

SYNOD 2023
FEEDBACK FORM ABOUT THE GROUP DISCUSSION

“What changes need to be made – in myself, in our parish, in the Diocese –
to make the Church’s mission today more vibrant and effective?”

(Please complete this form clearly)

Name/Type of group (indicate parish)	Parish Meeting Blessed Hugh Church, Faringdon	
Date of meeting		
Particular details that you wish to be noted (e.g., ecumenical, school, university etc)		
Number (indicate males/females)	25 members of the parish have contributed	
Age range	30-85+	

I. THE JOURNEYING COMPANIONS

How can we be more welcoming as a Christian community?

We are a community that does things together, we are a small parish but very active in this locality. We have coffee mornings after mass, we have shared lunches in our gardens, we have fund raising cake sales, shared lunches. We invite Our Parish Priest and bereaved people to share meals at our homes, but perhaps we could offer extend this to drop around meals to new parents, or the recently bereaved, for a period of time, so that when they are faced with a major change in life, there is one less thing to worry about.

Pre-covid we had welcomers at the front door of the church to greet people but this is something we need to return to. We may ask the Confirmation parents if they are willing to help with this. We have a modern banner outside church on our front wall which shows we are welcoming even during difficult times, and appeals to a wide range of ages.

Or we could have a communal meal, where parishioners bring a dish, and let all know, Catholic or not, that they are welcome to attend, and then it would be food and companionship for those that are lonely and hungry?

It would be good (notwithstanding the web site) to re-introduce the parish booklet (what goes on in Blessed Hugh; services) to hand out to new people and a parish registration form for all parishioners.

We should encourage new parishioners to take a look at what a Christian life has to offer – seeing it as our spiritual life-blood but at the same time make it something people will want. Visiting people who have recently left or become distant from our community will help build bridges; we need a visiting team.

2. LISTENING

How can we be good listeners to those close to us and those outside the Church? To whom do we listen?

We might try a suggestion box in church for people to give feedback and make specific requests, we have had this in the past and we should try again. Sometimes in a parish those who already have a strong voice are listened to the most and we need to listen to everyone in the parish. Let us try to listen to the quiet ones also and pray for patience and understanding.

We WILL listen to those who share their personal experience of Christ and approach the Christian life with enthusiasm.

Those who are housebound may need special arrangements – we did used to have a phone rota during lockdown, we should begin this again.

We have stopped the printed newsletter in recent times, but-it's time to print this again for everyone, and if it contained the psalm and responses and hymn numbers this might encourage people to join in. Having various formats such as A4 and A3 might be helpful.

It has been hard listening to, for example, the children in mass as there was no PA system but finally that has been installed so we can hear much better what is said.

3. SPEAKING OUT

How can we be more honest in our dealings with each other?

It is easy to offend people, here a suggestion box may help.

We can only be more honest if we trust that others will not condemn what we say or demean us by ridicule or by implying that they know better. We need to talk gently to each other about our Faith. Some may not have attended a Catholic school and may respond better to one who is eager to listen and share rather than to dictate. We are in this TOGETHER, as a family, not as individuals. Think seminar rather than lecture.

We are open about our how the parish is run, and have for some time published all the minutes of all our parish meetings, the PPC, the newly constituted Finance & Maintenance committee, all are available on the parish web site and a summary is given in our weekly newsletter. Parishioners do ask for changes and contact members of the PPC when they have ideas or have concerns etc. We hold an annual AGM for the Parish and each group within the parish gives a short report; this is very well-attended.

Music is a good way to break down barriers – for example, playing the guitar more often. Young people will relate better to it.

4. CELEBRATING

How might we celebrate better the Liturgy in our parish?

We are blessed to have a Parish Priest resident here again and journeying with us.

Fr Claro is a very synodially Parish Priest. Mass is said with the Priest and people participating. Fr has encouraged young readers and we have a training programme for new readers led by one of parishioners. Children always share their children's liturgy with the parish during the mass, and this is to be celebrated.

Music and the Choir is a large part of our worship – and here young people are being encouraged to learn new instruments – all being trained by one of our musicians.

It would be good to periodically change something in the celebration of the Mass, so that we pay attention anew to what is happening. This would be especially a good thing to do in the preparatory periods of the year e.g., Advent and Lent. Keeping our faith fresh and renewed is important for each one of us.

