

Synod response – Assumption of Our Lady, Maldon and St Cuthberts, Burnham on Crouch

Together we have reflected on the central question we have been asked to consider and have talked and prayed together to seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit in trying to provide feedback, via Bishop Alan, to Pope Francis for his Synodal meeting in 2023

It has been a wonderful opportunity, following the isolation which we have all endured, to get together and talk. We asked our 2 parishes to complete a Survey online or via paper and were pleased to get 51 responses. These came from across the parish area and represented most of the towns and villages our churches serve. The respondents also reflected a wide age range – from 14 to 91, mainly from practicing Catholics, but 2 from a non-Catholic or lapsed Catholic. Whilst we would have liked more, we feel that this adequately reflects our local Catholic population. We also held a wide range of face-to-face meetings with First Holy Communion parents, Confirmation candidates, SVP, Widows and Widowers Group, the Maldon Parish Committee, the Burnham Parish Committee, Maldon Prayer Group (1 of 4 home groups which meets regularly across the area), Vigil Mass in Maldon, 9am Mass in Maldon, 11:30 Mass in Burnham and a group of young people who represented the younger members of our joint parishes.

The question from Pope Francis is *'How does our journey together allow the Church to proclaim the Gospel in accordance with the mission entrusted to her?'* We thought it relevant and important to consider what areas of Church life most inspire us – in this way by recognising what is important we can celebrate it and show the positive side of our Faith (which is so often maligned by the mainstream media) and use this as a potential springboard to have our own conversations with others who have either lapsed or who want to know more about what drives our core Faith. In this way the Love of our God and the Love we have for each other will shine through.

There were many and varied responses to the questions about what is inspiring about our Church - but the most common answers focussed around the welcoming and loving nature of the Church, the loving atmosphere there, the enthusiasm of Father James and Deacon Quentin which all make the Church a wonderful place to be. There were also lots of comments about being **the place** to Hear together the Word of God, to receive the Sacraments and be a part of the Liturgy. Many people also commented on the singing and the choir which now, thankfully, we can start again after long absences due to the pandemic.

We also asked what the Church could do further to inspire us, and we are now starting to get to the crux of the question from the Pope. Many of these comments linked very closely to the first question. People wanted us to be more compassionate, less judgemental and welcoming of marginalised groups – single parents, unmarried couple, the LGBTQ+ community and to be able to provide a physical sanctuary to everyone. Many people suggested that they wanted change, but few were able to clarify that. Overall parishioners wanted us to remain true to God's teaching. Many, many people, include our young people wanted to be more involved – from assisting in Mass to helping with the Children's Liturgy. In this way the laity can help remove some of the tasks from our overstretched priest. We want and need the Church to be central to how to live and worship, but also want it to be a place where all are welcome and a place we can always return to, no matter how long it has been since we last visited - a little like coming home again after a long absence.

How can we make the Church a place for our future generations, a place they want to come and praise, worship and rejoice in and a place to gather with their community? Not surprisingly, this threw up a huge amount of comments and include married priests, women priests, women deacons, travelling

priest rotating around a deanery/diocese to share different messages with the parishioners locally. People wanted us to be more evangelising, more joyful, and not afraid to stand up for what we believe in. They commented about us being more visible within our own local communities and being able to confidently share our witness and our faith.

Our conversations have inspired us to look at our local community and we will take onboard some of the suggestions which we have the power to change. These include

- Involving the youth more and having regular youth led masses and with the Children's Liturgy
- Having more of our Confirmation and First Holy Communion session in Burnham, and not everything always in Maldon.
- More music in Church, maybe again with the youth involvement
- Inviting parishioners to give a personal Testimony at the end of Mass to encourage others and to share their journey in faith
- Simple idea, such as presenting our offerings to the Maldon Food Pantry (food bank) as part of the Offertory

There are many things which we know can only be led from the highest positions within the Church and these are some areas that we feel need greater support

- Evangelisation through a dedicated TV channel - a UK based expression of our faith, which can be shared more widely and can give everyone an idea of who we are.
- Clearer discussion and evidence of how the Church spends and shares its enormous wealth
- Open and honest discussions about the role of the laity, female deacons, and married priests

Lord, we humbly ask that you guide our Bishops and the Holy Father in Rome in their discussions and decisions. May the Holy Spirit descend upon them and guide them in their deliberations. Amen

We want to thank all members of our community for being open and honest and joining in so enthusiastically in this process.

Fr. James Joseph

Ann Williams – Steward of the Gospel, Burnham

Joan Costello, representing Burnham Parish

Simon Burwood – Steward of the Gospel, Maldon

Anne and John Gool, representing Maldon Parish