

**OMI Centre of Mission on Anglesey, North Wales**  
**Engagement with the Synodal Process**  
**October 2021 – May 2022**



The Anglesey Centre of Mission in North Wales is served by the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate (OMI) and is situated in the Diocese of Wrexham. In October 2021 the Catholic Faith Communities on the Island of Anglesey entered a time of reflection, conversation, and prayer, where we have considered both our common life and call to mission as we journey towards our Island Assembly in June 2022. This document reports the responses of seventeen facilitated groups, thirteen of which met in house groups and four groups that were facilitated through Zoom conferencing. Each group participated in four conversations focused on the questions posed in the Ten Thematic Nuclei as presented in the Preparatory Document. The four conversations considered Communion, Participation, Mission and Hope. This report presents the outcomes from the 68 conversations held across the Island, the participants of which total 108. Outcomes from the conversations are presented under the question headings and are taken directly from the feedback from each group conversation.

## **COMMUNION**

**In our local Church, who are those who “walk together”?**  
**When we say: “our faith community,” who is part of it?**

Our faith community encompasses all who attend Mass/Services, those unable to do so for various reasons, some perhaps not comfortable to return to Church, others housebound with sickness.

Relationships are central to the building of community. We highly value the relationships among us in each faith community, relationships that sustain us from one Sunday to the next. We experience a sense of family in journeying together. Community life is enriching and we spoke of the what an inspiration it is to journey together in community and to share one another’s experiences – joys and challenges. It is inspiring to witness how community members live out the challenges they face. This witness, one to the other, sustains, encourages and inspires.

Relationships are how community is grown, ‘you are never on your own’. We are walking together and enjoy belonging to a community of communities. To nurture intergenerational relationships opportunities for meeting and socialising outside of the Sunday Liturgy are crucial; the Covid pandemic has obviously curtailed these opportunities. Some expressed that we ‘need to have a ‘Back to Church Drive’! Whom haven’t we seen, spoken to? Who is missing? Keep in contact with the scattered church not just the committed people.’

We need to be positive despite our ageing communities and diminishing numbers. We are open and hopeful because we are consciously trying to move forward in the Spirit. Let us not

underestimate the love we spread by the small actions of our daily lives. We, the laity, must be strong and be responsible in our actions. We have been given much over the years through the ministry of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate, so we respond to the call of our baptism, of our church, and use the gifts we've been graced with. 'We are called through baptism to be priest, prophet and shepherd-king to one another – we are community - however small.' We ourselves recognise and ask that the place and importance of communities, not just Parish, is recognised and that these 'small base communities' are valued; the cells that build up the Body of Christ. Small group relationships nurture pastoral care between us. The future of our church seems to lie in small lay groups – we must prepare for this.

The trajectory we strive to travel is for equal partnership in leadership, priest and laity together, together in formation for shared leadership; we look to best practice and examples of this being lived out.

It was noted that a strong bond exists with those we 'know' in our community, but this does not necessarily extend to larger groupings or extended community. One group shared that 'We feel that we belong to our local faith community but are less sure of belonging in the same way to the Island, to the Diocese. Relationships and personal contact are important.' Opportunities to gather across boundaries: parishes and communities are essential to build the network of relationships that speak of being a Community of Communities.

### **Who are those who seem further apart?**

During the last two years of the Covid pandemic many have valued the opportunity to take part in online events, Faith Formation Webinars, Day Retreats during Advent and Lent, organised and made available to our communities, as well as Services of Word via Zoom conferencing and the instalment of a camera in one of our churches to enable streamed Masses. Whilst all these opportunities have been valued by those who were able to access them: our website, online events and streamed services, those who would have wished to avail of these opportunities have experienced a sense of being further apart.

Whilst some have valued the availability of Services online: 'If I missed Mass on a Sunday in the past, I would have felt guilty but now, I can attend during the week or watch Mass online so much more flexible', others have felt that it 'engendered a sense of detachment that does not fulfil the need for being present 'live''. Many don't feel connected to their parish anymore and what keeps their faith going is their personal relationship with God. Those who have returned to Sunday Mass in the Church, highlighted the 'difficulty locking up church after Mass – everything seems to be rushed - no chance to talk to people. Conversely, if stewarding, one wants to clean up, lock up and get away.' Covid has also highlighted 'those who are apart, or left on the margins, often the elderly, the housebound, those in hospital, retirement homes, equally distanced are the youth and children.' Some stated their perception that 'Priests are not visiting the sick and housebound – some people feel isolated and lonely and are suffering – mainly because of the pandemic and restrictions put in place.'

Some have expressed that it is 'always the same people 'Walking together', those who are Practising Catholics - Non-Practising are just as important'. Others emphasised that 'We need a purpose to be part of community, there needs to be a reason for people to be part of the community'; the faithful need to be able to contribute to the life of the community.

People felt a disconnection from the school. 'As people's children aren't in school anymore, they feel there is no link between school and parish as we haven't been proactive in keeping links once children leave primary school.' It was also commented on that there are a lot of non-Catholics or non-practicing Catholics that attend the Primary School and the parent's link with the Catholic Church is tenuous. 'We have lost a generation or two of people - the parents and their children'. There is a need to develop further links with the parish community communicating what's going on in school. There is a desire among community members to experience a connection with school. There was a felt need to identify and create opportunities to dialogue. 'Do we as an island community need to find a way of reaching out and engaging young people through our schools or other means?' Explore starting up SVP Groups such as Minnie Vinnies / Youth Group / Parents Group.

It is felt by many in the communities that there is a need to dialogue with those who seem further apart and to listen to their experience. For example, 'we shouldn't make assumptions about what young people want based on what we might have been interested in when we were younger'. 'We need to ask young people what they want and we need to listen to their ideas' and experiences. Others posed the question, 'Or do we accept that the church has little to offer young people and focus on the needs of our older population, this must surely be 'both - and'.

Are we using Social media sufficiently well? The Oblate Digital Communications Team could work with us to develop this further. Could we learn from churches with active youth groups? In considering this it is also important for us to bear in mind that without the parent's attendance in our parish communities how can we expect the young people to be present. We now have fewer baptisms, fewer children making their First Communion and fewer Confirmation Candidates. We are an ageing population. Ageing members of the community are not being replaced by younger ones.

Some expressed the opinion that although Anglesey communities do feel welcoming, it can still be difficult to get involved. People on the periphery need to be actively encouraged to become involved. It has been expressed often that people respond best to personal invitation rather than through general invitations in Newsletters etc., people need to be recognised and personally invited to feel valued and if ignored, they feel excluded. Everyone in our communities should strive to be people that invite.

**Who is asking us to journey together? Who are the road companions, including those outside the Church community?**

God is asking us to journey together, so is Pope Francis and one another. We feel a sense of belonging to the family of the worldwide Church and feel at home. One group commented that, ‘Due to travelling frequently to visit family, our “local Church” isn’t necessarily the one parish or diocese.’ Our companions include our faith community as well as outside bodies in the wider community.

Relationships grow in the faith community and local community through a variety of different opportunities to meet and get to know one another, coffee and tea after Mass, social gatherings and through supporting local community projects and campaigns that work to respond to the needs in society, the local and wider community.

We journey with those in our local community by engaging with groups and charities, by supporting and taking part in projects that give life and support those in need: e.g. visiting the sick and housebound, being members of local community groups such as: foodbanks, the local Good Turn Scheme, the Older People’s Council the Older People’s Forum on Anglesey, promoting and facilitating conversations with Councillors, Medrwn Mon, supporting Pobl I Bobl who support refugees with clothing donations etc., through developing as Dementia Friendly Communities and supporting the facilitation of social afternoons for those living with Dementia etc., other denominations, CAFOD, SACRE, the SVP and Oblate Missions. A perception evident in one group’s feedback that ‘we don’t reach out to those in the wider community’, points to the ever-pressing issue of the need for good communication. Pastoral care for one another happens through our relationships in community where we know one another and can respond to pastoral care needs where it is possible. One group recognised that, ‘There is a lot of good work going on but it is fragmented’. Perhaps with different members of our community supporting various groups in the wider community, such as those enumerated above, this is how the reality of integrating our support with local groups will appear. We are called to outreach in and among the wider community.

