



# CENTRE FOR ECCLESIAL ETHICS

Becoming a good and better Church



S E M I N A R S E R I E S 2 0 2 1

Our Church emerging from Covid: preparing the future

## F I N A L R E P O R T

‘Each crisis has a lesson to teach us; we need to learn  
how to listen for it with the ear of the heart.’

(Pope Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, 232)

## FOREWORD

On 27<sup>th</sup> January 2021, as we gathered across *Zoom* for the first of our seminars, the World Health Organisation reported 4,104,907 confirmed cases of Covid-19 in its' weekly epidemiological update, that had sadly resulted in 2,112,759 deaths.<sup>1</sup>

On 25<sup>th</sup> August 2021, at the time of publication, the World Health Organisation reported that 213,050,725 cases of covid-19 had been confirmed globally, that had sadly resulted in 4,448,352 confirmed deaths. Furthermore 32.5% of the global population have received at least one Covid-19 vaccination, and 5.04 billion doses have been administered across the world, whilst only '1.4% of people in low-income countries have received at least one dose.'<sup>2</sup>

It is however people and lives, not numbers and graphs that tell the story of what we have personally and collectively experienced across our world and our Church during this time of pandemic - it is stories rather than statistics that will reveal to us the depth of our experience and the hope and reach of our response. It is the experience at the heart of some of these stories that provided the locus from which we began our seminar series.

---

<sup>1</sup> See <https://covid19.who.int>, [accessed 25.08.21]

<sup>2</sup> See Our World in Data, <https://ourworldindata.org/covid-vaccinations>, [accessed 25.08.21]

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION.....	4
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: The seeds of a new ecclesial imaginary .....	6
BACKGROUND: THE CENTRE FOR ECCLESIAL ETHICS .....	14
AIMS: SEMINAR SERIES 2021 Our Church emerging from Covid - preparing the future .....	17
AIMS AND FOCUS OF EACH SEMINAR .....	19
METHOD .....	20
SEMINAR PARTICIPANTS .....	23
CEE SEMINAR ONE .....	32
<i>FOCUS</i> .....	32
<i>KEY FINDINGS FROM SEMINAR ONE</i> .....	33
Emergent themes: headlines .....	33
Emergent themes: in more detail.....	34
<i>SEMINAR ONE SUMMARY REPORT</i> .....	42
<i>LOOKING TO SEMINAR TWO</i> .....	42
CEE SEMINAR TWO.....	43
<i>FOCUS</i> .....	43
<i>KEY FINDINGS FROM SEMINAR TWO</i> .....	45
What is missing – What is new? .....	45
Fruits of personal discernment: Prioritised Emergent Themes.....	47
Fruits of communal discernment: Prioritised Emergent Themes.....	49
Communal discernment of one key prioritised emergent theme .....	49
<i>SEMINAR TWO CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS</i> .....	50
<i>SEMINAR TWO SUMMARY REPORT</i> .....	51
<i>LOOKING TO SEMINAR THREE</i> .....	51
CEE SEMINAR THREE .....	52
<i>FOCUS</i> .....	53
<i>KEY FINDINGS FROM SEMINAR THREE</i> .....	55
<i>SEMINAR THREE CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS</i> .....	57
<i>SEMINAR THREE SUMMARY REPORT</i> .....	58
CEE SEMINAR SERIES CONCLUDING REFLECTION .....	59
CEE SEMINAR SERIES ECCLESIAL IMPLICATIONS.....	62
LOOKING AHEAD: <i>Centre for Ecclesial Ethics 2021-22 and beyond</i> .....	66
CONCLUSION .....	67
APPENDICES .....	71

## INTRODUCTION

*'When the storm passes, I ask you Lord, that you return us better, as you once dreamed us.'*<sup>3</sup>

In the early weeks of 2020 the Covid-19 pandemic engulfed our world. On 27<sup>th</sup> March 2020 a frail yet determined Pope Francis emerged into the midst of a rainswept and empty St Peter's Square to pray for and with a people and a world engulfed in the storm of the pandemic. He reminded us that the Lord is 'calling on us to seize this time of trial as a time of choosing' – not as a time of God's judgement, but a time of 'our judgement: a time to choose what matters and what passes away, a time to separate what is necessary from what is not...a time to get our lives back on track with regard to you, Lord, and to others.'<sup>4</sup>

As the pandemic swept further across the globe and the scale and horror of this human tragedy unfolded, new injustices that scar humanity and old inequalities that disfigure our world arrested our gaze and held our ear. For the Church, the depth of existing crises were exposed with even greater clarity during this time, whilst the pandemic also revealed new unforeseen challenges before the Church alongside genuine opportunities of renewal for the ecclesial community. It was and remains a time of deep disruption for our world and the Church, both locally and globally, a time of deep trauma that demands a faithful but creative response from people and leaders alike. It is a time of *krisis* and *kairos* for both our wider world and the ecclesial community – that summons all within and beyond the Church to a deep solidarity, a preferential attentiveness beyond ourselves and a more just future. It ushers in for the Church, both local and universal, a graced opportunity to re-imagine 'new wineskins' as we begin to glimpse and prepare a future beyond Covid, both in our world and our Church as a communion of disciples with Jesus Christ.

The *Centre for Ecclesial Ethics* - which was established with the aim of enabling and equipping the Church, as communities and individuals, to become a good and better Church in its witness to the gospel of Jesus Christ and its service to the world - proposed *a seminar series through which we*

---

<sup>3</sup> Alexis Valdes, *Hope*, in Pope Francis, 'Let Us Dream: The path to a better future', edited by Austen Ivereigh, (London: Simon & Schuster, 2020), p. 140

<sup>4</sup> Pope Francis, *Urbi et Orbi: Extraordinary Moment of Prayer*, 27.03.20, [https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2020/documents/papa-francesco\\_20200327\\_omelia-epidemia.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2020/documents/papa-francesco_20200327_omelia-epidemia.html), [accessed 23.11.20]

*might discern and identify these challenges and opportunities before the Church as we emerge from Covid and re-imagine our ecclesial response.*

Thus the three-fold seminar series ***Our Church emerging from Covid: preparing the future*** was convened from January to March 2021 with eighteen participants from across the Catholic community in England, Wales and Ireland. Our experience across this time of pandemic, both personal and collective, was the originating source for our dialogue, in conversation with scripture and our wider ecclesial and ethical tradition. The fruits of the discernment, analysis and ecclesial re-imagining that defined this rich dialogue are published in this report.

Following this introduction is an extended executive summary, that offers an overview and a reflection upon the key findings from our seminar journey, and also a background to the *Centre for Ecclesial Ethics* that offers some context to the seminar series. This is followed by an overview of the aims and method of the seminar series alongside an important introduction to the participants who engaged in each of the seminars. The focus, findings and summary of each of the three seminars is then outlined, before drawing together some provisional conclusions that explore and analyse the rich opportunities, clear challenges and re-imagined possibilities that have emerged for our wider Church and the contribution that the *Centre for Ecclesial Ethics* can make to this ongoing collaborative venture. The full transcript report of each of the three seminars are to be found in the appendices. The fruits and conclusions of our rich dialogue and discernment find an intentional echo in many sections of the report, so that as with the process of our seminar series, the encounter with these echoes for the reader may nurture an ongoing and deepening reflection upon the fruits of our dialogue with each resonance.

The *Centre for Ecclesial Ethics* would like to express our sincere gratitude for the conscientious participation and wise contribution from all our participants in this important endeavour.

**Dr Liam Hayes**  
*Director, Centre for Ecclesial Ethics*

*September 2021*

*Many people want to return to normality ...but the pandemic is a crisis, and we do not emerge from a crisis the same as before: either we come out of it better, or we come out of it worse. We must come out of it better, .... Today we have an opportunity to build something different.<sup>5</sup>*

### ***Becoming a good and better Church as we emerge from Covid***

At the time of writing our world continues to be engulfed in the horror of the Covid-19 global pandemic that has taken too many lives, brought illness and suffering to millions, and continues to disrupt the lives, livelihoods and relationships of each and all to varying degrees. Whilst the severity of the health impact from the pandemic appears to be weakening in some countries with the wealth and infrastructure to facilitate a successful vaccination programme, the threat of new variants remains a serious threat.

Covid-19 continues however to tear through countries in the global south and across continents in which healthcare is too often a rare privilege rather than a shared gift, and in which access to vaccines is often prohibited by the behaviour and policy of others. Thus whilst countries and international alliances continue to wrestle with the ethical implications of a just and strategic distribution of vaccines, the Church across the world is called to remain focussed on addressing the injustices unveiled and exacerbated by the pandemic and attending to the trauma and pain that demands healing and tenderness.

It is in the very midst of this historical and ecclesial context that Pope Francis, recognising the significance of the *kairos* nature of this global disruption, has called the universal Church in every parish, diocese and nation to synod – to a shared pathway of walking together and listening, reflecting and discerning what it means to be a Church of communion, participation and mission - as we continue this next chapter of our shared pilgrimage as the holy people of God.

This papal call to synod, that summons the Church to a deep universal experience of discernment, through the practice of an attentive listening to all voices, not least those neglected and unheard in

---

<sup>5</sup> Pope Francis, *General Audience*, 19.08.20, [http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/audiences/2020/documents/papa-francesco\\_20200819\\_udienza-generale.html](http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/audiences/2020/documents/papa-francesco_20200819_udienza-generale.html), [accessed 16.03.21]

the life of the Church and our world, chimes clearly and loudly with the principle outcomes of the seminar series of the *Centre for Ecclesial Ethics* **Our Church emerging from Covid: preparing the future**, the fruits of which are shared in this report.

Our seminar participants reflected that it is *listening* and *attentiveness, accompaniment* and *discernment*, that have not only crystallised as hallmarks of the magisterium and papacy of Francis, with which God has gifted the Church, but that they have coalesced perhaps more importantly as the deep-rooted longings and desires of the pilgrim people of God within and beyond our Church, and offer a deep insight into the 'joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties'<sup>6</sup> of women and men of our time that have been unveiled more forensically through this Covid-19 pandemic.

It is same gospel practices therefore that now arise for a Church emerging from Covid, seeking to be defined by integrity and credibility, to inhabit and embrace both personally and collectively, if we are not only to 'recognize and understand the world in which we live, its explanations, its longings, and its often dramatic characteristics'<sup>7</sup> through a deep and attentive listening that is infused with a graced humility; but also to more faithfully and tenderly attend to the fragile, scarred and vulnerable humanity that at once we are both part of and walk alongside as we emerge from this pandemic.

For in our three-fold seminar series that spanned the months of January to March 2021, and engaged eighteen participants, lay and ordained, from across parishes, catholic agencies, networks and academia, a **call to deep attentiveness** emerges as both the rich opportunity and the critical challenge before us as Church as we begin to reimagine the shape and pattern of ecclesial life in service of the world through and beyond Covid. This call to attentiveness, that presents as both opportunity and challenge, finds a two-fold expression in the urgent need to attend to both the **trauma of each and all** experienced through and beyond this time of Covid, and the critical ecclesiological need to attend to **the neglected and unheard voices** across and beyond our Church - two of the critical 'signs-of-the-times' identified by participants as confronting our Church. Such attentiveness was identified as integral and constitutive of what it means to become a *good and faithful Church* as we emerge from Covid if it is to effectively and faithfully witness to the gospel in service of our fragile people and our scarred world.