For example:

- 1) Have the Mass said ad orientem throughout Lent, and then versus populum for Easter (with improved microphones and speakers, the old complaint about ad orientem, of people not being able to hear the priest, would not apply).
- 2) Chairs only for the elderly and infirm (round the edge of the church, or at the front), with everyone else standing (apart from when they are kneeling) for the whole of Mass (seems rather penitential- one for Lent?)
- 3) Having the Mass fully sung throughout, for instance on the first Sunday of every month, or major feast days.

It would be good to have the longer Nicene Creed said at Mass once a month; it has a richness of language and imagery that the shorter Apostle's creed lacks. This is important for our young people to learn too.

5. CO-RESPONSIBLE IN THE MISSION

How well do we work together as clergy and laity for the mission of the Church?

Father Claro is doing an excellent job in working with us, the laity, and in "stirring us up" to do more. There are many groups within the parish that all work together, The PPC, The Steering Committee, Finance & Maintenance, the Choir, Musicians, Children's Liturgy group, Confirmation Group, First Holy Communion Group etc. Fr Claro has been instrumental in bring new life to many of these groups and encouraging everyone to do something in the parish.

6. DIALOGUE IN CHURCH AND SOCIETY

How can our group, parish, diocese and the Church be more outward-facing?

Our recent Cake Sale for Cafod welcomed many local people into our church and Hall, many were unknown to us so a cake sale became a time of Evangelisation.

We might see if Fr Claro is able to lead an Assembly at the local schools. Our Justice & Peace Group provide practical expressions of our care and concern for the world around us.

The Faringdon Singers are now give a monthly concert in the Market Place, fabulous to hear these as we shop at the local outdoor market.

7. WITH THE OTHER CHRISTIAN DENOMINATIONS

In what ways might we improve our dialogue and relationship with other Christians?

Here in Faringdon- we have a very good relationship with the other churches established over many years. We all contribute to an active programme in Churches Together, holding joint services, Lenten programmes of study, and Advent services. Fr Claro has invited the local CoE Vicar to talk to us and he has spoken at their church. We have a shared Ecumenical Shop, The Mustard seed that is run entirely by volunteers and has done so for many years.

We have in the recent past had a Christmas Play performed in the Market Square, organised by the Churches Together, which even had live camels. It was a special moment of a visible sign of our Christian Faith.

For the future, possibly an external Christmas Crib may be something we can organise.

8. AUTHORITY AND PARTICIPATION

How can we make the Church more participatory and increase co-responsibility?

Again, we think Father Claro is already leading the way here.

Parents from the new Confirmation Group are getting involved in Parish life, similarly Frist Communion Group. Fr Claro encourages us all to think that we have a role to play in the parish and everyone should belong to a group or committee. This is something to aim for.

9. DISCERNING AND DECIDING

In a synodal style Church, what new processes of decision-making and decision-taking are needed? How transparent and accountable are the decisions made?

Our Pastoral Council needs to publish its agenda and invite suggestions from all. The PPC is accountable to the Parish. Fr Claro meets with everyone after Sunday Mass in the Hall over refreshments, very useful for informal discussion.

It might be worth looking into how some Protestant denominations manage it, as they have had a more synodal-type structure, but they also have a tendency to fission, so we should learn from their problems as well as their successes.

It would be good if before any discussion of a particular topic, the current position, and the history of how that was reached, any relevant dogma and doctrine, were made public. That way historic errors will not be repeated, and if everyone knows where the lines are, then that makes for a better debate and discussion.

Support for local LGBT groups is something we must take practical steps towards. For example, fliers to welcome them to church, making it evident that we do not judge. We are all equal before God.

Sponsored walks are currently being planned for Lent.

10. FORMING OURSELVES IN SYNODALITY

How do we form people to make them more capable of "journeying together"?

Our church is inclusive and for everyone. We are all encouraged to actively participate in parish life. We are planning a Retreat Day and may one in the Parish. Our weekly Bible Studies are informal formation of each one of us in the Faith.

Ensuring “continuing Catholic education” of parishioners after confirmation, as the clearer we are on what the Church teaches and why, the better we will all understand what we can change, what we cannot (and why) and most importantly, what we should change.

Our first experience of Journeying Together is usually through our early family life, and the R.E. lessons which we had at school and which shaped us for the Christian life in our future years. On any journey with others, we must learn to accommodate and cooperate, to listen and to learn. We must resist the temptation to stubbornness and subjectivity. We must embrace reciprocity and mutuality.