Members of our communities in different ways are working with and supporting those living Gospel Values in the wider community. They are “walking together” with people whose values we share, be they Catholics, Christians of other denominations, people of other faiths, and people of no religious faith. We see supporting those who live Gospel values as ‘faith in action’. Some of us carry out our Christian mission through participating in secular groups, rather than religious.

### **What persons or groups are left on the margins?**

Those we recognised as being on the margins or who experienced a sense of being marginalised are: the elderly, the housebound, the homeless, those without internet access to our streaming services and online events. Due to poor bus services and other transport problems along with the rural nature of Anglesey, it is very difficult for some to interact with the Parish or attend church. During the Covid pandemic this reality has been exacerbated. There are many who expressed experiencing the pain of their family members who feel marginalised: those who are divorced and remarried, LGBTQ+.

Women are marginalised by the church at large where their gifts, talents, skills and contributions are not recognised or given scope - their voice is muted, this is unacceptable.

The younger members of our community are also marginalized due to their small numbers. Many of these families do not attend church weekly and therefore the opportunity to meet one another and form friendships is impaired. The consequences of this are that children or young people may often feel that they are the only young person or child present and without a friendship group in the church community. A question was posed in one group: 'Do forms of Sacramental preparation available to children and young people need to speak more to the society in which they live?' A sense of being overwhelmed was expressed by some, 'Our aging population, the closure of churches, the lack of priests restricts our ability to change things but we must just keep on going'.

Whilst technology has been a great help for those who could access this form of communication and information, it is a huge barrier for many people. It is especially difficult for those with visual or hearing impairments which are exacerbated with virtual communication.

### **A synodal Church, in announcing the Gospel, “journeys together:” How is this “journeying together” happening today in your local Church or community?**

'Oblates are supportive and encourage all, including women, to play their part in the overall 'set up' on the Island and we need to be grateful, as this is not understood to be the case in the rest of the Diocese.'

Journeying together is happening on Anglesey through opportunities to socialise, work on projects and engage together in shared leadership and the taking on of responsibility. Recognising and valuing the skills and giftedness, in one another, is essential to build relationships that create a vital faith community. Throughout our group conversations there was a general sense of gratitude, 'We are fortunate to be in Oblate Parishes' where there is a commitment to strive for shared leadership, laity and priests together, and where decisions, on the whole, are discerned through consultation and consensus, through a spirit of equality, mutuality and respect; the laity has a role. Through our baptism we are called to share in the Mission of Christ through our living of Gospel Values to bring about the common good and God's Kingdom of justice and peace. We are nourished through our Liturgies, being a Eucharist Community, to go out and strive to live our lives witnessing to our faith which is nourished by, and not just about, receiving the Sacraments. As one group put it: 'If being part of a Faith Community is perceived as simply attendance at Mass – we are in trouble!'

We recognise our faith communities are generally an ageing population and that there are less priests and relying solely on volunteers is not the answer. We recognise the need for trained paid full-time lay Pastoral Workers with the necessary formation and skills to act as a catalyst and 'nudge us' and encourage community members to participate in sharing our gifts and to

encourage confidence among the lay people to take on responsibility for our community life. We have a Pastoral Associate employed fulltime by the Oblates of Mary Immaculate here on the Island. We are also fortunate that the OMI employ a fulltime Administrator. Why is there no funding available for Pastoral Associates to be employed elsewhere in the Diocese? If this is not seen as a priority by the Diocese, why not?

The impacts, on our communities, of the Covid 19 Pandemic have been mixed, some have experienced a greater sense of connection with the local Church, and the broader Church through accessing online streamed Masses, Services of Word and through Zoom conferencing. Access to online Webinars have given access to quality Faith Formation opportunities. Geographic boundaries and territories were no longer an issue and those who were able access online events were able to get to know others and deepen their faith with people from across our Island communities, Diocese, and across the Oblate Province through the Oblate Advent & Lent evenings. This has been a great gift and comfort for many during the pandemic. One group commented that, 'Although Covid has had negative consequences it has also made us more tolerant, more aware of each other, quicker to acknowledge each other. Stewarding, for example, has actually helped in getting to know each other and we have had to move around the church away from 'my' seat.'

It is appreciated that many things have been organised and there is a lot going on but there is a gap for those who can't or don't want to use technology. It does not replace or 'fill the gap' that comfort, support and friendship given by gathering with community members brings. For some there is a sense of loss of what existed before. We need to be together again to meet up and help each other. 'These Synod meetings are a step forward in improving a sense of unity.'

Reflecting on 'How our journeying together is happening locally' it is hoped, 'that actions from the synodal process may be locally achievable we could start small, we need to imagine a shared vision and sense of direction; dream of where we want to be and think out of the box.'

### **What are difficulties, obstacles, and wounds in the Diocese - Church?**

*Here follows some quotes taken directly from the 17 Conversation Groups Feedback in response to this question:*

- 'We are skeptical that the Church is listening, or even wants to listen, to the laity.'
- 'Will our comments reach the places that matter? Will it even get beyond this group?'
- 'Some of us almost left the Church altogether. What kept us in is realising that we just have to do things ourselves.'
- 'A more accepting hierarchy – accept we are an Island of smaller communities and 'the big church' mentality won't work on Anglesey. Rigid ecclesiastical inflexibility i.e.

‘the big church’ mentality of clustering parishes and communities we would want to be challenged.’

- ‘The Synod is an attempt to implement the vision of Vatican II – why is that only happening now? There seems to have been an active backlash against Vatican II. Tradition is important, but we must develop as well.’
- ‘Communication can be a real problem between the clergy and the people. Our OMI priests do make a real effort to communicate.’
- ‘We sense that the OMI vision is in contrast to that of the Diocese.’
- ‘Although we feel positive about OMI’s communication and openness with the laity, our skepticism with the larger church can affect our willingness to participate with local structures like the Parish Council.’
- Regarding wounds in the Diocese most groups posed the question: ‘What happened to the Diocesan Pastoral Council? What happened to the Deanery Pastoral Councils - laity and priests in conversation together?’ The Diocesan Pastoral Council and Deanery Pastoral Councils are urgently needed as channels of communication in the Diocese to facilitate communication between laity and priests together.
- ‘What has happened to the Diocesan Newsletter ‘The Link?’, which has fallen into abeyance during the last two years of the Pandemic when it was most needed? ‘The Link’ was at least one channel of communication in the Diocese, albeit limited.’
- ‘Diocesan organisational structures need to be examined and restructured to encourage and allow for dialogue and for the voices of the faithful, and the resounding voice of God outside the Church to be heard and responded to. What happened to the Diocesan Pastoral Council and the Deanery Pastoral Councils?’
- It emerged that, ‘Many parishioners feel disconnected to the Diocese as no one gets to know what is going on’. In the Diocese, ‘there is no forum for the laity to be given a voice? How? Where? When?’ Another group commented that there is a ‘Need for structures to change. The shape of the church has to change from a pyramid to a circle – we need to turn the church upside down.’
- It was expressed and echoed throughout the group conversations that the laity are longing for their gifts to be recognised and shared. It is in a community you learn to recognise your own gifts as well as recognising, affirming and drawing out the giftedness of others. These gifts are graced by the Spirit to enrich the community. ‘When the gifts of the faithful are dismissed anger and frustration among the laity is engendered in the face of a waste of the treasure – the Spirit’s gifts among the faithful.’

