more effectively to outsiders.

Further still, respondents felt that there was a strong culture in the Catholic Church that was discriminatory, judgmental, guilt-inducing, and legalistic. For example, treating men and women unequally, hostile to LGBTQ+ people, to those who had been divorced and re-married or were in particular life situations, or those who questioned points of Catholic doctrine.

A similar number expressed shame at the scandal of clerical sex abuse and its cover-up by the hierarchy, leading to charges of hypocrisy. All were aware of the resulting poor image of the Church in the media and in the minds of millions outside the Church.

Some indicated that senior bishops should have accepted personal responsibility for these failings and either apologised more fully or resigned; that the leaders of the Catholic Church in England were compromised by being too close to leaders of a secular government with little moral authority. There was a fear expressed that the Synod process could be undermined by an authoritarian culture and lack of public accountability of the bishops.

“... poor image of the Church in the media ...”

When asked how the Church should adapt to enable us all to walk together in harmony and to show more clearly to others the mercy shown by Jesus, nearly half the practising Catholics wanted to change the Church’s stance (and, where necessary, its rules) on one or more of the following:

- ◇ divorced and remarried people;
- ◇ celibacy of the clergy;
- ◇ ordination of women to the priesthood;
- ◇ homosexuality;
- ◇ contraception; and
- ◇ sex before marriage.

A small number of Catholics had stopped going to church regularly or felt alienated from the Church; and most of them cited the aforementioned attitudes as reasons for their leaving the Church.

It was pointed out that many people with disabilities (both physical and intellectual, including deaf and blind people) were effectively excluded from full participation in the Mass and other parish activities (see Appendix C).

There was recognition that the elderly, housebound and young families needed special outreach to include them in the parish community, as well as support through prayer and charitable action. Activities for young people were seen as vital to preserving and building up the parish community in the future.

There were a few respondents with more conservative views. One valued most 'The Truth' in the Church, wanting the preaching of a 'clear Gospel untainted by accommodation with the fashions of the age', and thought any adaptation to make

Jesus' mercy clearer to outsiders would be 'a blind alley'. The only change needed was 'more faithful bishops and

"... untainted by accommodation with the fashions of the age ..."

priests'. Another valued most 'Continuity and the teaching of the Fathers through the ages', objecting strongly to 'Liberal Theology'; and continued it is 'not possible for Catholics to share their values with others and for those outside the Church to engage more fully with Catholics'. A third, who valued 'Moral certainty – clear direction on right and wrong' most in the Church, nevertheless wanted a review of the Church's teaching and Canon Law on remarriage after divorce.

Parish Meetings

What would the Church look like when walking together as the People of God?

Typical group discernments included:

- ◇ The Church would be loving and joyful with a warm and inviting welcome to all. It would be inclusive and embrace everybody regardless of age, ability, gender, or ethnicity.
- ◇ It would be vibrant, with people who are spirit-filled, and have a deep relationship with God. It would nurture and develop the gifts and vocations of all people regardless of gender and marital status.
- ◇ The Church would have a representative cross section of society.
- ◇ Mass and Sacraments in this Church would be full of the Holy Spirit and would be the focus for spiritual development.
- ◇ The effect both on and in the Church could be exhilarating, buoyant and joyful – it would give life to our participation in services rather than mumbling responses.
- ◇ We could be listening to others' journeys of faith and experiences, and verbalise our own, sharing experiences that have shaped our lives and belief.
- ◇ This would in turn rejuvenate priests in their enthusiasm.

"... a real desire to be growing and engaging others ..."

It was felt that the Sunday Obligation did nothing to encourage such development: there is too much emphasis on attendance at Mass on a Sunday being an "Obligation", and that's why we go. Not because we want to, not because our Faith excites us, not because we are encouraged, supported, and strengthened by a relationship with God but because it is an obligation.

There was an expectation that for a Church to attract people: "We must have a real desire to be growing and engaging others, especially the young and youth. It needs to change from being a self-contained, 'closed' community to being outgoing and work out ways of doing so using modern methods. The church is stuck in a rut".

What groups are missing now?

