

## **SYNOD submission on behalf of St John the Baptist parish, Purley**

St John the Baptist is a large parish that includes both Purley and Kenley in the London Borough of Croydon. It also includes the chapel of The John Fisher School where one Sunday Mass is held every week attended by residents in the adjoining area. Both church and chapel are served by Canon John Weatherill and newly ordained Rev. David Hunter.

The parish held five meetings on the Synod for parishioners to voice their views, guided by Holy Spirit, on the future of the church. Additionally, some parish organisations such as the SVP, Women's Group and the Prayer Group devoted one of their meetings to the Synod and contributed their findings to this synthesis. Local schools have held sessions, too. Many individuals responded to a questionnaire on the parish website and others have contacted the Diocesan Synod office directly.

### **COMMUNION**

All parishioners realise that many aspects of parish life (liturgical, charitable, social etc.) were disrupted by Covid-19. Preparations for the forthcoming Synod 23 have given us an opportunity to reflect on how we wish to remodel our parish and its role in the wider community to fit us for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In this, we discern the work of the Holy Spirit.

1. Many parishioners are keen to see a much greater involvement of lay men and women in the running of the parish. They want to show their love of God by sharing their expertise, time, initiative, and drive to serve the Church; but this needs to be tested in practice. Even the Apostles needed the help of the laity (Luke: 6:1-6) to distribute food to the hungry! Several suggested that we need a **Parish Committee** to organise our affairs. It would (a) collaborate with the clergy to plan a liturgy and social calendar and (b) set up sub-committees for: Finance; Social Events; Youth Events; Welfare and Charitable Works. Members' roles and contact details could be listed on the parish notice board.
2. The six Sunday Masses offered each week were generally well attended pre-Covid. Many people now watch them via online streaming. Weekday Masses are well-attended and streamed. However, many parishioners' involvement stops at the church door after Mass partly perhaps as they do not feel included. Many who responded to the Synod's questions proposed ways to make everyone feel wanted in our parish.
3. Recent newcomers to the parish suggested that couples or families greeting Mass attenders at the church door with Mass and Hymn books would make everyone feel welcome. They could also help to identify newcomers. The Parish Priest called for welcomers over a number of weeks without much response, but hopefully an approach from fellow lay people will be more successful. A welcome letter from the parish to new parishioners is already sent out to those who make themselves known to us. An annual event where parish organisations have a stall about their work might encourage more people to join.

- 4 At the sign of peace, one parishioner said we could exchange names– not handshakes – with fresh faces near us at Mass. We could show love for our neighbours by speaking to strangers as well as friends after Sunday Mass and stay for coffee with them in the church hall.
- 5 Parents said that they wanted the return of the Children’s Liturgy groups during some Sunday Masses to teach primary school children about the day’s theme. This will be possible once we are relatively sure of a Covid-safe environment.
- 6 Many parents also said that they appreciated being involved with First Communion preparation. Some want to follow up the First Communion classes with social/spiritual activities to maintain the children’s interest and involvement in the faith through Scouts, Guides, Rainbows, youth clubs etc.
- 7 Other parents remarked that many young people stop going to Mass after their Confirmation or when they leave home and slowly lose their faith. They have said that Bible Study groups for young people, youth clubs, outings, pilgrimages, and camps should be supported and advertised.
- 8 One young 6<sup>th</sup> former confirmed the impression of many parents of lapsed adults that the Religious Education curriculum in schools needs reform. They feel that too many young people seem to be ignorant about basic facts of our faith.
- 9 A retired teacher suggested at one meeting that a course to prepare 6<sup>th</sup> Form students for university might help bolster their faith. Catholics need to be ready to answer sceptical, secular questions about the Church’s teaching on controversial topics and deal with questions on the recent scandals that have beset the Church.
- 10 One father produced statistics that showed how Catholic marriages and baptisms are in decline and parishes are being combined. He said that Marriage Preparation Courses with follow-up support are needed for young couples and their families.
- 11 Ongoing Adult Formation/Catechesis courses have proved very popular e.g., Bible Timeline course, CaFE courses and the Alpha course. Similar courses would be worth promoting throughout the year, not just in Lent. Those who have followed the RCIA course have said they would welcome follow-up group sessions, as would returning Catholics. Many parishioners have asked for more information about our Faith.
- 12 People want support to live out their Christian Faith. Everyone at our listening sessions felt that social events linked with liturgical/seasonal/charitable causes are essential. These provide sheer fun and enjoyment as well as reaching out and cementing friendships. Pre-Covid these included coffee mornings, fireworks, fairs, concerts, quizzes and much more besides.
- 13 A written contribution observed that priestly formation does not adequately address the issues of leadership and communication. Parish priests need support from the diocese as well as parishioners to carry out their role. One parishioner asked

whether prospective parish priests receive an induction course before their appointment. A celibate lifestyle is potentially lonely. Do Priests receive support from their Deanery or Diocese for their mental, spiritual and social needs?