- ‘Clericalism blocks the sharing of gifts.’ Not only does clericalism hinder the building of relationships among the faithful but blocks co-responsibility and the sharing of God given gifts present in the faithful body of Christ. Great pain and a stifling of the Holy Spirit is experienced when clericalism occurs.’
- ‘We don’t want to be too critical of the clergy. We understand that there are too few priests to cover the responsibilities of the diocese and parishes. It might help for the Church to be more open to collaborative ministry between clergy and laity.’
- ‘We need to support, and challenge Church leaders to embrace necessary change.’
- ‘Our Bishop and Clericalism are, or could be, obstacles to opening up involvement of the laity.’
- ‘I think that the Bishop is against the lay people taking part.’
- ‘When rigidity of clergy occurs/ has occurred, it is and has been a great disadvantage to parishioners.’
- ‘Real difficulties with Catholic rules on Divorcees and suicide victims not being allowed to be buried in holy ground – all unsure of the current rules relating to this but a general feeling of being stuck in the past.’
- ‘Need for more flexibility e.g., married priests ‘
- ‘Risk of running costs for churches restricting access.’
- ‘There are difficulties within the Diocese. Bishop Peter closing of our churches - no consultation with the faithful effected.’
- ‘The Bishop not accepting that we are aware of the difference between Mass and Celebrations of Services Word and Communion.’
- Many were insulted by the need for the recent questionnaire that was undertaken by our faith communities in order to establish whether the Bishop’s perception was correct or not, that the laity in the faith communities on Anglesey did not understand or recognise the difference between the Eucharist and a Celebrations Services of Word & Communion.’ An in-depth analysis of the results from the survey were submitted to the Bishop at the end of December and to the faithful on Anglesey.’
- ‘Why have we no lay workers in Justice and Peace and Youth activities? Ways need to be found to fund lay workers in the Diocese.’
- ‘There is a need to rethink the training and formation of clergy.’

- ‘Some concerns and worries about the future of the church – What will be lost?’
- ‘Should we be worrying about the future or be concerned about now? What can we do to improve the situation today? The church as we know it today may have to die.’
- ‘People are grasping at straws, feeling that we are propping up the Church, but no one really knows where the Church is going or how it will be, but felt the whole point was how you are with others, reflecting the Church in how we are with other people in the community.’
- ‘There is a danger that we will go back to the same old, same old and remain insular.’
- A few voiced the opinion perception that, ‘the Church missed the opportunity during Covid 19 to be active in fulfilling the needs of people. The media was full of information and concerns about the opening of pubs, cinemas, etc. but we heard no strong voice about the need to open churches!’
- ‘The Church hierarchy is patriarchal – in what other organisation is this tolerated?’
- ‘The patriarchal nature of the Church is unacceptable. The Church should be modelling equality, mutuality and respect. There is no place for this patriarchal structure as it limits the full participation of all.’
- ‘With no channels of communication in the Diocese at present the response to the question ‘*How are the laity, young people and women listened to?*’ the answer has to be they are not.’ All in these groups are too easily dismissed.
- In response to the question ‘*How is God speaking to us through the voices we sometimes ignore?*’ It is assumed that these voices are ignored as they call for change and those in the position of power and control will want to keep the status quo as it is.’
- ‘Does the Church dialogue or does it just instruct?’
- ‘The Church needs to learn to dialogue. In the past the Church has expected us to pay, pray and obey - this is no longer acceptable.’
- ‘The role of women in the church needs to be reviewed and brought in line with the Anglican communion. In a similar way the church needs to review and change its stance on married clergy both male and female.’
- ‘The church seems more interested in preserving its traditions and power structures/base than being truly Christian in its values.’

- ‘The formal administrative and clerical structures of the church are based on ancient roman power and command structures, focused more on maintaining the status quo and powerbase rather than being an effective way to offer pastoral care and being authentically Christian. Is it possible to move towards a more flattened and humble hierarchy?’
- ‘The hierarchy of the Church needs to right past wrongs and work for change.’
- ‘Improved communication and transparency is needed; in particular regarding issues of dealing with sexual abuse in the Church and the damage this has caused.’
- A wound in the Church is ‘abuse scandals, the church not addressing it and the media’s view of the church and of priests.’
- ‘To save the church community, the church needs to evolve, to work differently.’
- ‘The world is a different place and the Catholic Church needs to change, The Catholic Church is like a tanker – it takes an age to turn.’
- ‘Sometimes it seems like young people outside of the church express more radical Christian values of acceptance and justice than the church itself.’

### **What are difficulties, obstacles, and wounds in our particular Church?**

Regarding wounds in the communities the consensus was that all of the Island Communities have suffered in the last couple of years and the negative impact of COVID on loss of confidence in the building of community relationships was recognised. ‘Not only are Mass attendees down, for various reasons, but it caused separation, a tearing apart.’ The community is no longer quite the same, energy and enthusiasm have diminished. There is a desire to work to rebuild confidence in meeting once again and to explore ways to achieve this.

Suggestions for further consideration: develop better channels communication throughout the Island communities, be better connected with other faith groups, share more, do more together, involve those on the margins, make them feel connected and welcome. There was much discussion about the lack of children and youth, of young families.

Are young people feeling that what the Church has to offer has little relevance for them and their lives. The same young people have a sense of spirituality that is being met outside of the Church structures. Other Churches like Elim seem to be more effective at engaging young people in their Liturgy with more freedom of expression. Can we learn from this? Or do we need to support our young people engaging with them instead? Feeling inadequate we wonder again about a paid youth worker in this field, which is fraught with difficulties today for volunteers.

Do we need to have a more organised way of offering transport to church?

The last two years has shown that for every difficulty there is an opportunity. ‘Great opportunities exist for those who dare to be bold.’ Post pandemic - hopefully is an opportunity for change in our communities locally and in the Diocese. On a journey, change is constant – ‘be at home’ with this constant change and uncertainty as we travel in relationship with each other, aware of the Holy Spirit’s presence among us and travelling with us.

### **What relationship does our Church community have with members of other Christian traditions and denominations?**

There are small core groups of people in the three parish areas on the Island that build a network of relationships with other Christian denominations. In Llangefni particularly it has been difficult to build these networks and connections due to people from other Christian denominations being predominantly Welsh speaking and Catholic communities being predominantly English speaking. Experience shows that relationships with other Christian traditions seems to develop best when we work together – action for climate change, Fairtrade, fundraising shop. Those who are familiar with Cytun know there is a good relationship between other churches who actively work together on social / community projects and services. Dialogue with other Faiths and Christian denominations (Cytun) is very fruitful.

Through conversation with Cytun we believe that all local churches are experiencing the same issues as we are following the Covid 19 Pandemic. There is still some sharing between churches in planning for and celebrating the World Day of Prayer but it is not as strong as it was. The lack of Welsh speakers is a disadvantage to working together.

## **PARTICIPATION**

### **How do prayer and liturgical celebrations actually inspire and guide our common life and mission in our community?**

*Services of Word & Communion* The following was expressed strongly across all the conversation groups: The communities greatly value that we can still meet in our communities for a Sunday Liturgy in the absence of a priest, where we can still gather for the Liturgy of the Word, in union with the Church, and receive the body of Christ consecrated for us at a previous Eucharist. This is seen as crucial in sustaining our community life together. One group commented that ‘Services of Word & Communion do give a sense of being together as a community...’ and whilst ‘there is a sadness that they are needed, they maintain and nurture the relationships within each community’.

