

the altar, all provided welcome and support. Suggestions for improving inclusivity ranged from having masses specifically for children, ethnic groups, sporting groups, students, youth groups, yearly masses for recently married couples, recently baptized.

Core Question 6 about Dialogue in Church and Society

Core Question 6 about Dialogue in Church and Society did not generate as much discussion as other questions. Since the question referred to dialogue between diverse groups it was seen by most groups as not so applicable to a rural parish as to a city parish with a greater diversity of believers and non-believers. A few years ago, there was a Polish Mass celebrated when there was a larger Polish community than today. Inter-denominational services were still problematic due to resistance from the Reformed Churches though some interdenominational activities occurred, for example in Drumbohill. Other examples of cross community contact were the local Vintage Car Rally, the Big Breakfast, the Regeneration Group, Walking Clubs, and Hands that Talk. While ideally there was benefit in clergy being involved socially in the parish this did not happen now due to the shortage of priests.

Core Question 9 – Discerning and Deciding

Core Question 9 about Discerning and Deciding generated a lot of discussion. In general, while it was acknowledged that there were various layers of consultation in the parish and diocese, these were not well known to parishioners and information from such groups tended not to be widely publicized. It was also acknowledged that many parishioners have little interest in the consultation process. One group admitted that they were in the dark as regards discernment and deciding in the parish. Some felt that the Parish Pastoral Council played an important role in this area but that their deliberations were not always conveyed to parishioners.

Having completed the consultation process it is encouraging that our parishioners engaged in a thoughtful and honest way in giving their opinions on the set questions. Meetings were harmonious and fruitful in their result. This report was sent to the Diocesan Synodal Conversations Team for inclusion in their report to the Irish Bishops.

Thanks to all who gave generously of their time to meet and discuss important issues of Church policy, governance and relevance in challenging times.

I would like to thank Eugene and all the Parish Pastoral Council for their excellent work in organizing the Parish Synodal Conversations. Fr Seamus.

Report on Dungiven Parish Synodal Conversations 2022.

By Eugene McElhinney Chairman of Parish Pastoral Council

Our Parish Synodal Conversations were held in the Parish Conference Room in late April early May 2022. Thirty-five parishioners attended our first session, twenty the second and twenty-two the third. They were divided into small groups and sat around tables provided. Of note was the age profile of those who attended – no one under the age of thirty. At each event participants engaged enthusiastically in the process

In response to the first fundamental question about the strengths of the Church in the Derry Diocese, participants were complimentary about the range of groups and activities that promoted the faith under the stewardship of the priests and an active and ‘down to earth’ bishop. The many strengths included the sense of community celebrated through the various liturgies and supported by many voluntary lay groups. The ‘In Memory of Me’ programme and the JP2 Awards initiative and Children’s Adoration were singled out as particularly beneficial means of handing on the faith to the young. The use of the parish webcam for providing a virtual presence to those excluded due to the Covid 19 pandemic was appreciated. Pilgrimages to various Holy Shrines were seen as way of sharing in the universal faith of the Church.

On the question of how the diocese could help promote greater engagement in the church, there was a general recognition that at present parishioners under the age of thirty are few at church services. The introduction of lay deacons was seen by some as a way of dealing with the decline in priestly vocations. For others the introduction of married priests might attract more men to the ministry. Maintaining a strong Catholic ethos in parish schools was seen as a necessity especially now that fewer and fewer young people attend church services. One group noted that the liturgy and particularly the Eucharist should promote active engagement for children and their families similar to what had worked with the ‘In Memory of Me’ programme. A problem identified with the latter was the growing practice of local GAA clubs organizing games on Sunday mornings. A re-introduction of the ‘Search’ programme was cited as a way of engaging with youth. One recommendation was that parish schools should engage in a special school Mass every year. Some members reflected, emotionally on occasions, about a variety of religious experiences which had brought massive changes in lives. Others