---

<sup>6</sup> *Gaudium et Spes*, 1 [http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_cons\\_19651207\\_gaudium-et-Spes\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_cons_19651207_gaudium-et-Spes_en.html), [accessed 22/06/21]

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid*, 4.

This deep attentiveness we reflected would necessarily attend therefore not only to the human crisis pertaining to the physical, psychological, emotional and spiritual trauma that arises from the sickness and suffering, the death and grief, the loss and isolation, that have been both personally and collectively experienced during this time of pandemic; but also to the systemic and structural trauma of unveiled injustices and inequalities that have been revealed and exacerbated through this time of pandemic that can no longer be ignored, and significantly include the injustices experienced by people in the poorest economic situations, by people of colour, by women and by children within and beyond the life of the Church. Such ecclesial **attentiveness** in response to this trauma we concluded - drawing upon the principle of the *preferential option for the poor* from our Church's tradition - would carry a preferential and intentional attentiveness to the voices and experience of those women and men and children most deeply impacted and traumatised and who are so often neglected in our societies, if not our ecclesial communities, and thus merits the focus of much of our ecclesial energy as we emerge from the intensity of the pandemic.

This deep attentiveness we further reflected would necessarily extend to the critical ecclesiological need to attend to **the neglected and unheard voices** across and beyond our Church, to those on the peripheries who have been silenced or quietened, to those marginalised and excluded by Church structures and practices, to those voices disillusioned or disconnected, alongside those who are currently familiar and at home in our Church. For such an inattentive ecclesial neglect of the different voices, experience and wisdom of the diverse pilgrim people of God in the development of the life, teaching and praxis of the Church constitutes a grave challenge and a scandalous stumbling block for a Church we reflected seeking to flourish in its service and mission as it emerges from Covid - for it unveils a Church that will struggle to hear and encounter the voice and breath of God's Holy Spirit from the 'rising of the sun to its setting' - blowing and living, breathing and revealing in the lives and wisdom and voices of the faithful people of God, gathered within and dispersed beyond our ecclesial walls.<sup>8</sup>

Such attentive ecclesiological listening that responds to this challenge before the Church would therefore also carry a particular preferential attentiveness we concluded to the stories and experience of those identified as particularly neglected in this current ecclesial imaginary, namely

---

<sup>8</sup> Cf. 'In all the baptised, from first to last, the sanctifying power of the Spirit is at work. The people of God is holy thanks to this anointing, which makes it infallible in *credendo*. This means that it does not err in faith, even though it may not find words to explain that faith. The Spirit guides it in truth and leads it to salvation... God furnishes the totality of the faithful with an instinct of faith - *sensus fidei* - which helps them to discern what is truly of God.' *Evangelii Gaudium*, 119 (citing *Lumen Gentium*, 12).

women and people of colour, children and young people, and women and men who have been marginalised for their sexual orientation. It is through such an expanded attentiveness to the whole body of Christ, each part of which is intrinsic to the whole, that we can realise a richer and more accurate understanding of who we are and what is precious to each and all, and thus expand and enrich our understanding of humanity that more accurately and authentically informs and shapes not only our future ethics, but also our operant ecclesiology and the focus of our shared ministry.

Such an evangelical initiative would impel the Church to cast its ear firstly, but not exclusively, towards the experience of the those who are currently neglected and unheard, the contemporary 'little ones' to whom Christ preferentially attended in his life and ministry and therefore can be seen to facilitate not only an ecclesial cognitive expansion but also a just expansion of attention and love to the other, that constitutes an integral expansion of living justly itself for the Church. The committed preferential ecclesial moral choice to spend time with, dwell with, and listen attentively to the marginalised, neglected and unheard is value laden with the virtues of solidarity, inclusive love and justice that are exemplified in this ecclesial practice, and reflect the divine partiality of Christ - that whilst beginning with those excluded, extends and grows through an attentive ear, a focussed gaze and active presence to engage and justly include all the People of God. Such an ecclesial attentiveness therefore whilst admittedly a practice whose ethical imperative is rooted in an epistemic, divine and moral partiality - is neither exclusive or one of contraction, for it can realise for our Church emerging from Covid a just and inclusive expansion in experiential knowledge, attentive love and ecclesial participation.

This ecclesial embrace of *deep attentiveness* we concluded can begin to shape our faithful and authentic response to the challenges identified and find expression in the gospel practices of a deep attentive listening, a mutual accompaniment and a universal inclusive engagement in communal discernment, that with God's grace can lead to a re-imagined Church defined by universal *participation* and active agency, deepened *communion* and co-responsibility in *mission* – fruits and objectives that chime with the rhythm and rhyme of our approaching global Church synod.

It is our hope that through such discernment and synod, our ecclesial listening will avoid exclusivity in favour of an inclusive accessibility in its structure, method and focus, so that as a newly sensitised people and a rigorously conscientized Church, together we will attune our hearts and vision to the challenges and opportunities, joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the people of this time as

we emerge from Covid, and that *walking together* we can renew and reshape the wineskins that carry the treasure the Lord has given to us all to share - a renewal and reshaping that begins with the earthen vessels that are ourselves in conversation with the Risen Lord.

Whilst a deep and expansive attentiveness and an inclusive communal ecclesial discernment therefore were identified as foundational for a new pathway for the Church emerging from Covid to address the key challenges and opportunities before it, the ecclesiological implications of such a pathway attracted significant analysis and reflection and allowed our seminar participants, through a limited engagement in the same ecclesial method and journey that they proposed - of attentiveness and discernment - to identify the defining principles, values and relationships that they see as essential to becoming a good and better Church.

In the main body of the report therefore we will see that the ‘full and active **participation**’ of all the faithful people of God, both lay and ordained, in all areas of Church life that includes worship, outreach, decision-making, governance, ministry and leadership, is identified as *critical* for our Church to be competent, confident and credible in its response to the ecclesial challenges that have been further revealed and unveiled during this time of Covid through a systemic deficit in such participation - for our ecclesial renewal essentially ‘involves a continuing process of listening, learning, reflecting and teaching [in which] every member of the community has a part to play.’<sup>9</sup>

We will also see that an embrace and validation of a **plurality in ecclesial expressions of faith, ministry and practice** across and beyond parishes and dioceses, is *necessary* for the diverse and expanded picture of the body of Christ to be reflected in both our espoused and operant ecclesiology, and that a **blended ecclesiology**, that draws directly from the fruits and blessings of our ecclesial pandemic experience, can enable us to reflect more deeply upon the meaning and implications of such a new way of ‘fitting together’. We will observe that a new **ecclesial culture** that fosters a multi-dimensional and structural ecclesial attentiveness to the *least breath of the Spirit*<sup>10</sup> across all the faithful, lay and ordained, and finds expression in both governance and wider ecclesial practices, is foundational for the recovery, nurturing and sustaining of the credibility of our fractured Church.

---

<sup>9</sup> ARCIC II, *Life in Christ: Morals, Communion and the Church*, 29, [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/pontifical\\_councils/chrstuni/angl-comm-docs/rc\\_pc\\_chrstuni\\_doc\\_19930906\\_life-in-christ\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/chrstuni/angl-comm-docs/rc_pc_chrstuni_doc_19930906_life-in-christ_en.html), [accessed 05.03.16]

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Nick Austin, ‘Discernment as a work of the Church’, *The Way*, 58 (4), pp. 7-16

An important corollary of this that merits further attention and reflection is how such a diverse and catholic Church can flourish and grow in the midst of healthy and creative expressions of **ecclesial difference and disagreement**; as does how the **shared co-responsibility of leadership, governance and ministry**, that has been exercised so fruitfully during this time of pandemic in the local and diocesan Church, might be translated and embedded more permanently in the life of the Church as we emerge from Covid and thus enable all the baptised to exercise more fully their priestly and prophetic ministry.

It is however perhaps a deepened appreciation and enriched understanding of **connectedness, people and relationships** that has emerged as the common thread that reveals what really matters, what is really precious to our seminar participants, and thus offers a particular insight into what the people of God deeply value and treasure from across the many themes that populated our rich seminar dialogue. In the midst of the Covid isolation and disconnection of so many from each other, emerged a renewed understanding and appreciation of the importance of people and relationships in friends and family, neighbour and parishioners, strangers and colleagues for our human and ecclesial flourishing, and that of the whole web of life that populates God's creation.

This was not reducible to an instrumentalised or functional contribution that such people and creation make to our lives – not withstanding the important way that key workers were being revalued – but it was a rediscovery in this period, when our time and attention were no longer compressed by a suffocating rapidification, of the importance of interconnectedness and intrinsic relationality for human growth and flourishing, that clearly extended to God's wider creation. In the **absence of presence**, our understanding of the gift of each other, and our need of each other, intensified and deepened. The words on the page of *Laudato Si'* were taking shape in the breathing and rhythm of our pandemic daily living – understanding anew that we and everything is radically interconnected – as we became re-sensitised to the deep truth that we are a people who need each other, God and all creation for beauty and joy, in suffering and healing, for living and dying - and it is for this that we need to make time and create space in our world and importantly in our Church, as we continue to respond as an interconnected people to the ecological-economic crisis before our interconnected world.

It is **relationships and people** that we remembered were precious and critical for us personally, for our communities, for our Church and for our world. Thus to remain sensitised and attentive to 'who

matters' we recalled the new creative expressions that connected people online and at a distance, for both faith and social, familial and parochial, educational and work experiences, that were preferentially extended to those particularly vulnerable through foodbanks and lay led online worship for example, through phone ministry and bereavement support. As such our participants identified that it is **people and relationships** that should be at the heart of our Christ shaped Church as we emerge from Covid – people, relationships and encounter defining the horizon of our worship and action, our outreach and self-understanding, for 'being a Christian' as Francis reminds us, 'is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction.'<sup>11</sup>

It is in this light we concluded that our community might be transfigured from a Church defined by transaction and consumption, to a Church infused by relationality and defined by a deep and radical interconnectedness in which all are both physician and patient in ministry and mission, belonging and participation, for 'whenever we encounter another person in love, we learn something new about God. Whenever our eyes are opened to acknowledge the other, we grow in the light of faith and knowledge of God.'<sup>12</sup> In such a new ecclesial imaginary, our new way of fitting together, we concluded that our Church in this next period of time is called to focus its energy and attention on people rather than programmes, calling us to 'remove our sandals before the sacred ground of the other'<sup>13</sup> so that the '**art of accompaniment**' and **becoming a neighbour** to God, creation and each other will be defining of each and all of us as a community of disciples. The Covid-19 pandemic has revealed we reflected a luminal space from which the Church faces a moral choice regarding the focus, shape and imaginary of our Church as we prepare to walk together into the future with Jesus Christ.

