

## OUR LADY OF THE SACRED HEART HERNE BAY

### SYNOD REPORT

**COMMUNITY:** The strong sense of community in the parish is greatly valued. There is an atmosphere of warm welcome which new members of the parish and visitors comment upon. There was a tangible sense of relief when services resumed in church after the first lockdown and people rejoiced at being able to meet and worship together once more.

**Where sense of Community is experienced:** At Mass; other services e.g., Lent and Advent prayer services; meditation groups. Occasional awaydays on Scripture. Also at lunch club, parish social events, fundraising evenings etc. The value of **modern technology** was also noted: from the humble telephone through which up to fifty vulnerable parishioners were kept in touch during the lockdowns; to livestreaming a Sunday Mass and occasional funerals; to sharing online Scripture courses; and to a weekly Lectio Divina session.

**Areas of Challenge:** The absence of young people: we wondered whether reasons for this might have included the remoteness of our style of being together when contrasted with the various social media platforms the younger people are familiar with. Do we invite young people to take a more active role in the parish? Do we acknowledge sufficiently the more inclusive mentality of young people today and their reaction against a church which excludes women from ordained ministry, is perceived as anti-gay, disbars the divorced and remarried from the Sacraments, insists on celibacy for the clergy.

**Role of Hierarchy:** Whenever this matter was raised it was in a negative manner: would the findings of the parishes etc be properly listened to? Would any change recommended through the synod process be actually carried out? The view was expressed that the findings of the National Pastoral Congress in Liverpool in 1980 had not been adequately supported by the bishops. Another criticism of the hierarchy was that it was not sufficiently Catholic, not giving a properly distinctive lead to the world in matters of faith and morals.

In summary, at parish level there is a positive evaluation of the quality of community life whilst at the same time a recognition that there are significant challenges. The role of the parish in nurturing faith was frequently recognised: there was a feeling that parishioners were being treated as adults and were being encouraged to face the many challenges the world offers in terms of social justice or care for the environment.

**PARTICIPATION**: Again, the joy of resuming public worship was to the fore and the satisfaction of taking up ministries again as readers and ministers of the Eucharist was frequently mentioned.

There was a call for more participation in the preparation and celebration of the Liturgy at the parish level; regret was expressed at the lack of lay consultation in the choice of the new Bible translation for use in the liturgy.

Younger participants expressed the wish to be more involved in the parish though they felt they lacked confidence; those involved in music felt their participation was welcomed and supported.

The fact that there are many gifts of a practical nature in the parish that are not sufficiently recognised was mentioned and it was suggested that a skills register could be compiled. At the same time, the fact that so many members of the parish are involved in charitable work and in the support of vulnerable neighbours was also noted.

**Financial Support** received considerable attention. Apart from magnificent and ongoing support for the parish SVP conference, there was also the fact that, during the pandemic, many parishioners have begun donating by Standing Orders etc and the financial status of the parish has remained secure.

**Parish Pastoral Council**: its work was noted but perhaps does not have the prominence and profile that it should have.

**The Synod Process**: The level of participation in the process was good and the feeling was expressed several times that the process must continue beyond the consultation process for the benefit of the parish. Two ideas for the future were mentioned: to take up again a monthly parish discussion group which we called "Let's Talk"; or occasionally to have House Masses or other less formal celebrations of the Eucharist where there is the possibility of greater participation. The value of listening to one another in a non-judgemental way in the light of Scripture and being open to the Holy Spirit was an idea that was agreed with enthusiasm.

**MISSION:** Whilst Community and Participation were more readily understandable to most who attended the meetings there was a noticeable lack of understanding as to what constitutes our own individual mission or a joint parish mission. We recognised elements of **Outreach:** our parish website, our parish magazine distributed to the homes of every parishioner, reflections, and Masses broadcast on YouTube. There is also individual involvement in Street Pastors and a homeless charity, Catching Lives. The work of the SVP in reaching out to the local poor of whatever faith was also seen as part of the parish's Mission. Our Lunch Club in pre-Covid days was open to all. But important though these activities are, we seem to fall short of having a shared overall parish mission.

The point was made that we do not look outward as much as we should. An Alpha course was suggested. And we often came back to the point of why people have left the practice of the faith, very often seen together with the sadness so many have felt at seeing their children giving up the practice of the faith. Could we find ways of listening to their experience?

The point was made in several ways, that society has changed a great deal in recent years; society's understanding of human relationships and of human sexuality has moved on enormously: we have to learn how to have a proper dialogue with the modern world.

A strong view was expressed that the primary task of the parish is to work out its mission and then develop the means needed to implement the vision. If the main vision of the parish could be seen as helping people to have an encounter with Jesus then ways would have to be found for people to share their experience, perhaps meeting in small groups or one to one; retreat days could be organised or more widespread use of the many materials available on the internet could be encouraged; and much, if not all of this, could be lay led. Another idea came up: that we could adopt a logo such as "God is Love" and then order all our activities as a parish with this focus in mind. Again, the very active participation of lay people would be vital.

It was recognised that we still have much to do to arrive at a shared vision of the mission of the parish.

**FEBRUARY 2022**

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