The communities are extremely grateful to our trained Leaders of Prayer and all those who take on the various ministries of this important responsibility with great reverence, commitment,

and generosity, in order that these Celebrations can take place: Leaders of Prayer, Ministers of the Word, Extraordinary Ministers of Communion, Sacristan, stewards and welcomers and musicians. All undertake their responsibilities with utmost care and reverence. One group commented, that when we were first invited to be leaders of prayer 'we thought we were not able, but we now know we are very able.' The Holy Spirit gifts the community through all its members.

We do feel satisfied with our experiences of liturgy and sacraments on Anglesey. We are grateful for our priests who are working under difficult circumstances due to reduced numbers of priests.

One group noted that 'In relation to young people our church seems to have very little to offer them, it often does not speak to their values and the formality and lack of freedom in the Liturgy can be perceived as boring and irrelevant.' They then posed the questions: 'How could we make the liturgy more relevant to our young people? Is there a way of being able to express ourselves in more creative and sustaining ways and having a more interactive participative liturgy rather than the current focus which is about passive reception of sacraments?'

Some thought that our buildings for worship may no longer be fit for purpose and the layout often reinforced clericalism - although this has improved since the reform of the liturgy post Vatican 11. Is it possible to have a space, where we worship, which feels more empowering and inclusive of all in the liturgy?

It was shared in one group that Catholics 'who had been part of the Church for over 20 years felt that they were Catholics coming to church but not feeling part of the community whereas, newer participants, over the last year or so, stated that they were made very welcome experiencing a friendly atmosphere they 'felt part of the community family.'" Older members of the community noticed more a sense of the community celebrating together rather than just being a Mass centre. They felt the community was welcoming and friendly. They felt well cared for, especially during the pandemic. Indeed, some felt that the pandemic has brought them even closer together. There is a sense that 'All felt part of the community and are grateful to the lay people who take on the various ministries and for the openness to newer members who are encouraged to participate in taking on various ministries.'

Despite the restrictions imposed through the Covid Pandemic the rhythm of the Liturgical Year has been a comfort and nourished us through these challenging times. The confidence and willingness to take on responsibilities in the preparation for the various Liturgical Seasons means that these services are well organised, and the clergy trust the laity to take the lead in preparations. 'We remember key moments of awe when we have been aware of the closeness of God and of deep inner joy. Preparation of the sacred space - the sanctuary, music, flowers, banners etc are important in expressing our incarnate faith. We strive to prepare liturgies that invite full participation of the community. Our liturgies draws us together, so that our inward focus leads to service.'

Ecumenical services, such as Taizé and the World Day of Prayer are valued for bringing joy and an experience of fellowship with other Christians. Knowing that all over the world we are all practising the same services with other Christian denominations gives us confidence as we strive to be welcoming, inclusive and outward looking!

### **What do we need to help us grow more capable of ‘journeying together,’ listening to one another and engaging in dialogue?**

Once again it was deeply felt that ‘If we are a faith community, we will know one another well enough to be able to recognise one another’s gifts, to be able to name those gifts and encourage the sharing of these gifts to build up the life of the community. This is not possible if relationships are not fostered. Finding ways to foster the development of relationships is a priority. Many opportunities should continue to be created for people to meet. These groups should be many and varied where the faithful are able to share a co-responsible lived faith together, so building relationships and community.’ Without this fostering of relationships, dialogue is not possible. Crucial for the life of our communities is the building up of confidence and valuing of skills and gifts of lay people in being co-responsible for the life of their communities.

#### *A changing demographic in our church community*

Reviewing the journey of our faith communities through the years, ‘We spent some time reflecting on our history, of early Mass centres across the Island, in homes, pubs, hotel, cinema (only 3 Churches). Of busy 1950/60’s building and rebuilding churches and of great hope – 11 churches, maybe 10 priests. Then of diminishing numbers of priests and people and closure of 4 churches, maybe a fifth. Is this cyclical, will we return to Mass centres in our homes, pubs etc., small groups?... Yet we are a very different church today: with more participation among the laity, greater unity across the Island Faith Communities, more consultation. Real revolution!’

‘We all agreed that we are very lucky to have the OMI priests here. We are able to speak and work together without fear or embarrassment, our opinions are sought after and valued. We feel we are being listened to on a local level but not on a diocesan level.’

‘We need to encourage more people to join our church committees to give them a say in the structures and decision-making of the church. Minutes of the committee meetings must be published and be easily accessible to enable us to know what has been discussed/decided.’ This was echoed again by many of the groups: ‘It would be helpful to promote communication and engagement, to have the dates of the Parish Advisory Council (PAC) meetings in the Newsletter and Minutes and feedback available.’ ‘Our three PACs and Island Mission Group need to find ways to listen to community members and to give feedback from meetings i.e., opportunities to dialogue and feedback through the Island Newsletter and minutes of meetings to be available at the back of church and on request by email, in this way people would have a broader picture of what’s going on.’ One group stated that ‘There is still a distinct lack of communication between the Island leadership team and the parishioners.’

But equally, as one group stated, ‘We (parishioners) also need to improve *our* communication with our PAC’s and be more proactive regarding membership and sharing of ideas.’ Another group was encouraged and saw ‘It is a hopeful sign to see new, younger members coming on to our parish councils.’

Good communication does not just happen; good channels of communication are essential and always in need of improvement; it is a priority. We need to see its development as part of the journeying that requires constant care, attention, and time. Does everyone know who is a member of each of the 3 PAC groups? ‘It would be helpful to have the names of each of the 3 Parish Advisory Council members shared and for the dates of the Parish Council meetings to be advertised in the Newsletter. This would allow members of the communities to become more engaged and to have the chance to suggest aspects of the community life to be shared, celebrated, queries posed, needs and pastoral care issues, etc.’

There is a lot of information in the 3 Parish Area Handbooks that were produced a few years ago, everyone was given a copy for their parish area. Are these used? Are they given to new members who join our communities? Are they available at the back of church? Do they need updating?

Some people commented that they are happy for the various groups: Parish Councils, Island Mission Group and the Island Pastoral Team, to take on their responsibilities and get on with the job. However, those who are not on these leadership groups are still willing to help in other ways when asked – ‘do not assume apathy or disinterest; respect people’s choices and level of participation’. Another group recognised that they, ‘are aware of being apathetic with regard to fora of communication – Parish Councils, Island Mission Group, Island Pastoral Team. Who is on the Parish Council? Am I interested in seeing the minutes? Notice boards have been stripped, we need to refurbish them, maybe have a member of the parish council to speak occasionally at Mass?’ Another group shared the view that there was a ‘General lack of communication and dialogue with decision makers. Too often a “fait accompli”’

As on any journey the panorama changes, change is inevitable on our ongoing journey as we continue to travel together, nurturing relationships, responding and adapting to changes along the way, as we have done when faced with the reality of less priests, i.e., lay led Services of Word & Communion. We are called to be ready to adapt, accept that change is necessary – see – judge – act. We need to grow in the ability to dialogue and listen deeply to one another and to discern the promptings of the Holy Spirit and follow.

One community acknowledged ‘that more conversations, reflections, training courses and interaction with the other 2 parishes should be encouraged in our faith community... we should share internet knowledge and skills, and just listening over a cup of tea’. They went on to say that ‘acceptance of those (who are perceived to be) on the margins should be fostered, yet those who find that difficult must not be criticized... listening to others and responding to their needs is important. However, we felt that all this sometimes seems to fall on the

shoulders of the same people, and though the spirit is willing the energy required is draining away.’ This feeling was echoed in other group feedback.

The recent surveys undertaken in our communities - Parish Council meetings -meetings on Zoom all permit us to participate in shared decision making within our community and further afield.