It is perhaps through a deep immersion into the lives of each other, through a deeply attentive ecclesial encounter, both within and beyond our porous ecclesial walls, that we are called therefore to let the voice, images and story of our fellow human beings make an appeal on us and our moral imagination, to make room for new experiences and wisdom to be heard, so that they might ignite, mobilise and stretch our ecclesial imagination and allow us to journey through and beyond our current ecclesial vision and understanding, and re-imagine our Church, our ethics and our future as

---

<sup>11</sup>, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 7, [http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost\\_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco\\_esortazione-ap\\_20131124\\_evangelii-gaudium.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html), [accessed 18.05.21] quoting Pope Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*, 1

<sup>12</sup> *Evangelii Gaudium*, 272.

<sup>13</sup> *Evangelii Gaudium*, 169

we emerge from Covid. It is into such a new ecclesial imaginary that we are invited to walk, in which the leaders of the Church will be immersed into the ordinary lives of the people of God, and the wider people of God will be immersed into full participation into the life of a listening and attentive Church.

Such an expression of Church can create a place and space we concluded in which healing can begin and continue through both doing and belonging, in relationships and prayer, outreach and ritual as each person responds and recovers from this time of Covid at different times and at a different pace. It is through this attentive accompaniment, belonging and deepened communion that we believe our sustainable and faithful ecclesial renewal will take root and take God's shape, so that together we can competently and creatively, confidently and credibly address the critical opportunities and challenges before our Church as we emerge from Covid and become the Church God calls us to be. It is **people and relationships** that will thread together these **new wineskins of attentiveness** and **discernment** and enable us to become **a good and better Church** we concluded as we emerge from Covid.

*I. The origins and aims of the Centre for Ecclesial Ethics*

The Centre for Ecclesial Ethics was established with the aim of enabling and equipping the Church local and universal, diocesan and parochial, as communities and individuals, to become a good and better Church in its witness to the gospel of Jesus Christ as the pilgrim people of God.

The Centre for Ecclesial Ethics (CEE) sits within the Person H Beaufort Institute of Theology, Cambridge and is located in the Catholic Church in England and Wales. Its focus is however both within and beyond the ecclesial shores of the United Kingdom, where it hopes to develop and sustain mature relationships and partnerships of learning and practice with the wider Christian community.

The initial aims of the CEE are to identify and engage with the emerging challenges and opportunities that confront the contemporary Church; contribute towards a multi-disciplinary response to such challenges and opportunities; and support and enable the Church, in all its diverse expression, to develop and embed practices and systems that can contribute to becoming a better Church. In this light it is hoped that the ecclesial community can be formed by a 'discerning responsibility, a capacity to respond courageously to new and valued insights and new needs, and a readiness to take the risk.'<sup>14</sup>

The CEE is at home within the domain of ecclesial ethics, yet as noted above, it will engage across disciplines. The foundational method of the CEE is one of ongoing interdisciplinary discernment and analysis - a method that is rooted in dialogue through a deep attentive listening to the diverse repository of wisdom, both within and beyond the ecclesial community, that necessarily includes the experience and wisdom of the holy people of God, Scripture and Tradition, contemporary ethical discourse, and relevant professional disciplines - a 'continuing process of listening, learning, reflecting and teaching [in which] every member of the community has a part to play.'<sup>15</sup>

The contribution of the work of the CEE to the wider conversation whose focus is ecclesial renewal, is notably provisional in nature, and but one contribution amongst many, and will therefore seek

---

<sup>14</sup> Bernard Haring, *Free and Faithful in Christ: Volume I*, (London: St Paul's Publications 1978), p. 2,

<sup>15</sup> ARCIC II, *Life in Christ: Morals, Communion and the Church*, 29.

critical and supportive engagement with her contemporary peers and parallel institutes. ‘Let anyone who has an ear, listen to what the Spirit is saying to the Churches.’<sup>16</sup>

## ***II. Scoping the initial focus and work of the CEE***

*‘Each crisis has a lesson to teach us; we need to learn how to listen for it with the ear of the heart.’<sup>17</sup>*

*‘At these times, it becomes all the more important to create opportunities for speaking heart to heart.’<sup>18</sup>*

To determine the initial focus and work of the CEE, we had decided to organise a series of face-to-face ‘scoping’ seminars across England and Wales, that would enable us to listen, discern and identify through dialogue the principal challenges and opportunities that confront the contemporary Church.

In the early weeks of 2020 the world became engulfed in the Covid-19 pandemic.

After a pause to reflect and reorientate ourselves, we began to reshape our framework for scoping the work of the Centre, and with Pope Francis echoing in our ears we determined that the most fitting way forward to discern the aforementioned ecclesial challenges and opportunities could only now originate through an engagement with the personal, collective and ecclesial experience of this coronavirus pandemic in which we are currently immersed, for ‘each crisis’ does indeed have ‘a lesson to teach us’ and ‘we need to learn how to listen for it with the ear of the heart.’<sup>19</sup>

In order to facilitate this engagement, it is proposed that the work of the CEE for the first twelve months will comprise of three phases. Phase One will consist of a series of three virtual seminars for eighteen participants that explores the crises, challenges and opportunities that confront the Church as discerned through an engagement with our personal and collective experience of Covid-19, and critically analysed through a diverse palette of ecclesial wisdom that can begin to re-imagine a sustainable ecclesial renewal.

---

<sup>16</sup> Revelation 3:22 (NRSV)

<sup>17</sup> *Amoris Laetitia*, 232, [http://www.vatican.va/content/dam/francesco/pdf/apost\\_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco\\_esortazione-ap\\_20160319\\_amoris-laetitia\\_en.pdf](http://www.vatican.va/content/dam/francesco/pdf/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20160319_amoris-laetitia_en.pdf), [accessed 19.11.20]

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid*, 233

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid*, 232

Phase Two will engage with and build upon the focus, analysis and fruits of the first seminar series through an engagement with the wider Church community in order to frame such a new ecclesial imaginary in a local ecclesial context.

Phase Three in the autumn of 2021 will aim to support the ongoing synodal process that will be taking place across the local and universal Church from October 2021 and the Centre will also host both an inaugural Pope Francis CEE Lecture that examines the principle findings of the seminar series and an interdisciplinary seminar that explores the wider implications of the seminar series research through multiple academic lenses, and to identify the new ecclesial challenges and opportunities that will be emerging upon the horizon.

*'with the help of the Holy Spirit, it is the task of the entire People of God, especially pastors and theologians, to hear [and listen to], distinguish and interpret the many voices of our age, and to judge them in the light of the divine word, so that revealed truth can always be more deeply penetrated, better understood and set forth to greater advantage.'*<sup>20</sup>

*'to hope is to be open to the future and to be open to the future is to be open to God.'*<sup>21</sup>

The principle aim of our seminar series is to explore through our ongoing experience of the global pandemic of Covid-19, what is unveiled and revealed to us as the emerging issues and crises, inequalities and injustices, challenges and opportunities that confront the Church as it begins to emerge from the pandemic.

Some of these challenges and opportunities will have been present and embedded across our Church and society long before the pandemic, and others will have arisen and increased directly through the pandemic. Over the last year-and-a-half however, we have become increasingly aware that Covid-19 has more forensically unveiled the symptoms and root causes of such challenges, and yet has also revealed the pathways of opportunity for a better Church that open up before us today.

Through the process of this seminar series therefore, we aim to identify the significant ecclesial issues with which the CEE is called to engage and thus to map the focus and terms of the CEE programme for the coming two years. Thus the specific aims of our threefold seminar series *Our Church emerging from Covid: preparing the future* will be to identify the emergent issues that:

- challenge and confront the Church, as we emerge from the Covid-19 pandemic, and stand as potential barriers to becoming a good and better Church
- arise as opportunities for the Church to shape and prepare a better future, as we emerge from the heights of the Covid-19 pandemic, and pose as catalysts and fruitful pathways to becoming a good and better Church

---

<sup>20</sup> *Gaudium et spes*, 44

<sup>21</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, *Address on Apostolic Journey to Benin*, 2011, [http://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2011/november/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_spe\\_20111119\\_corpo-diplom.html](http://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2011/november/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20111119_corpo-diplom.html), [access 21.11.20]

By the end of our three-fold seminar series, we will have begun to lay the foundations for a clearer understanding then of what it might mean to be a good and better Church, and its ecclesiological and ethical implications as we begin to tentatively emerge from Covid.

*Every renewal of the Church is essentially grounded in an increase of fidelity to her own calling...Christ summons the Church to continual reformation as she sojourns here on earth.*<sup>22</sup>

Our **first seminar** was about listening - listening attentively to our personal and collective experience through this time of the Covid-19 pandemic - with a focus upon ourselves, others in our communities and world, our faith and our Church. Our personal and collective experience across this period of time therefore presented itself as an apt locus from which to begin our listening and discernment together and tentatively uncover and identify the emergent issues before the Church as we emerge from Covid, for as Francis reminded us 'each crisis has a lesson to teach us; we need to learn how to listen for it with the ear of the heart.'<sup>23</sup>

The fruits of our listening in seminar one became the data set of experience from which we undertook our discernment and analysis, which was our focus during the **second seminar**. In this second seminar we attempted to discern and prioritise the key emerging ecclesial challenges and opportunities from those that we had uncovered and identified during our first seminar, for we as Church are called to 'recognize and understand the world in which we live, its explanations, its longings, and its often dramatic characteristics.'<sup>24</sup>

In our **third seminar** we began to re-imagine the shape and contours, the values, principles and practices that might define the new wineskins of a renewed ecclesial imaginary – how things might fit together in our Church post Covid – through which we can respond faithfully and creatively, ethically and sustainably to the prioritised ecclesial challenges and opportunities that we had discerned and identified in our second seminar, for 'whenever we make the effort to return to the source and to recover the original freshness of the Gospel, new avenues arise, new paths of creativity open up, with different forms of expression, more eloquent signs and words with new meaning for today's world.'<sup>25</sup>

---

<sup>22</sup> *Unitatis Redintegratio*, 6, [http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_decree\\_19641121\\_unitatis-redintegratio\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decree_19641121_unitatis-redintegratio_en.html) [accessed 02.03.16]

<sup>23</sup> *Amoris Laetitia*, 232.

<sup>24</sup> *Gaudium et Spes*, 4.

<sup>25</sup> *Evangelii Gaudium*, 11.

## METHOD

*'before speaking, we must take great care to listen not only to what [women and] men say, but more especially to what they have it in their hearts to say...All this we must remember and strive to put into practice on the example and precept of Christ.'*<sup>26</sup>

*'the ministry of listening has been entrusted to them by the one who is indeed the great listener and in whose work they are to participate. We should listen with the ears of God, so that we can speak the Word of God.'*<sup>27</sup>

The method that primarily defines our seminar series is listening - a deep and attentive listening to the experience, reflection and discernment of our seminar participants, that is a deep and attentive listening to the Holy Spirit echoing and breathing within and beyond each one of us.

It is a practice that creates a unique and liminal space for the ignition and mobilisation of the moral imagination of participants, and the wider Church. It is a practice that can realise a graced movement beyond the self, through which a new picture of the human and our Church can emerge, by an attentive encounter with experience, conveyed through image and story.

