

testified to the peace found in personal prayer. There was a consensus that faith formation in the home was declining which impacted on the nurturing of the faith in schools and the church.

On the question of where in such experiences do we hear the voice of the Holy Spirit parishioners struggled to articulate them. For some it was experienced in 'calming presence' of being in church, for others it was felt through the ministry of the priest. There was also a view that the Holy Spirit was active in the Mass readings, homilies, various acts of liturgy and acts of charity performed by the many volunteer lay groups. Feeling guided to make the right decisions was a manifestation for others. Others drew strength from trusting and having faith in difficult moments. Some believed that the Holy Spirit was working through current conversations.

#### **Core Question 1 – Companions on the Journey**

As to who is included in our Church and Parish there was consensus that everyone was welcome. All Catholics by virtue of the sacraments of initiation were totally included; those seriously ill or at the point of death were part of the local Catholic family.

On the question of who were excluded there was a general view that some people excluded themselves for various reasons such as apathy, antipathy, loss of faith, rejection of Church teaching. There was a view that more could be done to invite the disaffected back to experience a welcoming church. Some of the reasons cited for self-exclusion were divorce, same-sex unions, and unmarried parents. While these were seen as obstacles to full participation in the Church there was also recognition of the need for compassion and understanding of these difficult relationships. It was noted that some people who had failed in their marital relationships but who wanted to be active lay ministers were excluded. A greater role for women in the Church was another factor identified as a way of creating a fuller sense of inclusion. Another sensitive situation needing compassion, diplomacy and understanding was reintegrating people who had been to prison.

#### **Core Question 1 - Listening**

On the second core question about Listening, groups were asked if they could discern God speaking to us through the lives of the committed and the marginalized. Some held that the words and deed of believers and religious media reflected gospel values while the plight of the marginalized reminded us of our duty to try to reach them while acknowledging that parish volunteer

groups actively supported many of them. One group thought that greater involvement in social action would include the marginalized, e.g., through bereavement support. Even providing links to existing charitable agencies such as charity shops, addiction services were seen as beneficial. The provision of signing for deaf parishioners was seen as a positive step forward. Minority ethnic groups also needed support. One group thought that the healthy financial state of the Parish should allow for greater assistance to volunteer groups. For others the non-judgmental gospel value helped us to have tolerance and compassion for those who did not share our values. Obstacles to listening were identified as the modern affluent lifestyle, worldly distractions, and false value systems.

#### **On Core Question 3 – Speaking Out**

About speaking out it was recognized by all groups that there were few channels for this apart from the usual points of contact with the Parish Priest, Parish Office, Pastoral Council and the current Synodal conversations, but that these contacts needed to be improved. There was a general acceptance that parishioners need more encouragement to speak up and have their points of view acknowledged. This was seen as particularly applicable to the marginalized. One group highlighted the difficulty experienced in speaking out about recent clerical sex abuse scandals, noting that victims and their families and friends were still hurting over this.

#### **Core Questions 4, 6 and 9 - Celebration**

Our third session had twenty-two participants. Core Questions 4, 6 and 9 were discussed. There was a consensus that on the question about Celebration that this was fundamental to our faith journey. A sense of community was experienced through participation in the Eucharist wherein the word of God was heard, and participation was open to laity- singing, reading, altar serving, distributing Holy Communion. Such celebration provided spiritual sustenance, inspiring people to continue their daily devotion. While most groups valued the contribution of choirs it was noted that a minority of worshippers found them distracting. In particular, funeral Masses were seen as poignant reminders of our human frailty and our connection with God.

On the question about how the parish invites all the baptized to participate in the active life of the parish there was general agreement that this was one of the positive aspects of parish policy. The frequency of masses, both live and virtual, the thematic emphases on the key themes of the Church Year, the support given via the Baptismal Preparation Team, pre-marriage courses and information provided through the weekly bulletin and announcements from