Almost every group is missing from the Church. The local church is skewed demographically to older people who are white. Particular missing groups whose needs are not well-catered for:

- ◇ those with particular physical or mental needs;
- ◇ those whose lifestyle is seen to be outside the teaching of the Church, (e.g. those who are gay / divorced / co-habiting) and who feel judged;
- ◇ those who have been hurt by the Church in some way;
- ◇ those who are on the margins of society; and
- ◇ those who have not had their spiritual needs met by the Church.

How can we include them and make them welcome?

- ◇ Each parishioner has a responsibility to welcome others, to be aware of their needs and to support them.
- ◇ We can invite and accompany non-Catholics to social and spiritual events.
- ◇ Make changes to the fabric of our buildings so that they are better suited to the needs of all parishioners – especially those with additional needs.
- ◇ Recognise that there will be some in the congregation who do not understand what is going on and so offer explanations as appropriate (mostly this will be the priest's role).
- ◇ Liturgies need to be accessible to people who are not sure what is happening.
- ◇ Masses should be at times more convenient for some of these missing groups.
- ◇ Be aware of, and welcoming to, those who have left the Church. Have the humility to explore the reasons they have left and learn from this.
- ◇ Allow general absolution so that people who have committed serious sin have a way to come back into communion with the Church.

**“... allow
general
absolution ...”**

There was particular attention given to young people:

- ◇ The influence of the family – and home-based nurturing of the Faith – is rightly recognised as the foundation to personal commitment. This leads to personal growth despite the negative pressures of peers and society.
- ◇ Children's liturgy, youth club and fun events give an opportunity to learn and share faith with peers.
- ◇ It is important they are not isolated from the parish family – children often encourage more active engagement of parents in parish activities.
- ◇ Ideally the role of Youth Leader could be reinstated or a Parish Youth committee set up. Youth 2000 is a wonderful example.
- ◇ Prioritise young people as they are the future of the Church.
- ◇ Make sure *families* are involved in a *family* Mass – *family* readers, choir, servers, bidding prayers, gathering children around the altar, directing homilies to include children, offertory processions.

**“... prioritise
young people ...”**

PARTICIPATION

Questionnaires

For many respondents, there was a deep appreciation of the liturgy, including adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, and sacred music (our parishes have fine choirs). There was a wish for non-Sacramental forms of worship, and non-liturgical gatherings for teaching and discussion of the faith.

There was a widespread feeling among all age groups that the laity need better adult education in the fundamentals of their faith, scripture, theology and the Church. This needs to be in plain language and relevant

to the world of today: through books and courses (such as Alpha and Sycamore), conferences, retreats, Bible study groups, open sharing in lay discussion meetings, and listening to inspiring preachers. One example given was that of Bishop Robert Barron of Los Angeles, widely followed in social media and YouTube. There was some praise for the ‘Walk with Me’ booklets, the parish’s ‘Come and See’ sessions for people interested in Catholicism, and the RCIA programme.

Some suggested that the clergy too needed more continuing education to keep up-to-date with modern thinking and practice.

There were many comments about the homily (not just in local churches). These should be short, focused, relating to the readings of the day, and to the real lives of the congregation. Proclaiming the Good News should be more joyful, uplifting, and inspiring.

The need to be a more listening Church, openly sharing our views (along the lines of the synodal meetings) was mentioned both in this context and in connection with parish governance.

Many expressed the view that responsibility within the Church should be shared more widely, notably between clergy and lay people, with the full inclusion of women. Respondents’ suggestions included:

- ◇ Each parish should have a leadership team responsible for administration, maintenance and the general running of the parish, allowing priests to focus on what they were ordained for – caring for the spiritual and pastoral needs of parishioners.
- ◇ Let priests be priests – Vatican departments and dioceses should be administered mainly by lay men and women equally.

Several noted a current lack of collaboration between clergy and laity, where the talents and qualifications of lay parishioners went unrecognised, and their offers of help were not taken up.

The dedication of our clergy was also acknowledged with the self-giving of priestly vocation singled out as effectively mirroring Christ’s love. *“I have no issues with my local parish, with the leadership or pastoral work of the clergy locally. They serve the mission of the Church as best they can in challenging circumstances, particularly over the last two years, and a welcoming, caring atmosphere prevails.”*

“... leadership teams... allowing priests to focus on what they were ordained for ...”