Our listening however is a practice that carries meaning and value not primarily because it can lead to an expanded repository of wisdom, significant though that is, but because it is formative and nurturing of what it means to be like Christ for our contemporary Church. Our listening in our seminars creates a space through which participants can belong, and moreover recognise that they belong in communion with each other and the broader community within which this practice is exercised. As such our seminar series method of deep attentive listening creates a sacred space of empathic connection, for 'the first service one owes to others in the community involves listening to them. Just as our love of God begins with listening to God's Word, the beginning of our love for other Christians is learning to listen to them.'<sup>28</sup>

Such attentive listening is demanding and costly at any time, and perhaps no more so through the aforementioned limitations of our zoom encounters, but the engagement in such a method is not only fruitful for our seminars but it is a method that is coherent and formative with the good and

---

<sup>26</sup> *Ecclesiam Suam*, 87, [http://w2.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_p-vi\\_enc\\_06081964\\_ecclesiam.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-vi_enc_06081964_ecclesiam.html), [accessed 02.06.21].

<sup>27</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, 'Life Together', in *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works, Volume 5*, edited by Geoffrey Kelly, translated by Daniel Bloesch and James Burtness (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), p. 98.

<sup>28</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, 'Life Together', p. 98

better Church that we seek to become. For deep attentive listening is an integral practice of the way of Christ, of authentic discipleship of the Christian community that is intrinsically 'good' to do.

Such deep attentive listening is moreover an inclusive and expansionist practice that can make space for the voices and experience of the excluded to be listened to and heard, an ethical preferential choice that can address and transform a narrow ecclesial and epistemic praxis that perpetuates an exclusion of such wisdom from the Church's anthropology, the development of its teaching and the exercise of ministry. For as Gutiérrez reminds the Church, we are not called to 'be the voice of the voiceless' for they have a voice themselves, and 'we must enable them to be heard.'<sup>29</sup> 'We must start', he concludes, 'by opening our ears and listening'<sup>30</sup> to those whose voices we currently neglect.'

This method of a preferential deep attentive listening will not only facilitate an ecclesial cognitive expansion but also a just expansion of attention and love to the other. Such an evangelical method calls us as Church to attune our ears firstly, but not exclusively, towards the experience of the those who are currently excluded, the 'little ones' to whom Christ preferentially attended in his life and ministry.

The corollary of listening in our method is **discernment** – both personal and collective - that enables an attunement of our vision, understanding and imagination to that of God. For our seminars it has been a 'graced practice of letting go and letting God lead us'<sup>31</sup> in what has been 'a serious effort to discover what it means to be in Christ.'<sup>32</sup> Our discernment in our seminars has invited us to listen to each other 'until breathing in the will to which God calls us.'<sup>33</sup>

Our seminar series has been defined therefore by **listening** and **discernment**, yet it has proven to be an experience of Church in which listening and discernment have not merely been tools to allow the path ahead to emerge for our Church that is attendant to the opportunities and challenges

---

<sup>29</sup> Fr. Gustavo Gutiérrez, *CAFOD Pope Paul VI Lecture*, 04.11.2005, cited in The Tablet, 12 November 2005, p. 37, <http://archive.thetablet.co.uk/article/12th-november-2005/37/hear-the-voices-of-the-poor>, [accessed 11.01.16]

<sup>30</sup> Gustavo Gutiérrez, *Power of the poor in history*, (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1983), p. 27

<sup>31</sup> Nick Austin, 'Francis: the discerning Pope', *Thinking Faith*, 09.03.2018, <https://www.thinkingfaith.org/articles/francis-discerning-pope>, [accessed 28.06.21]

<sup>32</sup> Rowan Williams, 'Making moral decisions' in *The Cambridge Companion to Christian Ethics*, edited by Robin Gill, (Cambridge: CUP, 2001), pp.3-15 (p. 6).

<sup>33</sup> Pope Francis, *Address of His Holiness Pope Francis during the meeting on the family*, 04.10.2014, [https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2014/october/documents/papa-francesco\\_20141004\\_incontro-per-la-famiglia.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2014/october/documents/papa-francesco_20141004_incontro-per-la-famiglia.html), [accessed 24.07.21]

before us, but importantly it has been not only a significant experience of a listening and discerning Church, but one through which each person present is changed and their imagination and vision expanded and enriched.

It is in this light that our seminar series is consonant with the spirit and practice of the recently announced Synod process by Pope Francis for the universal Church beginning in October 2021. Our seminars have proven to be a small, yet important example of a synodal Church that can be defined as a 'discerning Church, in which everyone listens to each other, in order to listen to the Holy Spirit'<sup>34</sup> and understand more deeply through communal reflection and prayerful deliberation a deeper understanding of the path to which God calls our Church as we emerge from Covid.

---

<sup>34</sup> Nick Austin, 'Discernment as a work of the Church', *The Way*, 58 (4), pp. 7-16

## SEMINAR PARTICIPANTS

This section that focuses on our seminar participants is intentionally included in this main body of the report, rather than in the appendices, to reflect the integral role that their participation and contribution occupies in this seminar research and the ongoing life of the Church and also the contextual significance of our personal and ecclesial stories and background.

The participants in this seminar series were drawn from across and beyond the ecclesial community in England and Wales: *from Catholic communities, Catholic agencies and networks, and academic institutions from Ireland and England*. Each participant was invited because they have a significant and valuable contribution to make to the seminar discernment and dialogue that can offer a more comprehensive and accurate picture of the contextual ecclesial landscape and enrich the proposed pathways of renewal that open up as the Church emerges from the pandemic.

It is hoped that Catholics across England and Wales recognise something of themselves in our seminar participants. Without such diverse contributions our discernment and analysis would be the lesser and important voices and insights would be missing from the rich palette of ecclesial wisdom of our community. The names and biographies are given as each participant wished to be introduced.

Anna ABRAM

Rosina ABUDULAI

Bridget Marie ALABI

Caroline ALFRED

Christine ALLEN

Piers BENN (listener/observer)

Frank CALLUS

Sean CONNOLLY

Celia DEANE-DRUMMOND

John FLANNERY

Liam HAYES

Nali NATHAN

Ethna REGAN

Catherine SEXTON

Margaret SIBERRY

Alan WILLIAMS

Isabelle WOODFORD

**Anna ABRAM** is Principal (in a shared role with Dr Sue Price) of the Margaret Beaufort Institute of Theology in Cambridge (MBIT). She was born in Poland. Before moving to Cambridge in April 2017, she was for 25 years at Heythrop College in various roles including Head of Pastoral and Social Studies Department and Senior Lecturer in Ethics. She also taught moral theology at Missionary Institute London, Middlesex University and on the Permanent Diaconate Formation Programme, St Mary's University, Twickenham. At MBIT she teaches 'Moral Development, Reasoning and Decision Making' and 'Ethics in Professional Context'. Together with Liam Hayes she has been involved in establishing the MBIT's Centre for Ecclesial Ethics. In December 2020 she published a paper 'From Moral Theology to Ecclesial Ethics' (Studia Nauk Teologicznych [Journal of the Polish Academy of Science]). Her short piece 'Ecclesial Ethics – A Way Forward?' appeared on Catholic Theological Ethics in the World Church Forum, (<http://www.catholicethics.com/forum-submissions/ecclesial-ethics-a-way-forward>) When she lived in London, she was active in RCIA, liturgical, catechetical and social justice activities. Currently she is not involved in parish life. She lives in Cambridge with an orange Rex Rabbit called 'Beau'.

**Rosina ABUDULAI** has lived in Cambridge for well over 30 years, having come originally from Ghana to join her husband in Aberdeen and then, with the family, they moved to Cambridge in the early 80s where he completed his PhD. Rosina has three adult professional daughters. She has maintained a link with her homeland Ghana where she visits regularly. She is a cradle/practicing Catholic. For many years from 1983, Rosina worked with three International Conservation organisations in Cambridge, including UNEP/WCMC, Fauna & Flora International and Bird Life International. With a degree background in Humanities (History & Geography), in 2007, while still working full time, Rosina decided to explore her faith at a deeper level and joined the Margaret Beaufort Institute of Theology, where she completed the part-time Catholic Life and Service programme, including an Advanced Certificate in Pastoral Counselling. Being the fine Institution that it is, Rosina found her time there addictive and proceeded to undertake and complete an MA course in Pastoral Theology through the Cambridge Theological Federation. She based her dissertation on the dichotomy between Mary and Martha, linking these with the working life of women. She is an alumna of the Margaret Beaufort Institute.

In the community, Rosina is drawn to, and is engaged with her environment, neighbours and friends alike, seeking especially to encourage the young to higher aspirations, and providing guidance and help, where necessary. She is regularly called upon by friends, family and neighbours for support and advice in the joys and challenges of life. Rosina has been an active parishioner at St Laurence's Church, Cambridge, for many years where she has been involved in many aspects of parish life, including baptismal preparation programme, music group, leader of the African choir, fundraising via African cuisine, member of the emergency prayer group, flower arranger, and Extraordinary Minister of the Eucharist. She played a key role in initiating a welcoming team which she serves on, and, driven by the African community and sanctioned by the then parish priest many years ago, led the organisation and start of the 31st December midnight Mass (which is not in the lectionary) to welcome the New Year at Church. A pre-Covid Mass much appreciated and attended by many parishioners across board. Currently, Rosina works part-time at her first parish in Cambridge, Our

Lady of the Assumption and the English Martyrs as Pastoral Assistant and as the RC Chaplain in the Anglia Ruskin University Interfaith Chaplaincy team. Here, she is involved in a list of items, including formation, baptism preparation, facilitation of groups/participation in prayer groups, provision of pastoral care, training, on Campus student/staff support, Catholic presence at Freshers Events, supporting formation of CathSoc societies, organising Mass, leading Rosary sessions, or reflections on Campus (pre-Covid), online provision of Thought of the Week amongst others.

Rosina works the rest of the time for herself, providing counselling, coaching and supporting working people find balance in work & life, as well as encouraging and preparing jobseekers and especially those who have suffered unexpected redundancy heal and find their feet in the working world. Above all, Rosina is keen to see the richness that diversity offers in our current world, fully utilised within, and outside the Church.

**Bridget Marie ALABI** is the founder of the Catholic Women Network. She is a social scientist & public health professional on a mission to support women to have healthy families, successful careers and to make a difference in the world & the Church. Her work began with a fascination for health; its social determinants and health inequalities. For instance, why some people are more vulnerable to disease than others. Her earlier work involved the use of geographic and spatial data to understand the connection between physical, socio-economic environments and health. However, after an unexplained stillbirth, her attention was drawn to women health and fertility. She has since investigated the health needs of women in different communities, developed population health profiles, made data driven recommendations for improving women's health and actively promoted healthy behaviours for better health outcomes.

Alongside her research work, she is also qualified as a holistic fertility therapist and has taught thousands of women to improve their well-being and fertility. Her work and research led to the creation of the New Eve Method and the development of a New Eve Theology. She has written and self-published several books on the subject. She is currently studying for a Professional Doctorate in Practical Theology with a view to exploring the challenges that Catholic women face and the extent to which these challenges have been influenced by the norms, guidelines, and expectations within the Church. She is keen to explore the possibility of building a new theology of woman based on the lived experiences of Catholic women in the 21st century.