*Places of Dialogue:*

- after Sunday Liturgies
- Faith Formation Events – face to face or on Zoom
- Faith Formation through Webinars
- Retreats in Advent & Lent
- Taking on responsibilities together
- Celebrating together significant events in the life of community members
- Synod Assembly Conversation Groups across the Island
- Social gatherings – these have been impossible through Covid pandemic
- Zoom groups
- Zoom Workshops to learn how to use Zoom
- Services of Word online
- Sharing hobbies through Lockdown
- Season of Creation events
- Wednesday & Friday Morning Zoom groups
- Island wide meetings open to all those in the communities when making important decisions that affect everyone – listening, reflecting and discerning through to consensus, the next best steps
- Island Assemblies every 5/6years
- Island Mission Group Meetings
- Parish Council meetings
- Island Pastoral Team Meetings
- OMI Province gatherings on Zoom – Advent & Lent Retreat Evenings
- Informal gatherings

The layout of many Church buildings does not allow for spaces that foster community interaction where members can meet, learn, and work together. It was suggested by many of the participants that ‘More practical use of buildings may help. Joining in with other denominations e.g., joint use of buildings.’ ‘The church buildings could be adapted/ rearranged and developed to be multi-purpose so promoting the building of community relationships and participation.’

We recognise that our communities are aging, the time has come to employ cleaners and gardeners, maintenance providers to undertake tasks that we would have undertaken ourselves in the past.

Individuals in the group shared their experience of inner conflict and tension in finding a balance between the demands of daily life and family responsibilities: work, caring and supporting children and elderly parents. Increasingly these demands coalescing at the same time. They see older members of the community who have undertaken roles serving the community for years but who now need to step back due to age or ill health. 'It can feel challenging to know how best to respond in the light of our own life demands and responsibilities.' Those who have busy work schedules and other family commitments are not able to undertake further responsibilities in the Faith Communities. A consequence of this is that 'we feel we don't know who the other parishioners are'. We need to create opportunities to listen deeply to the different experiences of our community members to further develop a greater awareness of the burdens and challenges that those members carry at different stages of the family life cycle.

During this time of 'travelling in the half-light', in times of uncertainty and in the carrying of anxieties, burdens, responsibilities, and acceptance of the reality of our aging communities, 'we do what we can, when we can'. In acknowledging that these are challenging times for the life of our communities 'we must listen and spend time with each other and not remain on the side-lines.'

'We need to discern individually and as communities where the life and light is and to follow it wherever that may lead us.'

### **How do we participate and help others participate in decision-making within hierarchical structures of our parishes and Diocese?**

'We feel women, and all laity, are well represented in decision making on the Island. We cannot say the same of the Diocese. It is good to hear that lay men and women can now head Curia departments, a chink of light!'

Listening and being listened to is central to the process of community discernment and in reaching consensus in decision-making. Discernment and consensus must be our process of decision making wherever possible. Our communities make time to discern together, laity and priests, a shared vision for the living out of the Mission here on the Island. We have experience of facilitating shared discernment and decision making by consensus. We must use these ways of discernment whenever possible, to grow this way of being and journeying together as we learn to trust in the Spirit's presence, guidance, and inspiration.

We 'need to be at home' and present to the current reality – remembering how we got to where we are today and to develop confidence in trusting in the promptings of the Holy Spirit who will show us the way – the next step best we should make on the journey. We need to

continue to have confidence in our ability to dialogue and listen deeply to one another and in our ability to discern and respond to the movement of the Holy Spirit among us as we reflect on our lived experience.

It is a priority to encourage participation of the lay faithful in co-responsibility for the life of the communities, this is an essential Baptismal right and not a favour. Co-responsibility is not possible where clericalism exists. Shared leadership, lay and clergy together, striving for equal partnership is essential to promote a vital faith community. It is time to move forward in what we have been talking about for so long, the discipleship of all the Baptised in the Mission of the Church. Vatican II days have faded, we need to return to the Vatican II vision. It is not 'the priest' *and* the 'Community' but the priest is one among the community of the faithful and should be seen as such. Each person, through their Baptism, is called to co-responsibility to be: priest, prophet and shepherd-king to one another and responsible for the life of the community; for the living out of the mission of Christ.

Again, we recognise that relationships are central if we are to be communities where each person is truly known, respected and encouraged. Participation and involvement, at all levels, in all ministries, helps us to grow, share, develop, discern. Finding ways to encourage more interaction nurtures a sense of co-responsibility and participation in decision making.

Our Church urgently needs to have a presence on the various Social Media Platforms. The Oblate Digital Communications Team have some helpful research on how best to use the various Social Media Platforms i.e., which age groups use which platforms. This would help us to use social media more effectively by focussing outreach to different age groups.

It was agreed how important personal invitation is to encourage engagement and participation. We all shared experiences and noted the power of personal invitation. Being personally invited to participate, share giftedness, to take on responsibility for the life of the community is affirming and encouraging and increases a sense of belonging. We need to know each other to be able to call out one another's gifts. 'The encouragement and training of laity, in order for laity participation in all levels of the church's life is both challenging and gives us some hope.' 'The various faith ministries are now being taken on by many in our community, lessening the pressures which our, too few, clergy must sometimes experience.'

The more we give of ourselves the more we grow together. With relationships in place, we can then adapt to change, supporting one another and being people that invite. Small group meetings are important. We need to use every opportunity when we meet to dialogue and to ACT of the ideas that arise between us and that we discern to be the next right step.

It was suggested by one group that 'future planning must involve under 30's and consider how to engage future families, otherwise we have to accept that we are making a plan for how to minister to an aging population with inevitably fewer and fewer people to provide active involvement- how do we make sure that those people don't get burnt out by taking on too much for everyone else?'

When we gather for the Island Assembly in June 2022 we need to listen to the promptings of the Holy Spirit as we together, reflect on these outcomes, and discern priorities, for the future development of our Faith Communities, that set the best path to travel. There was a strong sense of needing a plan of how to build on what has begun through this Synod Assembly process.

After the Island Assembly and as a follow up to these conversations, it will be important to have regular reviews and follow up meetings, with clear objectives and the identification of the steps to be taken to achieve these goals. We will need to work to ensure clear channels of communication with, and between, all the members of our community, about what is being done to help us keep a focus and not drift away from any plans that we make.

## MISSION

### **To whom does our particular church “need to listen to”?**

How do we reach out, connect, listen and respond to the views/needs of those who are not part of this synodal process? God speaks to us outside the Church and we need to find ways to listen to those who no longer come to church, those who need to use foodbanks, those who are most impacted by the rising cost of living and rising fuel costs, refugees, the sick, elderly and housebound, parents coping with multivarious needs of teenagers, grandchildren and aging parents, those who feel excluded in some way, single parents, those with disabilities. We must listen to climate change activists, to the signs of the times - acknowledging the reality, to the voices of parents of children in our primary school, the voices of people on the periphery of our communities, young people, other Christian denominations, older lay people who have wisdom and experience to share; they are generally more open to change and adaptation than is realised. We must listen to Pope Francis and to awkward issues as they arise.

### **How are the laity, especially young people and women, listened to?**

It is requested that the Diocesan Pastoral Council and Deanery Pastoral Councils be reinstated as a forum for listening, conversation, consultation and decision making, priests and laity together.

There are no channels of communication within our Diocese to hear the voice of women, young people, the laity in general, in this regard they are all marginalized. Two groups reported feeling ‘uncomfortable with no mention of both women and men in the question.’ The marginalized are probably heard more through family relationships and at a National and International level through lay led networks such as the Scottish Laity Network, Root & Branch Synod, the Edinburgh Jesuits, where excellent speakers from across the world, broaden perspectives, deepen faith formation and allow for dialogue through webinars and Zoom conferencing. A participant conjectured ‘Listening to women... I sometimes wonder if women’s sodalities for example ‘Union Catholic Mothers’, ‘Friends of St Eugene’ etc., keep

women busy and quiet! It's labelled being 'involved' but is not actually full participation in the Church'.