Parish Meetings

How has your participation in church been affected by the pandemic?

There was a huge sense of hurt and loss caused by the pandemic and the inability to go to Mass and meet up with people. This heightened some people’s desire for, and need of, church-going and being involved with the church community. Yet others have simply stopped coming to church.

Livestreaming was seen as a mixed blessing. It made the Mass a spectator – rather than a participatory – event and the inability to receive Holy Communion was keenly felt. However, many people found that livestreaming, at the very least, kept them in touch with the parish, and at best was a rewarding and enriching experience as they were able to experience worship in other parishes.

Respondents would like to import some of the ideas they saw in practice. Livestreaming (or Zoom) of other services (e.g. sung evening prayer provided by a Liturgy group) has been helpful for many people and more accessible than going out – particularly in the winter. Livestreaming may be more sustainable than driving to church.

There is an eagerness in many to return to church and the church family, and to take on roles within the church community. It would be good to look at innovative ways of using the church space to further the sense of community within the church.

“... innovative ways to use church space to further the sense of community ...”

The Young Adults Group reported that the online faith experience was helpful but not the same as being there in person. “We all said that the pandemic made us feel isolated and that we all really missed being part of a community”. A fruit of the pandemic was the creation of the Young Adults’ Group. “We have some regulars and a larger group on Facebook of Catholics from the locality”. The general public seem unaware of the positive contribution of the church and its activities such as social outreach. Better marketing and advertising on social media may be needed for the Catholic Church.

Among a few comments on liturgical matters, the Young Adults’ Group said that much discussion was given to ‘How can we get young people to interact/ come to church?’ The group organised a Holy Hour with charismatic worship from Youth 2000 Worship School (during which Confession was available).

This saw over 40 people turn up, with half of them from Warwick University Catholic Society. “Apart from the Holy Hour, we’ve noticed that so far the socials have gained the most attendees”.

Discernments by other small groups included:

The practice of “General Absolution” was enthusiastically remembered by the participants as opportunities for the community, including the youth – in fact specifically the youth – to reconnect with their faith and confess to, and receive absolution from, “youthful sins” (i.e. sex) which at that age is difficult to discuss.

The need for more or better lay education in the fundamentals of the faith (identified in ‘Questionnaires’) was elaborated in the meetings:

- ◇ Could we have more interaction with local schools? Youths? Different churches? Retreats are a valuable opportunity to develop faith and community, maybe we could have a retreat here to reboot faith. Guest speakers talking about specific topics about faith. Parish pilgrimage? Worship based on charismatic renewal?”
- ◇ To participate better in the Eucharist we need parts of the Mass explained more often, scripture explored further, and see how this calls us to social action.
- ◇ Regular adult catechism groups where people can develop their understanding of different aspects of the faith and the Church’s teachings in a positive, sharing and encouraging environment irrespective of where they are on their faith journey.
- ◇ Adult catechism would allow for those who have attended ‘Come and See’, RCIA or ALPHA courses to continue their development and share their faith.

“... Worship based on charismatic renewal? ...”

It was recognised that this [need for better lay education] was not solely the responsibility of the priests. The model of “Church” in England is based on an outdated social environment where the clergy were frequently the most, and sometimes the only, well-educated members of the community. That is no longer the case.

The laity is no longer prepared to passively soak up dictates from the pulpit. Only by embracing and encouraging the laity to express and live the Faith in their everyday lives through the conscious and informed practice of the Christian life can the Church hope to restore a place in the life of the community.

An adult understanding of the faith is formed only in part from what is handed down by teaching authority. There is also the formation that comes from lived experience, which can be of more value than what is formally learnt. There was a consensus that:

- ◇ ‘dissent’ may not be the right way to label diversity of ideas and opinions;
- ◇ it is not always helpful to view the clergy as guardians of orthodoxy;
- ◇ priests need formation to teach and inspire and relate face-to-face; and
- ◇ married priests would help get a more balanced view of life in the 21st century and an appreciation of intimacy and family.

Much discussion was had on how to become a listening, sharing Church; open to change in the way we act, compared to the past.