My name is **Caroline ALFRED**. I am a mother of three, who has recently been promoted to a mother of 3 adults! I work as a science technician in a secondary school. While helping teachers with their daily tasks I get to integrate with children of different ethnicity, cultural and social backgrounds. I have been a part of St. Stephen's Parish for more than 30 years where I have found a home away from home! I serve in the Church as a Catechist and Eucharist Minister. In my spare time, I love to read and arrange flowers as to fit my introversion.

**Christine ALLEN** has been Director of CAFOD since March 2019 having spent twenty years in the international development sector holding senior posts in Christian Aid and Progressio (formerly CIIR). Before that she worked on issues of housing, homelessness and social inclusion. She has worked in Church-based organisations for many years, and has also been part of some committees for the Bishops Conference (world of work, public life and NCLA). She has been a trustee of Church Action on Poverty and the Manna daycentre. She currently does some work with the Jesuits through Pray As You Go and Thinking Faith.

She lives in North London with her family and is active in her local parish. Over the last year she has done a variety of local volunteering work to help her community survive the pandemic. She is interested in Catholic Social Teaching and likes reading theological books, but wouldn't call herself a theologian. Her formation came through the Young Christian Students so the "see judge act" approach frames her life!

**Piers BENN** has lectured in philosophy or medical ethics at several UK universities, including St. Andrews, Leeds, Imperial College London, Heythrop College and Fordham University London Centre (he expects to resume the latter position once the Covid situation is under control). He is the author of *Ethics* (Routledge 2001), *Commitment* (Acumen Press 2011) and most recently *Intellectual Freedom and the Culture Wars* (Palgrave Macmillan 2020). His interests are wide-ranging but focus on free speech and toleration, philosophy of religion, and applied ethics, including philosophy of psychiatry. He has been a member of the Battle of Ideas Committee since 2011, which organises high profile debates and discussions for a general audience, and is an occasional commentator for the British media.

I am **Frank CALLUS**, a retired secondary school Deputy Head, married with two adult children. I am the Chair of Trustees for ACTA – an organisation that aims to improve dialogue between clergy, religious and laity. We have some 1500 members across most of the dioceses of England and Wales. We have run a successful autumn series on the Post Pandemic Church and further events are planned for 2021. I am also the Vice-Chair of the Diocesan Evangelisation Commission for the Archdiocese of Cardiff, and have experience in Parish Council work and parish catechesis [RCIA] for over 10 years.

My name is **Sean CONNOLLY** and I am a priest at St. Stephen's Church, Manor Park in the diocese of Brentwood. I also work with the Centre for Theology and Community based in East London with a range of Christian Churches using the tools of Community Organizing to particularly encourage Catholic congregations to strengthen their internal Church community and develop leadership, and engage with the concerns of their neighbourhood. Our parish is also a member of Newham Citizens, part of the national Citizens U.K. alliance, and we are currently focusing our attention on addressing the housing crisis afflicting many of our parishioners. I see the pandemic exposing Church

weaknesses already present but offering opportunities to build new models to enable us to be more effective witnesses of the Gospel.

**Celia DEANE-DRUMMOND** is Director of the Laudato Si' Research Institute and Senior Research Fellow in theology at Campion Hall, University of Oxford. She is also honorary visiting Professor in Theology and Science at the University of Durham, UK and adjunct Professor of Theology at the University of Notre Dame. Her recent publications include *The Wisdom of the Liminal: Human Nature, Evolution and Other Animals* (2014), *Technofutures, Nature and the Sacred*, ed. with Sigurd Bergmann and Bronislaw Szerszynski (2015), *Ecology in Jürgen Moltmann's Theology*, 2nd edition, (2016), *Religion in the Anthropocene*, edited with Sigurd Bergmann and Markus Vogt (2017), *Theology and Ecology Across the Disciplines: On Care for Our Common Home*, edited with Rebecca Artinian Kaiser (2018), *The Evolution of Wisdom Volume 1: Theological Ethics Through a Multispecies Lens* (2019).

**John FLANNERY** is from the Lake District and educated by the Marist Brothers in Scotland. He owned and managed a printing company in London for many years before undertaking studies in theology at Heythrop College, University of London. A Diploma in Theology in 2000 was followed by an MA in Christianity and Interreligious Dialogue. His doctoral thesis focussed on the relations of the Catholic Church with Shi'a Islam and Eastern Christianity, as illustrated by the religio-diplomatic missions of the Portuguese Augustinians in early 17th century Persia. He was Projects Administrator for Heythrop's Centre for Christianity and Interreligious Dialogue, and subsequently Executive Administrator of the Centre for Eastern Christianity.

Having taken an active role in a large multicultural parish in East London, in 2010 John relocated to North Somerset and now belongs to a Bristol inner-city parish well known for its multifaceted outreach to those on the margins. He served for a number of years as a trustee of the Borderlands charity linked to the parish and which supports asylum-seekers and refugees. John was privileged to be involved in establishing a ministry in Clifton diocese for the LGBT+ community, and was recently appointed convenor of the newly-created South West branch of Quest, an organisation offering pastoral care and support to LGBT+ Catholics and others.

**Liam HAYES** is the Director of the Centre for Ecclesial Ethics at the Margaret Beaufort Institute, which has been established with the aim of enabling and equipping the Church, both local and universal, to become a better Church in its witness to the gospel of Jesus Christ. In his doctoral research Liam explored the disjunction between Catholic teaching and practice in the domain of sexual ethics and the significant role that experience plays in the moral discernment of Catholic women and men. Liam continues to explore the importance of experience as a moral theological locus, the significance that the tutoring role of the ecclesial community occupies in the moral decision-making of Catholics today, and the importance of deep attentive listening for the renewal

and future flourishing of the Church. Liam is a priest of the Diocese of Brentwood, where he serves as part of the team at St. Stephen's Catholic Parish in Manor Park, East London. Liam has also worked with CAFOD for over 15 years, and is currently engaged as their Clergy and Theology Strategy Adviser. In his leisure time Liam enjoys cycling, music, cooking and playing the piano badly!

Hi, I'm **Nali NATHAN**. I'm in my thirties and currently live in London. Right now I'm working at a charity and prior to that was a primary school teacher and RE coordinator. I've also worked as a catechetical coordinator and catechist in several parishes and am a trained facilitator for community dialogue. I'm fascinated by the full spectrum of political viewpoints in the Church and in society. I try to live a Catholic life but struggle each day! I appreciate the graces I see in the Catholic Church but also am saddened by the hypocrisy, corruption and divisions.

Like almost everyone, my social life has been pretty limited this past year and family connections and friendships maintained mostly via technology. My new year's resolution has been to teach myself biblical Hebrew- so far I've managed to learn the Hebrew alphabet but not much else!

**Ethna REGAN** is Associate Professor of Theology and Ethics at Dublin City University. She is a member of the Holy Faith Sisters. She spent over 15 years working overseas, both in Trinidad and in Samoa.

Before coming into research and academia later in life, **Catherine SEXTON** worked in international development. Catherine spent nearly 10 years living and working in South East Asia (Indonesia and Cambodia) and latterly worked in senior management within VSO and CAFOD and then as a freelance consultant to the sector. Catherine was awarded her doctorate in 'Theologies of Ministry among older RC women religious in the UK' in 2018 (at MBIT). Alongside this, Catherine worked as a co-researcher with Sr Gemma Simmonds on a research project on Vitality in women's apostolic congregations in the UK and Ireland.

More recently, Catherine has led a three-year collaborative research project between MBIT and the Centre for Catholic Studies at Durham University exploring the future sustainability of the apostolic form of religious life for women in East and Central Africa. Catherine is now engaged as a post-doctoral research associate in the CCS at Durham on a project researching the ecclesial and cultural implications of the child sexual abuse scandal in the Catholic Church in England and Wales.

Catherine is originally from South Wales but now lives in Leeds. Catherine reflects that 'I regard myself as a 'practising' Catholic through my prayer life, centred around the Divine Office and Lectio and my research, which I understand as ministry. I don't have a regular connection with a particular parish and sometimes attend Quaker meetings for worship. When I'm not engaged in any of the above, I like walking & birding in 'wild' places.'

I am **Margaret SIBERRY**, a mother, grandmother and great grandmother who offers part-time child-care for my great grandson. When schools are open this involves collecting him from school two days a week, providing a meal and looking after him until his parents collect him when they finish work. In lockdown I look after him for the two days. He is a delight and he brings me much joy. During the week, around this, I enjoy walking, participating in various Zoom meetings and social Zooms as well as a commitment as a listening volunteer for Samaritans.

Since moving to Garforth, a small town 7 miles from Leeds, almost 50 years ago I have been involved with the Diocesan Justice and Peace Commission, serving on the Commission and on various working parties. This has been an important part of my faith journey and continues to be so currently, more especially since parish life here changed significantly (and for many of us detrimentally) with the appointment of our current pastor two years ago. I have always been an active member of our parish community over the years and enjoyed especially serving on the liturgy group as well as the 'Faith, Justice and Action' group.

In Autumn 2019 a group of parishioners created a 'Reflection and Conversation' group that meets to explore issues of faith, to learn together and to help us grow. I am privileged to facilitate this group which initially followed Daniel O'Leary's video course on Creation Spirituality, followed by Richard Rohr's 'Embracing an Alternative Orthodoxy' video set. We were part way through this when lockdown began. I was initially involved in setting up the Leeds ACTA group and though I still receive their minutes, I have not participated in local meetings or events for the last couple of years. I did attend the ACTA National AGM with Diarmuid O'Murchu in Manchester, Autumn 2019.

Professionally, I worked as a Primary Teacher for 27 years, before moving to work for a street homeless charity in Leeds, The Simon Community, with whom I had been previously volunteering. After three years I resigned to care for my mother who had developed dementia. After her death the opportunity arose to apply for a post with CAFOD I was very privileged to be appointed as Diocesan Manager for CAFOD in 2007, a post I retired from in December 2014.

**Alan WILLIAMS** is the Bishop of Brentwood Diocese that comprises the county of Essex and the boroughs of north-East London. He is a member of the Marist order and hails originally from Oldham in Lancashire. Alan holds a Degree in Natural Science from Durham University, a Degree in Theology from the University of Cambridge, a PhD in Psychology from London University and a Masters Degree in Education from the University of Hull.

Alan has previously served as Director of the National Shrine at Walsingham, and as parish priest at St Lawrence of Canterbury, Sidcup. He is a former Major Superior of the Marist Fathers in England, and has also served as a school teacher and chaplain in secondary schools and Catholic chaplain at Sheffield Hallam University. He has also taught Christian Spirituality at postgraduate level.

Pope Francis appointed Alan the seventh Bishop of Brentwood on 14 April 2014, and he serves as a member of the Bishops' Conference Department for Education and Formation.

My name is **Isabelle WOODFORD**, I'm a first year Theology student at Cambridge. When I'm not working, I enjoy reading novels and knitting. I've been attending mass my whole life, and pre-covid I went weekly, participating first as an altar server and then later as a Eucharistic minister. However in recent months I've kept away from Church for fear of spreading the virus to more vulnerable members of my congregation. I particularly enjoy challenging the beliefs I grew up with through theological study and questioning myself (and occasionally others!)