It was stated in several groups that we need to become more confident in our sense of community so that when the time comes that we no longer have an OMI priest and may be served by a secular priest of the Diocese, we can be confident to challenge any movement to push back on lay involvement. We need to both support and challenge church leaders to embrace necessary change.

### **How is God speaking to us through the voices we sometimes ignore?**

God speaks to us through the silence of absent members. One group explained, 'Post pandemic – people didn't miss going to Mass but faith became stronger. Young people are not interested in being involved with the institution. People don't want to just go back to the way it was.'

One group's feedback commented: 'In the Diocese and some Diocesan Parishes, conflicts and difficulties are addressed by ignoring them - silence. Worse than not being 'listened to' is being listened to and then ignored. Voices of the laity being ignored and written off is indefensible. If people are badly treated by the Church hierarchy, they walk away.'

It was voiced that 'the Church at large has made little move towards equality, diversity and inclusion. There is a fear that the gulf between some of the church's teachings/attitudes and 'real' life is widening and people are voting with their feet.' It was also acknowledged that 'listening to those who it might be difficult to hear – even our own children regarding church going, we often 'pussy foot' around this, it is often easier not to listen.'

### **How are differences of vision, or conflicts and difficulties addressed in our local Church and Diocese?**

The general perception was that conflicts and difficulties are not addressed in the Diocese. As mentioned above because the Diocesan Pastoral Council and the Deanery Pastoral Councils are no longer in existence very little is heard from the Diocese on any matter.

Some people are not aware of any conflict and were curious to know 'where is the conflict with the Diocese?' There was a sense that 'we need to help build a greater sense of community and belonging in our church. If we are more engaged, supportive and willing to listen to each other, areas of disagreement naturally arise and can be worked through to resolution more easily.' We need to bring members of our church family together in unity through dialogue, deep listening, with compassion and tolerance, to prevent isolation.

### **When and how do we manage to say what is important to us in local Church, Diocese and society?**

Anglesey Faith Communities have experience of organising facilitated community ‘*Conversations with Councillors*’ promoting Care for the Elderly and the Common Good. They have facilitated Community Conversations when making decisions that affect the Faith Communities, where what concerns all is discussed by all. A discernment process in decision-making is reached through discernment through to consensus. This happens through shared leadership of lay and priests together and has been learnt and applied over the years. ‘As we emerge from Covid let us take the opportunities offered to us to dialogue, reflect and discern the movement of the Holy Spirit together as we prepare for the Island Assembly.’

The experience is that the Diocese is too centralised to allow for, or promote, meaningful dialogue. Channels of communication need to be created.

### **What enables or hinders us from speaking out in our local Church the Diocese and society?**

We are fortunate on Anglesey to have opportunities to dialogue, but we also need to take on personal responsibility to participate in these opportunities. Being heard is important but people will be reluctant to engage in dialogue if they feel, through their experience, that they are not listened too; without transparency and trust dialogue won’t happen. All of us should reach out to each other to encourage dialogue. Often it is through conversation that seeds can be sown, energy and motivation created, that can grow unknown ways for the good of the communities.

To be able to speak out effectively as a group we need to be well informed. This means listening to everything around us. Participants encouraged one another to listen – with our eyes and our hearts. To aim to be non-judgemental in approach through becoming aware of our own prejudices; listen to those we do not agree with. God is God of the weak, the poor, the ignored – he speaks to us through them. Let us be open to ‘respond to the promptings of the Holy Spirit’ and have courage in speaking out. We learn through the example and actions of others; this encourages us to move outwards. Let us invite and encourage others to express themselves. Dialogue in small groups creates the courage to speak out in larger groups.

We need our church buildings to be adapted in order that they are conducive to groups meeting for dialogue and building of community relationships. Coffee after Mass is an effective way to build community and create the climate for ongoing conversation.

One group commented that ‘we feel there is still a prevailing attitude of “Father says”, where unilateral decisions can sometimes be made.’ The group also recognised that they were aware ‘of not wanting to rock the boat and because of this did not have the courage to say something that may upset others.’ It can be a hinderance to speaking out if there is a sense that decisions have already been made and consultation is token. Also attitudes of stubbornness or a sense of insecurity or being hurt in the past can be a barrier to speaking out. One group felt that they were not encouraged to speak out, ‘decision makers don’t share information’. They acknowledged that the lack of being able to meet face to face during the Covid pandemic resulted in ‘no opportunities to raise questions’.

It was queried by one group and echoed by others, ‘is anyone truly listened to by the hierarchy?’

‘No formal mechanism to resolve conflicts at parish, community or diocesan level,’ is evident.

It was recognized that there can be ‘fear (and some negativity) about speaking out in case you’re asked to do something.’ Another block to speaking out was perhaps ‘the need to have what might be seen as a difficult or challenging conversation.’

The consequence of a lack of transparency is the absence of trust, which causes issues to be buried rather than being out in the open, e.g., clerical abuse. Courage is required to speak out where necessary.

## **HOPE**

### **Q. Where do you yourself encounter energy in the life of your local Church and Diocese?**

Energy is experienced in our relationships - small groups – sharing the journey. Celebration of the Eucharist ‘brings energy in many ways: celebrating; reflecting; applying the readings; prayer. continuity & renewal’. Energy and a felt sense of community is found in Sunday worship and in the opportunity to meet socially afterwards; ‘we experience a sense of belonging. Covid has underlined how much we have missed this, as also receiving Communion and of being physically present in our church. It made us more aware of absent friends too.’ ‘Community is where the energy comes from.’ Energy comes from participating and from those who take on service to the community in many and varied ways. ‘We are inspired by the example of others, their generosity, their volunteering for all sorts of roles.’ ‘Lay participation / leading the liturgy – this is where the energy is.’ Again, another group expressed it this way, ‘The group gain energy from attending church regularly which keeps their faith alive, from seeing the participation of our community in the various ministries –our “local regular holiday visitors” provides welcome energy into our community. Yet another group describes encountering energy as: ‘Feeling energised when working on project/activity together in parish, when involved with a group; when preparing music for liturgy, music helps us to pray. ‘We enjoy the stillness in services, feel refocussed and energised through the sacraments. We feel energised by seeing people on regular basis in church, feeling the community.’

We too are grateful for the ‘benefit of our 2 Oblate priests regularly presiding in our church.’ ‘Our enthusiastic priests are a positive asset.’ ‘Energy comes from thought provoking homilies.’

‘We find energy in the beauty around us, in music, in readings. In the beauty of others (of all ages), their life and example, their dedication and generosity. We draw energy from our liturgy, our gatherings (prayerful and social). In discovering 'new country' (Tagore).’ One group identified that ‘Lockdown experiences confirmed that God is all around’ and that ‘energy breaks out in surprising places – e.g., when receive offers of aid from strangers in the parish; from connections made,’ and that ‘Breaking the rules can bring energy.’

Many stated that ‘energy is felt when people meet face to face’ and felt that ‘this was lost during the pandemic but will be important to return to now and in the future’. Many recognised the importance of the newsletters and the scripture readings emailed out during the pandemic. ‘By having a newsletter all throughout lockdown kept a kind of energy within the Island Community. No one seemed to know what was going on in the Diocese as communication has been poor.’ Energy is experienced from ‘Meetings such as the Synod conversations.’. Another group stated, ‘We’ve enjoyed this process of meeting.’ ‘It’s not all about Sunday ...’ ‘Attending combined social and learning events renews our energy.’ Listening to one another’s faith stories inspires and gives us energy.

