

Synod Responses St Joseph's Bridgwater

*Question 1 A Synodal Church in announcing the gospel "journeys together"
How is this "journeying together" happening today in your parish? How is the Holy Spirit inviting your parish community to grow in this "journeying together"? Where in these experiences do you hear the voice of the Holy Spirit?*

In response to the more general question of, "How do I hear God in the parish and my everyday life?" many replied; through personal prayer, through scripture, through the different Sacraments, through the Eucharist and also through other people and the wonder of creation

Small groups in the parish have "journeyed together" on Zoom or other platforms, pursuing the "Dare to Dream" programme and "The Gift"

One person mentioned that the volunteering work I do in the parish is part of my worship and fosters involvement

Question 2 How is God speaking to us through the voices that are in our midst? How is God speaking to us in the voices we sometimes ignore including those on the peripheries? What space is there to listen to the voices on the peripheries, especially cultural groups, women, the disabled, those who experience poverty, marginalisation or social exclusion?

In taking part or attending liturgies especially of other ethnic groups, which mark "life events" such as baptisms, funerals and the death of family members, anniversaries or birthdays, deaths, etc.

In response to the question of how do we listen to those on the peripheries? One person mentioned, "By providing a welcome to all people coming to Mass."

Our parish priest has a very inclusive approach to the diverse community within the parish and at a meeting with one of the groups said, "We want your culture in our parish"

We have used the small groups, especially in the different ethnic groups to encourage and foster parish involvement. Consequently a group of women from East Timor now undertake the church cleaning on a regular basis – they see this as part of their contribution to parish life; it also helps them as an incoming community within the parish to maintain their identity and culture through meeting together regularly and eventually to involve some social element.

We are also involving different ethnic groups in aspects of the liturgy including hymns and songs popular and widely known in their “home” liturgy and worship. Also we’re introducing the readings of scripture and prayers of intercession in the different parish languages proclaimed by members of their own community.

Question 3 What enables or hinders you from speaking out courageously, candidly and responsibly in your parish and society? What space is there in your parish for the voice of the people including active and inactive members of our faith?

As a response to the different groupings in the parish and to help develop integration and improved involvement, before Christmas we invited each parish household to complete a questionnaire. In addition to contact details and the number and ages within each household there were a number of questions asked.

The questions included requests for suggestions of additional things offered in the parish, such as faith sharing (prayer groups, bible studies, house groups etc.) parish social activities and specific support in areas like, bereavement, counselling, family, marriage, parenting, separation and divorce.

Question 4 How are the baptised members of your parish able to participate in the mission of the Church in proclaiming the gospel? What hinders people for being active in your parish? How is authority or governance exercised in your local parish? How are teamwork and co-responsibility put into practice in your local parish?

What hinders people from being active? The responses included, busy lives, family commitments, taking care of grandchildren, work, unsocial working hours, and the location of home relative to parish and problems with transport. Something in the order of 80% considered these were significant factors preventing greater involvement

Comment; One major factor in preventing greater integration within the parish is geography. Our Catholic school is on the other side of the town some distance from the parish church making close cooperation between school and church difficult. Many of the Catholic children in the parish (mainly from ethnic communities) live on the other side of town and consequently don't attend the school.

In respect of decision making and governance it has to be recognised that invariably the major decisions are taken by the parish priest but we have a parish council which meets every 8-10 weeks and supports him in a number of ways. The agenda for the meetings includes topics such as formation, social activities, sacramental catechesis, youth, children and families and pastoral care, but other matters are also discussed.

Question 5 How does your parish use the methods of listening and speaking (consultation) to make decisions? How does your parish promote participation in decision making within the hierarchical church? Does the decision making of your parish help you to listen to all members of the community including those on the peripheries of parish life?

See response to question 3 above about the parish questionnaire.

The parish priest is flexible in providing weekday Mass at times to suit the community - some mornings and on other days in the evenings. He is assisted by an active, small group of laity who help in other ways with Adoration, prayer, rosary etc. The flexible timetable of worship is in response to parishioners' requests and more changes will be introduced as needed.

Question 6 How do prayer and liturgical celebrations especially Sunday Mass inspire and guide your parish? How do your prayer life and the celebration of the Mass inspire and inform your personal decisions and decisions in the parish community? How does the parish invite all baptised Catholics including our ethnic communities, youth, families and those with disabilities and their families into the active life of the parish, especially Sunday Mass?

Mass provides the opportunity to listen to the gospels and scripture and for the priest to offer advice on how these relate to our current lives.

The witness of others inspires us. For example, when different cultures wear their “Sunday best” which many of them do, it reminds us of the importance of what we are doing.

Music can be a great source of inspiration but inevitably not always

There were a number who commented on our welcoming and engaging parish priest