---

It is important to acknowledge the significance and impact of hosting the seminars across the zoom platform. For whilst such a virtual platform reduced some of the barriers that geography and time might have posed to participation, it also limited the personal and informal conversations and encounters that so often enrich and animate the dialogue during face-to-face seminars.

Each seminar was structured so as to incorporate several breaks that would facilitate time away from the screen, to mitigate the impact of both screen fatigue and eye strain that could reduce the energy, focus and contributions of participants.

It is also noteworthy however that zoom introduced a rather egalitarian dimension to participation in the seminar, whereby each participant was afforded precisely the same sized 'real estate' on screen regardless of academic, ecclesial, or ordained status. Each participant was also afforded the same time for their contributions, which appeared somewhat easier to maintain through zoom. This I believe contributed to the richness and openness of the dialogue through an alleviation of unnecessary deference and anxiety.

It is also noteworthy that the openness, humility, consideration and respect given to all our participants by each other significantly contributed to the rich insight shared in our seminar conversations.

### FOCUS

The focus of our first seminar was about **listening** - attentively **listening to the experience** of our participants across this time of the global pandemic, their experience of what might have arisen or emerged directly because of Covid, or been exacerbated during this time of Covid, or that might simply have arisen during this period in which Covid has engulfed us.

We would listen to and explore this experience of each participant through the lenses of personal experience, experience with others in family, work and the wider world, experience through faith, and our experience through Church. Each participant received the questions that would frame the sessions for our second seminar in advance in order to aid their reflection and preparation.

The first session of this seminar was intentionally open ended so as to enable each participant to share what had been most significant for them during this initial period of the pandemic. The second session focussed upon their experience of faith across this time of pandemic, both within and beyond the Church and the impact of lockdown upon their faith. The third session focussed upon the darkness and light that they had experienced and witnessed in our communities and wider world during this period of pandemic, whilst session four paid attention to the symptoms of decay, dysfunction and flourishing that they experienced and witnessed across the Church during this period. The framework of questions that constituted the four sessions of this seminar are given in more detail in Appendix 1, and the transcript of the seminar dialogue in Appendix 2.

By the end of the first seminar it was intended that we would have a deeper and clearer understanding of the personal and collective experience of participants during this time of the Covid -19 pandemic that would offer an insight into one fragment of the rich tapestry of the experience across our Church during this time. This would offer a data set of experience, from which in the second seminar, it would be possible to discern and identify the key issues, challenges and opportunities before the Church as we imagine an emergence from Covid. In order to aid this discernment the experience shared in seminar one was collated into some tentative thematic groupings, a summary of which are given in the next section.

## KEY FINDINGS FROM SEMINAR ONE

Given below are some key themes that have tentatively been identified as emerging from the experience and conversations shared during our first seminar. These themes are provisional in nature and merit further reflection. They arise from my own engagement with the 'data' from our first seminar, that draws upon my seminar notes and importantly all the 'zoom videos' for each of our groups across all four sessions. These are only one perspective that would be further enriched by the response and further reflection of participants both before and during the second seminar.

### Emergent themes: headlines

- New models of Leadership: shared; blended
- New ways of being Church
- A 'blended' ecclesiology
- A new model of priesthood:
- Synod: local parish; diocesan; national
- Race and Black Lives Matter
- Clerical child sexual abuse in the Catholic Church
- Covid and women
- Ecological crisis
- Participation
- Home - a rediscovery of the significance of home
- Disconnection – connection
- Time
- Recovered experience of Discernment
- An expanded understanding of human experience
- Online joy and challenge
- Re-emerging personal Agency
- Awakening – sensitisation – seeing anew – 'covid conscientisation' to:
- A Catholic response to Covid
- Poverty of voices: creating a space
- Food: poverty; liturgical solidarity and action a response of a catholic sacramental imagination?
- Death
- A new ecclesial culture
- A 'Cheers' ecclesiological model – deepening relationships
- Public non-ordained Catholic leadership
- God

Given below is a more detailed context for each of the themes that emerged from the contributions and dialogue in the first seminar.

- **New models of Leadership: shared and blended leadership**

During the pandemic to date, most notably during periods of lockdown, participants had experienced some different expressions of leadership, alongside the established normative models which during lockdown tended to be more remote and disconnected. In response to this experience of different leadership models, it was determined to be important to explore the potential richness and limitations that such alternative models of ecclesial leadership might bring for a Church emerging from Covid, that included:

- A new model of leadership as we emerge into new model of Church beyond Covid
- a need to explore a model of shared leadership: shared power and authority
- a model that drew upon diverse models of good practice: people-priest; priest-priest; business-networks; faiths
- a model of 'Kenotic leadership'
- a model of Co-responsibility in leadership
- New models of ministry – priest not the only community leader
- Two and three people sharing leadership together
- A blended leadership that acknowledged different leaders responsible for different areas life across the ecclesial community

- **New ways of being Church**

Complementary to such new expressions of leadership would be the development and continued emergence of renewed and new expressions of Church, that included

- A plurality of contemporary expression of Church that is both recognised and validated
- Alternative local expressions of Church alongside a more established parish model of Church
- Drawing inspiration from a diverse global Catholic expression in Amazon, S America, Africa
- An intentional development of ecclesial expression and model
- A rebirth from frayed wineskins to new wineskins to hold the same treasure

- **A 'blended' ecclesiology**

During the pandemic, many participants had experienced different modalities of presence, relationship, work and worship in their lives that included physical and virtual presence, telephone and online worship, remote working and schooling, to name but a few. In light of

such blended experiences across different areas of life, an exploration of the potential value of such intentional blended expression in the life of the Church would include:

- Blended ministry
- Blended Church
- Blended liturgy
- Blended presence
- Blended leadership
- Blended action
- Blended participation

- **A new model of priesthood:**

The experience of priests and other Church leaders during this time noted a 'liberation' from the ordinary administration of parish business that enabled a deeper focus upon:

- Growing beyond dispensing of sacraments
- role defined by discernment and accompaniment
- Clericalism; hierarchy; patriarchy
- Liberating and unburdening pastors

- **Synod: local parish; diocesan; national**

The potential for a synod process to engage a polyphony of unheard voices across the Church was identified as a significant opportunity as we emerge from Covid, that might facilitate an:

- In-depth encounter with the experience, wisdom and imagination of all the baptised
- opportunity to share and reflect upon a shared yet diverse experience through Covid
- enriched 'thicker' understanding of humanity and an expanded moral imagination
- ecclesial recognition of the authentic discernment of the signs of the times by the wider people of god
- trusted process, recognised by the Church, that enables all the baptised to listen, discern and respond to the signs of the times with which we are now confronted
- response to the recent call to Synod for the Universal Church by Pope Francis from October

- **Race and Black Lives Matter**

Participants experienced themselves, and identified a wider societal experience, of an increased sensitivity and deepened awareness of the grave injustices and systemic inequalities that were revealed and exacerbated by the covid-19 pandemic across race, gender and socio-economic lines. These present as a critical challenge for both society and our Church, and demand not only further analysis and reflection, but also both a personal and structural response by all

within and across the Church that begins with a direct attentive listening to the women and men who have and continued to experience such injustice.

- **Clerical child sexual abuse in the Catholic Church**

Participants identified the significance of the critical challenge before the Church of the scandal of the clerical child abuse scandal and the subsequent episcopal cover up, not least and foremost through its impact upon survivors and their families, but also the wider Church community. This raised Some of the issues arising that demand urgent attention included:

- The exercise and composition of leadership in the Church
- Accountability and transparency in ecclesial governance and ministry
- Clear Code of conduct for all in positions of leadership and ministry
- the exercise of power
- The Inadequacy of the CBCEW response to the IICSA report
- A new open and honest ecclesial culture that reflects our gospel

- **Covid and women**

The inattentive listening and acknowledgement of women, their experience, expertise and role within the Church was identified as a significant omission in the life of the Church, not least through the neglect of women's

- Significant and distinctive experience
- Contribution to a richer and more accurate anthropological picture and vision
- Need for engagement and support through the life of the Church
- Contribution, and potential contribution, to leadership, ministry and governance

- **Ecological crisis**

The ecological-economic crisis confronting our world, as testified to through both the encyclical *Laudato Si'* and the experience of participants, was acknowledged as a significant challenge that demanded an ongoing ecclesial response that engaged with our

- Distorted relationship with natural world
- Lessons from Covid pandemic
- Integral ecological wisdom
- Formed and shaped all the baptised
- Informed and reflected in our liturgy

- **Participation**

Participation, by all and for all across the Church, was identified as both a key challenge and a rich opportunity as we emerge from Covid, that would need to examine

- Participation across the breadth of 'Church life' and the accompanying barriers and opportunities for specific groups of lay and ordained groups of Catholics
- Inclusion and exclusion in worship, community, ministry and leadership
- Diminished barriers for re-engagement of those marginalised and lapsed (online gateway)
- The development of teaching: whose voice, whose wisdom, whose experience counts
- Participation in leadership (shared), ministry, teaching (cf new role of catechist)
- Our personal and communal participation in wider society

- **Re-emerging personal Agency**

Connected with the theme of participation, is the experience amongst participants of a growing confidence in personal and community agency across the Church during the covid pandemic that was not contingent upon clerical validation or consent. This was seen

- Across worship, organising and Church action and outreach
- In the rituals of prayer drawn upon during Covid from diverse tradition
- In the responsibility creatively taken up by lay men and women during this time of pandemic, not least in online worship, action and service
- In the personal moral life and moral decision making of ordinary Catholics
- In the need to explore the underuse of resources from the repository of faith and spirituality of the Church and the role of lay men and women to develop and embed new resources

- **Awakening – sensitisation – seeing anew – 'covid conscientisation'**

Participants identified the need to continue to foster and embed our 'covid conscientisation' and sensitisation to the injustices and inequalities through this time of pandemic, and observed the following fruits of this shared conscientisation

- A deepened awareness of the need for conversion and change through covid...
- The importance of interconnected relationships between people – nature – God
- The role and place of all Creation – environment in our lives
- Remembering that we need each other again - interdependence
- the significance and importance of keyworkers, the vulnerable, the elderly
- A re-evaluation of who and what is key to a flourishing society and Church
- A new awareness of the lives of our fellow human beings near and far
- A renewed attentiveness to the hidden realities from which we averted our gaze: Poverty, inequality, injustice and the importance and role of food
- A Journey from personal good to Common good

- **Home - a rediscovery of the significance of home**

Participants identified a growing recovery of the significance of home across their lives through the lockdown period, that included

- renewing at home
- Relationships at home
- Faith at home
- Church at home – domestic Church support
- Safety at home - Crises in the home

- **Disconnection – connection**

Participants identified the importance of the concept of connection and disconnection in lives that included an increased

- Awareness of interdependence and interconnectedness
- Experience of Isolation
- The significant impact of separation and disconnection
- The fruits of being alone
- The crisis of loneliness

- **Recovered experience of Discernment**

Participants experienced a recovery or discovery of discernment in personal and communal life that facilitated a:

- Recalibration of needs and priorities
- Deepening of what is integral for survival and flourishing

- **Death and trauma**

The personal and shared experience of each and all across communities, nations and continents of a pervasive exposure to and experience of sickness, suffering, trauma and death was identified as a defining experience of the Covid pandemic that necessitated a new understanding of the impact of

- Universal trauma
- Unaccompanied illness and dying and grieving
- reduced ritual and touch in sickness and death and bereavement
- the significance of the Ministry of healing and accompaniment to come

- **An expanded understanding of human experience**

The depth and impact of participants' personal and communal experience of the Covid pandemic was identified as leading to an:

- Deepened reservoirs of empathy between people, peoples and communities
- Increased empathic connection that enabled and fostered newly imagined relationships
- Expanded anthropology: a more sufficient and a more accurate understanding

- **Online joy and challenge**

Despite the acknowledged fatigue from online virtual communication and connectivity, participants acknowledged its significance as opening up new ways of relating, ministering and worshipping that merited further reflection with a focus upon its fruits of

- Creativity
- New emergent leaders
- Addressing barriers to inclusion
- Opening up barriers to Exclusion

- **A Catholic response to Covid**

The question that asks, '*Is there a distinctive Catholic response to pandemic?*' was consistently posed during our seminar dialogue.