More energy is being created in the local church / Island community as we have started to meet again after Mass for tea & coffee. ‘The need to move forward is very evident and to do this we need to meet each other and encourage hope. Gathering, to talk, listen and really get to know each other will lead to new life in the church community – we need to chat! Weekend Mass time is the only realistic time for gatherings that include people who are working.’

Working together creates energy and creativity, we can learn from others outside the Church and work with them in responding to the needs in society. Energy is present when responding to the needs of others. ‘We have all been moved by the plight of refugees but there are also hardships very close to home regarding poverty and the climate crisis. To witness to our faith we need to be open to changes and to work with those outside the church doors. ‘We need to be less insular.’

A relatively small number of people take up the opportunity to take part in the three weekly ‘Pray & Ponder the Scripture’, prayer with the Sunday Scripture and the monthly ‘Contemplative Prayer’ zoom meetings, “but for those who do attend, this feels like an important point of connection with others from across the Island that would otherwise not happen. This has helped to maintain a sense of spiritual belonging and connection.”

Pope Francis is a huge source of energy for us – he gives us energy. He knows and emphasises the importance of encouraging a sense of responsibility and openness among all the faithful to care for others and for creation. He inspires us to respond to his call to find and create ways to care for one another, those in need in our society and for creation, to challenge the status quo.

Regarding where energy was experienced in the Diocese it was noted by one group that it was ‘difficult to answer this question. We send energy (money, information); not always easy to see what comes back. We noted that workshops, talks, other links are on hold (Covid) so the Diocese feels remote right now. Also, because of OMI our local structure is a little different from usual Diocese relationship.’ Benedictines, Jesuits, OMI, and other orders have played positive roles in our experiences of Church here and in other locations (often there seem to be tensions between orders and Diocese). St Beuno’s stands out as a source of energy and hope, including participation from non-Catholics.’

**Q. What are your hopes for the future of your local Church and Diocese?**

Our hope is to continue our journey of faith together and demonstrate our close community relationships. ‘We need more get-togethers so we can deepen friendships and get to know each other’ creating strong bonds. It was suggested by the group from St Joseph’s that there could be ‘better use of Llangefni church space by replacing the benches with chairs so offering greater flexibility in the use of space.’ Our church buildings should be ‘conducive to groups gathering to socialise, dialogue and work together, not just for gathering for Mass. Communities are formed where people really get to know one another.’

One group expressed their hopes in this way: ‘Be at home in travelling together in the half light of uncertainty. Follow the energy, the light, the prompting of the Holy Spirit and act on these. Be present to the movement of the Holy Spirit within the group; listen to the Spirit. Acknowledge and accept the reality and then respond and trust in the Lord’s journeying with us. That we offer one another ‘Companionship and comradeship - travelling forward and out in renewed hope guided by the Holy Spirit.’ They acknowledged ‘The importance of listening to the Spirit in the group’ Take care of one another and ‘Love ourselves so that we can love others.’

An expectation has built among participants through these discussions that this synodal process will lead to change in the church and enrich the life of the parish. It was suggested by a group that ‘The Oblates and the Bishop need to share their forward planning for the provision of priests and places of worship. A clarity of strategic planning and choices available would assist in moving forward. We hope our church will remain open with a priest and parishioners. The themes that have emerged continually in our conversations should not be lost but be further addressed and discussed and be acted upon. We hope some positive developments will come from our synodal meetings.’

Again, there was a desire expressed to ‘increase social opportunities- film evenings, create opportunities to gather regularly and get to know one another better.’ Offering tea & coffee etc after masses is a good opportunity to do this. Maybe only a few will stay at first, but this can grow if we are consistent in offering this opportunity. It also is a helpful way to ‘welcome and engage with visitors and occasional Mass attenders.’ A rota of helpers to organise teas and coffee after Mass, also encourages participation and sharing responsibility.

We hope is that more from our communities across the Island will respond to the invitation to participate in the zoom prayer meetings, these have helped to maintain a sense of spiritual belonging and connection and are an important point of connection with others from across the island that would otherwise not happen.

We are hopeful that our churches remain open.

One group focused on the ‘need to celebrate local parishioners’ milestone birthdays, anniversaries, etc. the question was asked has Holyhead taken over? Newsletters need sections for each parish news.’

Many who have taken on responsibilities over the years such as gardening, cleaning, laundry, playing a musical instrument at the Liturgies, are no longer able to continue these responsibilities. We need to accept this as a reality when it occurs and find solutions such as employing people to undertake these tasks or as in the situation of providing music for liturgy explore the use of technology. ‘There is a sense of inner conflict experienced ‘I can’t do this job any longer – or I have no time to help...’ we need to accept these realities.’

‘We need to concentrate on what we can do, on what is possible: small groups, pastoral care, sharing with each other, being open-minded, awareness of social issues leading to action. We, hope to be like that old tree stump, sprouting new life. May younger adults step up to the plate. May small groups grow stronger and flourish.’

‘Once more we discussed how there would be more hope for the future and relevance of the church if it was possible to have female and married clergy. There was an expressed concern that the call for this possible reality, raised in synod discussions, will be edited out by the Bishops of England and Wales.’ Many echoed the following reflections voiced by this group: ‘how many women were involved in the Easter services, performing all sorts of different ministries. Our group discussed how dreadful it was that the church is still so male dominated in its hierarchy and wants the church to be more inclusive of women and married people as clergy and decision makers and pondered our role in bringing this about.’

One group expressed that they feel “‘hamstrung by history’, rules and regulations perhaps learned in childhood. There sometimes persists a very old-fashioned view of what the Catholic Church is about and it’s up to us to dispel this”. We all need to find our way in development of our faith. The language of the Church can create barriers and does not promote a sense of inclusivity. It is hoped that we grow in sensitivity and a heightened awareness so that we intentionally work to celebrate liturgies that use inclusive language, adapting language where needs be.

One group stated the following, ‘Some of the church’s attitudes, actions, regulations and behaviour would be completely unacceptable in today’s workplace or society.’ This feeling was also echoed by many other of the groups.

Expressed in all groups is the desire for the Diocese ‘to be more inclusive and organise diocesan wide events, news, etc.’ for Lay and priests together.

Regarding the Church at large ‘We hope that the Church’s baggage does not overwhelm its mission of love. (Baggage includes theology and rituals that insist on what is divine and does not seem to recognise the divine in people; and mixed up theology that gives people an

excuse to leave.)’ We hope ‘That attending Mass will help us to be more loving, that the Church will be strong, sure of itself in reaching out to others; open to the new, that the Church will listen, that the Church will change and adapt to become more relevant. The Church does seem to be evolving. We hope this is true.’

‘Our hope for future church on Anglesey is that our small communities are recognised and valued and understand themselves as a community of communities. Communities that are in relationship and LISTEN; outward looking; aware of the bigger picture; learning to discern together the movement and promptings of the Holy Spirit; that synodality is lived in the way we ‘be’ together. The faithful themselves must live synodality – deep listening and discernment in our community relationships.’

‘We hope for a successful Assembly, leading to greater unity and integration of our churches on Anglesey. That it will map a way forward while retaining local responsibilities (pastorally and in local action).’

### **Q. What paths are opening up for our local Church?**

‘We have recognised challenges in our conversations and need to work on solutions, but we need to be listening to the voice of the Holy Spirit. There is a commonality of themes that have emerged in our conversations, and these will need further exploration as we take steps to respond to these challenges.’ ‘The way ahead is as yet unclear and uncertain. The Assembly will surely indicate and open up new paths’, acting as a compass showing the direction of travel and indicating next steps. ‘Significant challenges have opened up, e.g.: the Covid pandemic; priest shortage, fewer young people. The challenges are forcing the Church to follow what it always should be doing: to seek wisdom to discern what to do, what to change, what to accept. To pray for the guidance of the Holy Spirit.’