- ◇ It was felt that little listening went on – dialogue sometimes, but not listening, and a forum was needed for this.
- ◇ More small groups who can get together and care about each other, to develop understanding, whether in social or pastoral organisation, informal meetings, or house groups.
- ◇ More interaction and conversation between the clergy and the laity; this should not be confrontational, but a polite, respectful listening process.
- ◇ Perhaps, a renewed parish council with opportunities for all to take part such as happened with this synodal process.
- ◇ We need to be ongoing witnesses to the faith in our parish. Perhaps a laity group supporting the priests would be helpful witnesses of the faith.
- ◇ We need reassurance that we will be listened to in the synodal process.
- ◇ There is the perception of a dichotomy between the Catholic Church and the Christian Faith! A conflict between how we see Catholicism in practice and the Catechism. A lack of alignment, yet there are examples of harmony, e.g. Mother and Toddler Group, where there is interaction between Christian denominations and other, non-Christian, faiths.
- ◇ If everyone was able to express their faith with confidence the Church will be totally transformed internally and externally.

“... more conversations between laity and priests ...”

“... renewed parish councils ...”

It was recognised that the transition to a listening, sharing Church would not be easy:

- ◇ Sharing is difficult, dangerous, and exposes our vulnerability, our weaknesses, our lack of trust. Bearing witness in groups, in meetings, and in community is the expression of Faith. This expression of Faith is not just in Mass but in any liturgy or opportunity to share with others. It is an opportunity to grow in faith and grace, and to share that faith in and with every human interaction.
- ◇ Catholics are all too often reticent or shy in sharing their faith. We need to create opportunities that encourage people not only to interact with each other socially but also to be comfortable in sharing their faith with fellow parishioners and build up each other’s faith.
- ◇ We should seize opportunities offered by the Holy Spirit to chat and to go outside our comfort zones in further discussions about faith. If we feel the Holy Spirit prompting us, let us give our “yes” to the Lord. If we do not feel comfortable talking about our faith, how can we seek to discuss it with others who don’t? We should meet people where they are at and in their stage of life.

How, and with whom, should we share ideas and opinions about the Church?

Sharing needs to come from a place of prayer, recognising and embracing diversity in humanity, God’s creation. Ideas and opinions need to be shared from a position that is held in common, with humility and a receptive open mind. It is not enough to spout learned, stock, answers.

Discernments on co-responsibility for parish work:

- ◇ A sense that there is a huge, untapped reservoir of gifts within each parish, but that no-one really knows what anyone else's gifts are.
- ◇ Each of us needs to recognise the gifts we have and how these can be used in service to others.
- ◇ Encourage other people (and ourselves) to name the gifts God has given us. But we don't know each other very well, which social events would help to mitigate.
- ◇ Gifts could be developed through training and mentoring.

“... people unaware of the range of help needed ...”

Delegation

- ◇ Most people are not aware of the range of help needed in the parishes. More transparency in the structures of the church. Better organisation could allow more laity involvement. This would release the priests to concentrate on their vocation of pastoral and spiritual work.
- ◇ The clergy have too many distractions, roofs, boilers, leaks, and the like, most of which they have neither the training nor the experience to deal with.
- ◇ There was consensus that it is healthy to look beyond the priest for leadership in the parish context, e.g. deacons and catechists.
- ◇ All were comfortable with the idea of women and married men exercising leadership in the Church.
- ◇ It was acknowledged that the Church is facing a crisis in the numbers of priests. It was felt that this could be alleviated by recognising that God may well be calling women and married people as priests.
- ◇ The church could use the gifts of all the laity in supporting the spiritual life of the community, for example by lay members leading the service of the Word.

Practical suggestions

- ◇ We need parish councils and a way that the council members can ascertain the views of the silent majority.
- ◇ There are other ways clergy and laity can interact: face-to-face meetings; invitations to a meal to savour family reality; by email or letter; through talking and sharing with group leaders and active people in various roles in the parish.
- ◇ What do the parish groups do? Could different people speak about the parish groups briefly after Mass? That way, everyone would have an awareness of what the groups do. It would be helpful to know about the different components and how 'Catholic Leamington' works. Then we can invite others to join us.