- **Poverty of voices: creating a space**

Participants consistently and passionately identified the need to create spaces and practices that responded to the poverty of active voices in and across our Church. In light of this the following questions demanded critical engagement:

- Who is missing? Who are we not seeing? Who is not being heard?
- Who is neglected and marginalised, silence and quietened, forgotten and familiar?

and reflection upon how to

- Create a space and a framework, and develop practices for encounter and listening
- Ensure all voices are heard beginning with the periphery

- **Food: poverty; liturgical solidarity and action a response of a catholic sacramental imagination?**

Participants identified the important and intensified role that food played, and continues to play, during this time of pandemic, that included

- Food as a popular and frequently imagined expression of Catholic faith and action
- The absence of sharing in eucharistic food

- **A new ecclesial culture**

Participants identified some seeds of a new ecclesial culture during this time, that necessitated further development and intentional nurture, that would definitively include:

- Valuing – dignity – collaboration – shared pilgrimage
- Structures of governance
- Shared Decision making
- Clear Accountability
- Listening and attentive
- Operant and espoused ecclesiology -
- Mature and adult approach reflective of life beyond Church
- The arc of change – the ark of change – a new covenant – new Church
- Co-responsibility

- **A 'Cheers' ecclesiological model – deepening relationships**

The importance of deep relationships, through which we deeply know and care and relate, was identified as key for a flourishing Church, in which we understood and deeply know the

- Name – story – needs – gifts – griefs – anxieties – joys – hopes - context – culture

of those we call sisters and brothers. The need to explore, develop and reflect upon such an emergent ecclesiology was identified.

- **Public non-ordained Catholic leadership**

Participants through their seminar participation and withdrawal identified

- Speaking freely and without fear in public catholic life
- Personal, professional, theological freedom of expression

as key issues that merit significant attention and analysis for a flourishing Church post Covid.

- **Time**

Through the initial wave of the pandemic participants identified

- A rediscovery of the gift of time
- A theology of slowing down
- An enforced slow down as a foil to the rapidification of a previous covid life

- **God**

Participants observed an ongoing and active reflection upon their relationship with God during this experience of pandemic that include a focus upon:

- A time of reacquaintance
- A time for intimacy
- At time of absence
- God and suffering

## SEMINAR ONE SUMMARY REPORT

See Appendix 1 for the Summary report of Seminar One

## LOOKING TO SEMINAR TWO

Ongoing reflection that draws upon experience is an integral characteristic of the process and method of our seminar series. Approximately two weeks after seminar one therefore, and having read the report from this first seminar, participants were invited to reflect upon how their thinking and discernment had developed since the first seminar.

At the start of the second seminar we thus spent some time looking at what emergent themes might have been missed from the reflections and dialogue in our provisional summary from the first seminar, and to offer any further key opportunities and challenges that have emerged during this interim time of reflection.

## CEE SEMINAR TWO

'I dream of a **'missionary option'**, that is, **a missionary impulse capable of transforming everything**, so that the Church's customs, ways of doing things, times and schedules, language and structures can be suitably channelled for the evangelization of today's **world rather than for her self-preservation.**' (EG,27).

## FOCUS

The fruits of our listening in seminar one became the 'experiential data' from which we undertook our **discernment and analysis**, which was our focus during the **second seminar**. In this second seminar we would attempt to discern and prioritise the key emerging ecclesial challenges and opportunities from those that we had uncovered and identified during our first seminar.

In our opening session we would focus upon an article in 'The Way' by Nick Austin SJ, 'Discernment a work of the Church', that would help to deepen our understanding and awareness of the significance of discernment for ourselves, this seminar series and the wider Church.

We would therefore spend some time reflecting on our processing of our engagement with the emergent themes from the last seminar, how our thinking has developed, and what we might now wish to offer as key opportunities and challenges, that have only emerged for us during this interim time of reflection. We would also spend some time looking at any emergent themes that might be missing from the reflections and dialogue in our provisional summary of the first seminar.

We would also spend some time discerning and prioritising the emergent themes that we have identified before the Church through an engagement in collective communal discernment that would build upon the personal discernment and reflection of each participant. In the final session of this seminar, we would explore some of the ecclesiological and ethical implications of some of the prioritised themes for our Church and consider what needs to be taken into account in relation to becoming a good and better Church as we emerge from Covid. The framework of questions that constituted the four sessions of this seminar and the transcript of the seminar dialogue are given in more detail in Appendix 2.

By the end of this our second seminar, through our discernment and initial analysis, we aim to have a richer and clearer understanding of the implications of these emergent issues for the Church, in terms of the critical barriers and pathways of opportunity that they pose to becoming a good and better Church as we emerge from Covid.

### What is missing – What is new?

In response to 'what is missing an emergent theme in the report' and 'upon further reflection, is there anything new you now wish to propose as a critical challenge or opportunity facing the Church emerging from Covid', participants identified the following:

- The impact of **trauma, and covid-related trauma** is missing and underestimated in the report.
- We also need to concentrate more on the voices of **victims, the isolated and the excluded**.
- The report should focus more on the impact of Covid on **women**, also bearing in mind that the issues women face during Covid are the same as the ones they faced before. This was highlighted by several participants.
- The report also misses the **impact on children**, who are an especially important part of the Church today, as well as being its future. There is a lack of attention to children's voices, and what they say about their experiences of the pandemic. This was underlined by several participants.
- We need to focus more on **stories**. What story are we telling about ourselves as a Church during the Covid period? Storytelling is a means of understanding.
- The report does not say what is the **theology underpinning** it
- The **ecological conversion** and **climate crisis** merits greater emphasis, which will require the changing of hearts and minds.
- **Conversion** should now be understood as **something the Church undergoes** in practice as well as theory. This will help us to do something about its mission.
- how we can **consult the excluded and the isolated**.
- The **Church** should **not speak only as physician – it is also a patient**.
- address the underestimation of the needs of the **disabled and accessibility**
- the importance of **discernment** - the real challenge is knowing **which voices we should listen to**.
- What of the **place for evangelism, witness and mission?**
- The need to make the **Church humbler**.
- The importance of **baptism** is not mentioned.
- The idea of **holiness** is missing from the report
- a lack of attention to **LGBT** issues.

From these additional insights, and the emphasis given to them by participants, it became clearer that the following were also key emergent issues for the Church as we emerge from Covid:

- how we **attend to trauma** and develop a **ministry of healing** for the sick and the bereaved.
- How as Church we learn to become **attentive**, and develop **practices of attentiveness**
- **Attention to unheard voices is needed**, which preferentially include those who are poor, women, people across black and ethnic minorities and children.
- How does **listening to trauma** translate into Church activities?
- what does it mean for us **personally, and collectively as Church to be attentive and to listen?**

At this stage, participants concluded that **attentiveness**, and how to develop, embed and participate in **attentive ecclesial practices**, is both a critical challenge and a rich opportunity for the Church emerging from Covid.

## Fruits of personal discernment: Prioritised Emergent Themes

The following themes were identified by participants, through their personal reflection and discernment upon the fruits of our first seminar, as the key themes that have emerged as challenges and opportunities before the Church:

- Saintliness;
- humility to recognise that we are the patients as well as physicians in all sections of our Church
- marginalized people being active agents in working for change.
- Accompanying trauma;
- listening, especially to the excluded and disillusioned;
- constructing something out of the accompaniment of trauma and listening to those traumatized.
- Participation
- co-responsibility
- discernment. (In particular, enabling the participation of unheard voices)
- listening to women
- leadership
- distinctive Catholic response to secular problems like Covid.
- new model of leadership
- greater participation of women and minorities
- learn the lessons of the child sexual abuse scandals.
- move beyond leadership rather than new models
- roles of women and minorities – it isn't clear how one can be a Catholic and a woman.
- the ecological crisis.
- The need for holiness
- The need to hear unheard voices
- The need for mission and evangelization
- The ecological crisis
- to participate in synod
- new ecclesial culture.
- new ways of being Church
- Ecclesial culture: Church as a culture of the broken
- Personal agency

- Embracing development of theology and faith
- Renewing the spiritual, liturgical and sacramental life
- Trauma – the need to respond
- The need for confident, prophetic voices in the Church
- The need for a proper process of apology to the victims of abuse
- The need to engage beyond Catholics
- many voices, include the missing need to be heard
- a new ecclesial culture modelled on Pope Francis, embracing notion of pilgrimage
- The need for shared decision making and a public, non-ordained Catholic leadership,
- blended God, blended humanity, recalibrated blended Church
- shared Leadership
- Intentional listening to unheard voices.

## Fruits of communal discernment: Prioritised Emergent Themes

Drawing upon the above emergent themes identified through participants' personal discernment, and the additional themes identified since the first seminar, participants in three groups now identified those key emergent themes that they collectively discerned as priorities for the Church as follows:

- accompanying trauma
- listening to marginal voices
- discernment.
- Synod
- listening to women and other unheard voices
- ecological crisis.
- Leadership
- a new ecclesial culture
- intentional attention to unheard voices, especially in responding to trauma

## Communal discernment of one key prioritised emergent theme

Developing and refining this prioritisation of themes still further, participants in three groups collectively discerned the ***one key theme*** that they believe merited priority ecclesial attention as given below:

- the establishment of a **'think tank'** to create both a space for discernment in the life of the **universal and local Church, and to create and develop practices of discernment** for all within and across the body of the Church that serve and renew the Church in service of the world
- Participation of all the people of God across the Church in attentive dialogue through **'big conversations'** and **Synod**
- The development of an **attentive listening space, accompanying practices and ecclesial culture** that can support and integrate the **attentive listening to unheard and neglected voices across the life of the Church**
- The development of **personal, communal and liturgical practices and ministries of accompaniment** to support and serve all within and beyond our Church as we emerge from Covid

## SEMINAR TWO CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS

Our second seminar created the space in which we were able to not only offer a contextual critical analysis upon the opportunities and challenges before the Church, but to participate in an experience of communal discernment as members of our Church.