- 14** What support do newly ordained priests receive? How are they helped to progress in their vocation? What help does the Diocese offer them other than more responsibilities and tasks (e.g. a recently introduced very work-intensive health & safety system)?

### **PARTICIPATION**

1. Many people have said that ours is an inward-looking parish. It is also an ethnically diverse community. Some parishioners described vibrant practices at Churches in their home countries, which they recommended.
2. Comments have also been made about how the Church needs to show the love of God to the LGBT community as well as to those who are divorced, remarried and in civil partnerships.
3. Several have expressed the desire to show their love of God in the celebration of Benediction, Vespers, Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament and Stations of the Cross. They hope these services will soon be offered again. They wonder, too, whether parishes can make more use of the Church's rich musical heritage.
4. Many younger parishioners have called for more Inclusive, everyday language in the Mass, not words like "consubstantial" and "iniquity." We must bear in mind, too, that English is not the first language of many parishioners.
5. The Parish Newsletter and the weekly email are very useful and help to inform parishioners about forthcoming events led by different groups; local school events; pilgrimages etc. Some groups need publicity to become better known eg. Mother Teresa knitting group; Teams of Our Lady; and the Prayer Group. One mother, distracted by her children at Mass, asks for the sermon to be published on the Parish website, so that she could read it later!
6. Pulpit presentations by local groups such as the SVP; St Gerard Society (for mothers); the Catholic Women's Group (for women of all ages); and the Catenians would encourage new members to join as well as forge friendships and a mutually supportive community bound by faith to the parish!
7. The SVP members at their Synod meeting spoke of the needs of people in the many Residential Care Homes in the parish. As Covid restrictions permit, SVP members and Special Eucharistic Ministers will again be able to visit them.
8. Several parishioners spoke of their wish to reach out to lapsed adult Catholics, particularly their offspring. Some people described what had put off their relations. These included thoughts such as the teachings are irrelevant to today's world; priests vestments create 'us and them' and the Mass is boring and male dominated.

A former Confirmation Catechist would like to survey the thoughts and feelings of 30-year-olds. What has kept or driven them away from the church?

9. Some parishioners complained that our parish centre is rented on weekdays to a Nursery and there is nowhere for mothers and toddlers' groups or other groups to meet during the day.

## MISSION

1. Before the pandemic, our parish was a very active supporter of the local **Food Hub** and delivering **Christmas Lunch on Jesus** to poor families. These were established by **Churches Together in Purley & Kenley**. Many parishioners want to be more fully involved again when the pandemic recedes. Other initiatives established by local churches that some parishioners support include:
  - (a) **Floating Shelter** for homeless people
  - (b) **Croydon Street and School Pastors** to help adults and children return home safely and to be a presence if they need to talk to someone.
  - (c) **Breakfast** at the Baptist Church during Christian Unity Week
  - (d) **Choral evensong** at other Christian congregations.
2. The Catholic Women's Group held a listening session on the Synod. The group organises the Women's World Day of Prayer when it is the turn of our parish to welcome women from other Christian denominations for a special service.
3. Some men and women are also keen for the Catholic church to address the role of women in the church from parish level to the Vatican! Apart from Our Lady, many famous women have served the Church as theologians, leaders of monastic communities, social reformers and martyrs. Is the Holy Spirit inviting the Church to consider ordaining women and married men as deacons and priests to remedy the shortage of celibate male priests?
4. The pandemic has caused many parishioners to use video conferencing in their daily lives. They have welcomed online talks by priests about our faith. They firmly consider that from now on, the Church should use IT to market the Faith to a younger generation. Some also ask why not make more use of the church building for philosophical debates/ discussion? A drop-in informal youth meeting in the Church would be good to try!
5. Many parishioners have described memorable visits to streamed Masses where the priest addresses those present in person but also acknowledges the presence of a hidden congregation. Some people think this is an ideal way to evangelise society. Streaming is also another means for publicising local and international events in the Christian calendar through homilies or notices at the end of Mass. Interested viewers might also be drawn to attend RCIA talks.
6. One or two written contributions regretted the loss of some traditions which foster involvement and connection such as priests making parish visits, blessing homes etc.

- 7 Lastly, some have stressed that fund raising appeals from the pulpit for good causes and the Missions overseas should not be forgotten, especially the plight of Afghanistan.