Acknowledgment of difficulties

- ◇ Many stem from structural constraints, most of which could be changed.
- ◇ However, the difficulty of the clergy to 'let go' of functions was felt to be a large constraint which may not be easy to change.
- ◇ Concern that too few people were being expected to do too much leading to burnout. This can deter other people from taking anything on.

“... more dynamic, tolerant and outward looking ...”

There was a strong sense that the Gospel message is what matters and what binds us; the Church itself is a flawed institution in need of reform and renewal, as much as a body which deserves our love.

There was a shared openness to major change, for instance in the roles played by women (much outspoken support for women priests was noted); and to those once excluded (e.g. LGBTQ+ Catholics). A fundamental review of the Church was required, including aspects of Canon Law, so that it becomes a bottom-up organisation which is more dynamic, tolerant, and outward looking.

MISSION

Questionnaires

In what ways do Catholics show the love exhibited by Jesus in his life?

- ◇ There was a high level of agreement that this is demonstrated by kindness to sick, housebound and needy people both individually and in charitable projects, and by generous giving to charities. (It was pointed out that people of other faiths do the same.)
- ◇ Many praised SPAN and Kindaid (parish charities), the SVP (parish volunteers giving person-to-person care to local people in need), the Saturday Friendship Group (a joint project of St Peter's and the Salvation Army serving homeless people), LIFE (a pregnancy support charity founded by parishioners) and monthly Catholic Leamington Justice & Peace meetings.
- ◇ Some added that prayer, such as the Intercessions at Mass, demonstrated caring for others.

How could the Church help you to be more confident or more effective in sharing your faith?

As mentioned in earlier sections, many saw their own lack of knowledge of the Catholic faith, and need for training, a significant obstacle to their spreading the Good News to others outside the Church. Young adult respondents (16-30) believed that a stronger development of personal faith would build enthusiasm for evangelization, through testimony talks, evangelical events, Nightfever prayer evenings, healing services, and advice on regular personal prayer. They recommended outreach through Facebook, TikTok, other social media, and YouTube.

A commitment to good communication ought to be a more significant priority:

- ◇ more reliable responses to enquiries by phone and email;
- ◇ better use of social media to keep people aware of events and good causes in the parish;
- ◇ the simple matter of clear and effective signage identifying church buildings and the activities held in them; and
- ◇ signifying the fact that all are welcome.

What barriers need to be overcome to enable us all to walk together in harmony, so that Catholics can share their values with others, and those outside the Church can engage more fully with the Catholic Community?

- ◇ More ecumenical activity, including dialogue between our priests and the pastors of the other Christian churches in Leamington (which have a long history of cooperation under the 'Churches Together' banner); more shared services, prayer and study groups, and charitable projects.
- ◇ There were calls for the 'Sunday Obligation' to be relaxed – for example, by one married couple (of an Anglican and a Catholic) who had a child at a non-Catholic school attending the school's Anglican communion every Sunday and then going on to attend Mass with both his parents. He could not see any significant difference between the two services.
- ◇ A local non-Catholic minister shared their hurt at not being able to receive communion, the rebuff when trying to minister collaboratively with Catholic priests, and examples of picking up the pieces when the Catholic Church had rejected devout Catholics found in irregular life situations;
- ◇ Many (perhaps most) found the negative image of the Church in the minds of the public an almost insuperable obstacle to evangelization.

“... more ecumenical activity ...”

Parish Meetings

Once again the good work being done by groups like SVP, SPAN, Kindaid, the Saturday Friendship Group and Catholic Leamington Justice & Peace was recognised, mentioning specifically the involvement of parishioners with the homeless and climate change issues. But there were many calls to do much more, such as:

- ◇ I would like to see Catholic Leamington doing mission and outreach to a far greater extent. At present it involves only a small number of people tackling a small number of issues.
- ◇ Most parishioners are inward-looking (seeing just the parish) when we should be outward-looking to see what needs to be done in the wider community.
- ◇ Throughout our local community there is evidence of poverty, modern-day slavery, abuse, homelessness, addiction and unemployment.

We should all be involved:

- ◇ The Holy Spirit is evident in all charitable acts and works through everyone.
- ◇ There is a sense of the Poor in all of us, and a clear need to work through the poor without proselytizing – we should not set ourselves against other churches.
- ◇ A hope that Catholic clergy could be seen as ministers to the whole community, not just to the Catholic flock.