Many groups expressed that change is good but admitted that they struggle with change. There is a recognition that we are continuously called to change, and the hope is that this change will come about as part of this Synod Assembly process. There is great hope that the forthcoming Assembly in June will bear fruit and take us on a new path, revived and refreshed. Opportunities have emerged from the shared conversations and will from the Assembly. ‘The steps to be taken are as yet unknown, other than to attend the Assembly Day if we can.’

We are called to become a listening Church – How does this happen? What would a listening church look like? We have to listen where people can be heard and speak where people are listening. Listening to experiences of people’s daily lives and what this says to the church. Are we prepared to leave our comfort zone? Are we prepared to make changes however foreign they are to ‘our yesterdays’?

We are called to ‘embrace new ideas that bring light to those experiencing darkness; so, bringing hope. Can we change the direction of thinking from ‘getting people in’, to us ‘moving out’, meeting people where they are on their terms rather than ours? What might this look like in reality?’

A quote from one group feedback was also echoed in many groups, ‘We need to wake up to the reality of the likelihood that soon we may only have one priest, no priest or visiting priests- either OMI or Diocesan. Our communities need to prepare for this through overt planning for life with one priest, visiting priests/no priest. There will be a need for more lay led involvement, but this raises challenges of governance, supervision and support for those in that role.’ If this is to happen, more people need to take up and carry this responsibility, rather than it being carried by a relatively small group.

One group’s suggestion for the future was to take ‘Technological advances beyond the current streaming of Masses may lead to united Mass going at diverse locations with the use of Eucharistic Ministers and large screen facilities.’

We will always need the Mass even if it is just an eager anticipation of the next Mass. It was felt that it would be helpful to have ‘more faith development from the pulpit regarding services of Word and Communion’. ‘Future paths seem to be either more Services of Word & Communion or New centres of Faith covering larger geographic areas.’

One group shared that ‘much discussion was held about the use of technology for providing Mass, but this group found that watching rather than participating was not satisfactory. Would a Mass by Zoom be more participatory than streaming?’ Perhaps this could be tried on occasion for those who do not have the opportunity to attend church due to being housebound.

We should try out new things, even if they may not work, this too is an opportunity to learn and grow. We need to take small steps and make a difference. We have the courage to try new things. Lay people need training and encouragement to identify future needs and prepare to respond to them. We would like to weave relationships and learn from each other as we strive to fulfil the needs of others. We need to compare, contrast and learn from the experiences and activities of other parishes on Anglesey and beyond.

It is positive that in the grounds of three of our churches “wild meadows” have been developed. These meadows are home to a richness of species of different native wildflower and fungi species which in turn support a huge number of invertebrates, birds, and mammals. It is good that we are playing a part in this. The management of these meadows is also another opportunity for members of our communities to get involved and work together.

Many groups echoed the need to encourage and offer personal invitation to people to encourage participation in church activities, saying, ‘we must reach out, there is definitely scope in being more ecumenical. Ecumenical events and friendships open up new avenues of worship, learning and development. We could share our buildings and facilities with the local

community.’ Ecumenical gatherings give us hope, new experiences and broadening perspectives. ‘We would like to work closely with our other churches and other faith communities; possibilities may be social clubs etc.’ As numbers in all churches dwindle, we could work together more in the community.

The possibilities of events like festivals, walks, picnics, meals, etc. with a less “Religious” theme will need the involvement of a large group of willing helpers outside of the core group of workers.

Zoom gives an opportunity to meet across wider communities – let’s develop this. Zoom events and opportunities for faith development, meetings etc. should be continued and developed; it also reduces the need to travel so gives greater access to more people to participate. ‘Zoom has helped some to experience the wider church. May modern technology keep us in contact with the wider church and open new horizons.’

That we look for opportunities to engage with families within our community whatever that may look like. It was expressed that ‘We should not fret about the youth in our church, this issue is impacted by a demographic on in our area. It was suggested that perhaps we could help our young people by linking up with Colwyn Bay youth group?’

‘We are willing and encouraged to look forward rather than backwards.’ One group reminds us that, ‘We are the ones we have been waiting for! We must do what we can with what gifts we have to share. Don’t fall into the trap of saying ‘if only this... if only that...’ We are each called to serve to ‘Do what I can – it’s not an all or nothing involvement – what I have to give is enough and that’s okay. So, ‘Be there when you can be – be involved and share what you do have to offer’.

One group suggested that they agree ‘3 achievable goals actioned in our parish e.g. After Mass get together. As we have a Saturday evening Mass, we’ll look into having a summer barbecue. We will bring back donation boxes for the food bank.

Another group encourages us ‘To have an expectation of new life and healing as the Holy Spirit moves and works among us’ and reminds us ‘Where two or three are gathered there I am among you - grow in faith and hope – remember and know that with God nothing is impossible. Another group states ‘The people are the Church not just the buildings, Lay participation is key on the Island, anticipate new life and trust that God will help us find a way.’ A member of the group shared words from a song that came to mind, ‘Jesus you are my only desire and in the heart of my friends I find you.’

The following feedback reflects on how ‘Synodality demands a huge shift in the way things have been. We are called to learn to listen deeply to one another, through relationships of mutuality, equality and respect and particularly to those who have no voice or are marginalised. This needs to happen through building relationships in small groups, through working together on projects that bring life.’

‘The laity are beginning to grow new ways of building community, networks of connection, encouragement and support of one another, without the constraints of geographic boundaries, parish territories or a stifling need to seek permission that results from an unhealthy deference to clergy. There is no need to let structures catch-up first. We recognise there will be no paths of hope opening up for us unless we open them ourselves.’

In the words of one group: ‘Keep going, persevere!’ In the words of another: ‘Stay positive, keep believing and work for changes that we might not see.’

We have recognised throughout our conversations that our communities are aging. In the light of that fact, I include by way of encouragement, a quote from Pope Francis’ General Audience last Wednesday 15<sup>th</sup> June 2022:

**POPE FRANCIS *GENERAL AUDIENCE St Peter's Square Wednesday, 15 June 2022***

It is precisely the *Christian community* that must take care of the elderly: relatives and friends, but the community. Visiting the elderly must be done by many, together and often... especially now that the number of elderly people has grown considerably, also in relation to the young, since we are in this demographic winter, we have fewer children, and there are many elderly people and few young ones...

Even in old age one can, or rather, one has, to serve the community. It is good for the elderly to continue to cultivate the responsibility of serving, overcoming the temptation to step aside. ... The elderly who retain the disposition for healing, consolation, intercession for their brothers and sisters — be they disciples, centurions, people disturbed by evil spirits, those who are rejected — are perhaps the highest witness of the purity of this gratitude that accompanies faith... The gratitude of elderly people for the gifts received from God during their life, as Peter’s mother-in-law teaches us, restores to the community the joy of living together, and confers to the faith of the disciples the essential feature of its destination.

At the outset of the Synodal process on Anglesey, time was spent discussing what a ‘synodal church’ might mean and some felt that the aim of this synodal process was not clear. Others expressed a certain amount of cynicism about what could be achieved, would their contribution be lost in the synthesising of reports, would their views be edited out? However, the experience within our communities, at least, has been positive with people expressing that whilst it is true that ‘we have participated in several Parish Assemblies over the years, the conversation now has been much broader’. The participants have been able to dialogue and listen to one another’s reflections, ‘we have learnt a different way to meet and listen deeply.’

Pauline Thomas (*Pastoral Associate*) June 2022

On behalf of Fr Joe Daly OMI & Fr Frank Murray OMI & the Catholic Communities of Anglesey