“... we would be magnets drawing others to the joy of our faith ...”

Spreading the Good News to others:

- ◇ If our church generated joy, and reassurance of our destiny in a loving God, it would be unnecessary to campaign like politicians. We would be magnets – people would be drawn towards us because they want to experience the joy of our faith.
- ◇ The best way to share the Gospel is by the example of your life. Live as Jesus taught us: *“I have come that they may have life and live it to the full.”* (Jn 10:10)
- ◇ Agreement of a shared responsibility to be ‘up front’ about our Catholic faith and commitment to the Church.

Opportunities for sharing our faith:

- ◇ We share our faith through encounter in all aspects of our lives.
- ◇ Catholics should be encouraged to take part in local and national politics, or join social, intellectual or voluntary associations, and put the Christian point of view, so as to extend our mission and raise the profile of the Church.
- ◇ People spend most of their time with family and at work. Mission exists there too. Catholics should see their work as mission.

Again, communications caused much debate – embrace more modern methods of communication, and prioritise communication generally:

- ◇ The Newsletter is a weekly missed opportunity for evangelization, mission and outreach. It would need to be made more attractive and inspiring for this purpose.
- ◇ Communication – including noticeboards, a person on the door, newsletters and the website – must be honest, welcoming and timely, explaining what is going on, when and how to get involved.
- ◇ Physical signs are important. *“Take the church in which this meeting is being held. There is no sign outside to proclaim its purpose, its nature, the living*

“... embrace more modern methods of communication ...”

community of faith that meets here, or when and how it meets. Just a shabby, weed-clogged, and derelict forecourt. A drive leading nowhere. Inviting no-one. Breathing no life”.

- ◇ The parish needs a core of people who take responsibility for these aspects of mission and evangelization.

Ecumenical (and inter-faith) collaboration:

It was felt to be important that the Church be truly ecumenical – not just tolerating other traditions, but accepting and welcoming them. To recognise that our similarities are more than our differences; and that we should work together in serving, and being Jesus to, the wider community.

We can learn a great deal from other Christian churches that make a better job of welcoming, being more inclusive, involving women equally in parishes, and including the laity in both practical and spiritual tasks.

Equally, we can learn also from other faiths: for instance, the Sikhs invite visitors into their gurdwara, provide free meals, and take the opportunity to explain their faith.

“... recognise our similarities are more than our differences ...”

Several initiatives were suggested:

- ◇ Create opportunities for others to visit our churches and learn about our faith. A programme of open days, social events, or sessions for non-Catholic spouses or relatives of parishioners, for neighbours, and for other faith groups.
- ◇ Invite different ministers to preach in our churches, such as an exchange between a Methodist minister and a Catholic priest as used to happen at St Joseph’s.
- ◇ Join with other churches, with more collaboration and inter-communion.
- ◇ The Churches’ Together Walking Group is another very good initiative supported by a few parishioners, and an opportunity for sharing our faith.
- ◇ There could be fruitful ecumenical or inter-faith discussions on (for example) ‘How do you pray?’, which could lead to collective prayer together.

Some felt shame at past failures:

- ◇ Very few parishioners have joined members of other churches in Leamington at the Good Friday Raising of the Cross in Christchurch Gardens, the Women’s World Day of Prayer, and joint services for Christian Unity.
- ◇ Witness together with other Christians should be prioritised and time allocated to joint prayer.
- ◇ Clergy and laity can participate in meetings of Churches Together in Leamington, inter-faith study groups, Lenten prayer or Bible study groups.
- ◇ Attend important civic events such as the Remembrance Sunday Commemoration Parade and Service.

Barriers to evangelization:

- ◇ A big difference between how we would like the Church to be seen and how it is (or may be) perceived by other people.
- ◇ The huge damage done by scandals in the Church – abuse scandals, cover-ups by the bishops and hierarchy, financial mismanagement, and so on.
- ◇ Modern life and materialism.
- ◇ General lack of interest in religion.

But perhaps the most interesting discernment was:

“We are the ‘barriers’. We are too immersed in ourselves and this prevents us from sharing the faith as much as we could do. Let’s share the joy of the faith”.