As such it presented as a rare, if not novel experience for most of our seminar participants that was both fruitful and challenging with regards to the richness and diversity of the insights, perspectives and reflections that were shared, the priorities identified and the conclusions drawn - such that **how we deal with difference and disagreement in ecclesial discernment** was a significant question that arose from our dialogue.

Yet a foundational ecclesial meta-practice of **attentiveness**, that would find expression in, and inform a palette of interconnected practices across a good and better Church, was emerging with clarity and precision from our discernment and analysis.

## SEMINAR TWO SUMMARY REPORT

See Appendix 2 for the Summary report of Seminar Two

## LOOKING TO SEMINAR THREE

In advance of seminar three, participants were invited to spend time reflecting and praying with the scriptural texts on 'new wineskins' in Mark 2: 13-28 and Matthew 9: 9-17 that might stimulate and inform our discernment and contributions towards the dialogue and re-imagining in our third seminar.

*'I dream of a 'missionary option', that is, a missionary impulse capable of transforming everything, so that the Church's customs, ways of doing things, times and schedules, language and structures can be suitably channelled for the evangelization of today's world rather than for her self-preservation.'*<sup>35</sup>

---

<sup>35</sup> Evangelii Gaudium, 27 [http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost\\_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco\\_esortazione-ap\\_20131124\\_evangelii-gaudium.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html), [accessed 18.05.21]

The focus of this third seminar will be **re-imagining** and **looking forward**, in light of our listening to experience, our discernment and our analysis during our first two seminars. We will begin to re-imagine how our Church can ‘fit together’ as we emerge from Covid so that we can faithfully and creatively respond to the emerging challenges and opportunities before us. Through a creative dialogue between scripture and our own insight and experience, we aim to draw out the **values and practices** that might underpin **the relationships, worship and action** of a re-imagined Church emerging from Covid, that responds faithfully and creatively to some of the prioritised themes that we identified in the second seminar.

As such these values and practices will begin to shape the new wineskins of a re-imagined Church and pave a way for our Church to ethically and sustainably respond in all our diverse expression to the challenges and opportunities that we now face as we tentatively contemplate emerging from this global Covid-19 pandemic.

In seminar two it emerged that our experience of communal discernment in the Church is a rather rare and sometimes challenging experience that merits some further reflection, thus in our first session we would reflect upon **our attempts to discern both individually and communally, and the challenges and opportunities that diversity and disagreement offer to such discernment for the wider Church.**

From seminar two it also emerged that one critical challenge and opportunity facing the Church as we emerge from Covid is the **imperative to attentively listen to the unheard and neglected, the silenced and quietened, and the marginalised and familiar voices** across and beyond our Church. One possible ecclesial implication of this is the potential for parish, diocesan and national synod in our Church that can serve as a communal practice of discernment that strives to attentively listen to all voices across and beyond our Church.<sup>36</sup> Yet to complement synod in our second session we would explore the possibility of facilitating a more nimble and agile ‘big conversation’ across and

---

<sup>36</sup> It is noteworthy that Pope Francis has convoked the 16th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, which will be held in the month of October 2022 on the theme: “For a synodal Church: communion, participation and mission”. Francis has also recently called the Church in his diocese of Rome to Synod. It is also recently reported that the Irish Bishops’ conference will be calling the Irish Church to synod in the near future. In his recent letter to the German Church during their synodal journey Francis wrote he observed that ‘listening, reflection and discernment’ aim to make the Church “more faithful, able, agile and transparent to preach the Gospel with joy.” He concluded that we are called to ‘walk together along the way, as an apostolic body, and listen to each other under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, even if we do not think the same way.’

beyond our Church that can engage with the experience of our present time as we begin to emerge from this phase of the pandemic.

In our final two sessions, conscious of the emergent themes that we prioritised in seminar two, we would explore the **key practices and values of the new wineskins** that might animate and sustain the relationships, worship and actions of our Church emerging from Covid that can effectively and faithfully respond to such themes, both in light of Person Ethna's short paper that reflected upon the parable of the lost coin in Luke 15, and the implications for ecclesial ethics today – a re-imagining of how our Church might 'fit together' both in response to the challenges and opportunities in a world emerging through Covid and in creative fidelity to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

## KEY FINDINGS FROM SEMINAR THREE

The fruits of our seminar discussions regarding personal and communal discernment, the feasibility of a national ‘big conversation’ as a nimble and agile vehicle for synod, and our response to Ethna’s reflective paper on the parable of the lost coin for ecclesial ethics can be found in the summary report of this seminar in Appendix 3.

Drawing upon the wisdom, insight and dialogue from these three sessions, and our previous two seminars, participants were invited to identify and develop the three **cornerstone practices** that should define the Church as we emerge from Covid, so that we can faithfully and effectively respond to the challenges and opportunities previously identified.<sup>37</sup>

The following **practices** were those identified and discerned by participants:<sup>38</sup>

- **Hospitality is a central practice** that promotes the goods of fraternity, solidarity and high-level attentiveness. It sees the human face in the other. It helps us see the elements of the practice of hospitality: hospitality without a basic recognition of everyone’s humanity cannot be an acceptable practice.
- **Listening** that promotes attentiveness
- **Welcome** that promotes inclusion, belonging, and integration
- **‘neighbouring’** promotes acceptance and embrace of each and every person
- **communal attunement** a bonding closeness to the other, who may be very different. It is about really appreciating the other.
- **Subsidiarity** Local Churches should be given the power to discern and determine what they need and are called to respond to
- **Accompaniment** walking with, empathising and understanding. We accompany best by sharing stories and experiences.

---

<sup>37</sup> Person A noted that we must first ask what we mean by ‘practice’. Alasdair McIntyre defines a practice as group activities aimed at a set of goods, for example agriculture or laboratory experiments. A practice has predecessors but is always open to something new. We should ask what goods we want to promote? For example asking what practice would promote the good of hearing the unheard?

<sup>38</sup> Whilst it is acknowledged that all those identified might not be technically ‘practices’ from the perspective of moral philosophy, that is not the most important issue at this stage – rather it is to tease out the insight of participants concerning how the Church might ‘fit together’ in a new ecclesial imaginary so that post covid it can faithfully and effectively attend to the challenges and opportunities before it.

- <b>Listening</b>	building a relational culture in the Church.
- <b>Clear and Open governance</b>	promoting accountability and transparency
- <b>kindness and helpfulness</b>	'practices' that have emerged from the crisis?.
- <b>Compassion, mercy, forgiveness</b>	gospel principles that define us and our communities
- <b>Grief is something we all share.</b>	We now have a reservoir of common experience. We are all in trauma and the Church can no longer simply offer a service – it needs properly to hear others' experiences.
- <b>person-centred practices</b>	that promote and begin with the dignity of each and every person
- <b>practices of mutuality</b>	that promote mutuality in relationships: a need to treat each other as if no one is set apart. We need a word for this.
- <b>practices of atonement</b>	connecting with the ability to ask for forgiveness, requiring humility and a recognition that there is something to lament.
- <b>mature practices that foster</b>	<b>mature relationships</b> that are adult, collegial, horizontal and respectful

Participants identified the following values, as found in our gospels, as central to **actions, relationships and worship** of an effective and faithful Church as we emerge from Covid:

- Faith, hope and love.
- Transparency and humility.
- charity and hospitality
- Inclusivity, innovation and transformation.
- Mutuality
- reconciliation, self-examination and lamenting.
- to valuation and appreciation of one another
- attentiveness

The conversation in our third seminar was a little more fragmented and challenging as we moved from discernment and analysis towards re-imagining the ecclesial structures and practices that will be sustained and nurtured by the relationships, values and principles that have emerged as essential for a good and better Church.

Inclusion and belonging, fraternity and solidarity, attentiveness and integration, at-one-ment and hearing the unheard were identified as foundational goods to be promoted by the ecclesial community - goods infused with the inalienable dignity of each and every human person, created *imago Dei*, that summons us to a renewed ecclesial culture in which we value all, respect all and accept all. Such goods can find a systemic infusion across the life of the Church through our habitual personal and collective engagement in the ancient and definitive Christian practices of 'welcome', 'hospitality', 'neighbouring', 'accompaniment and 'listening' - practices that have an essential *ecclesia ad extra* dimension towards our world, but also demand a corporeal embrace and individuation of the essential *ecclesia ad intra* implications across the life and ecology of the Church.

We were mindful of the summons of Paul VI for the Church to be constantly renewed and evangelised itself if it 'wishes to retain freshness, vigour and strength...in order to evangelize the world with credibility...for unless the Church listens, is evangelised and challenged in its own thinking, it cannot be an effective teacher and evangeliser of others.'<sup>39</sup> It is these practices therefore we concluded that can knit us together into a new ecclesial web of deep relationships that can reveal an ecclesial imaginary defined by a maturity and reciprocity in listening and speaking, attentiveness and healing, learning and teaching, leading and accompanying, discerning and acting that arises from a participative and inclusive church that is predicated on a shared baptismal dignity, respect and appreciation of the other and is attentive to the 'least breath of the Holy Spirit'<sup>40</sup> in all the voices of the beautifully diverse and catholic body of Christ.

---

<sup>39</sup> *Evangelii nuntiandi*, 15, [https://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/apost\\_exhortations/documents/hf\\_p-vi\\_exh\\_19751208\\_evangelii-nuntiandi.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_p-vi_exh_19751208_evangelii-nuntiandi.html), [accessed 23.08.21]

<sup>40</sup> Cf Nick Austin, 'Discernment as a work of the Church'.

## SEMINAR THREE SUMMARY REPORT

See Appendix 3 for the Summary report of Seminar Three

*Given below is the reflection that was offered as an interim summary of our seminar series during the third seminar.*

Our seminar series began back in January, when the days were short, cold and bleak, and Covid in the UK was relentlessly taking the lives of over one thousand women and men each day. Yet through the darkness of this time, hope and light shone through the cracks revealing new possibilities that opened up before us an ‘opportunity to build something different’ and re-imagine a new way of fitting together for our Church. It is a way that has been crafted and sculpted from the fruits of our listening which began during our first seminar in which we listened attentively to our personal and collective experience through this time of pandemic - with a focus upon ourselves, others in our communities and world, our faith and our Church. We engaged in this listening so that we could begin to uncover and identify the issues before us as Church as we tentatively emerge from Covid.

*The fruits* of our listening became clear during our second seminar, when the days had begun to lengthen a little and the second wave of covid had begun to recede within these shores. Our focus this time was discernment and analysis – identifying emerging challenges and opportunities that we refined and prioritised through our personal and collective analysis and discernment.

**Discernment** itself, for all its communal challenges, appeared to emerge from our dialogue as a critical foundational practice for the Church to embrace as we emerge from Covid – inviting us to further explore what a personal and communal expression of a discerning Church might look like today - as we listen for the voice of the spirit amongst and beyond us.

It is a practice we reflected that can carry something of our ecclesial response to the resounding emerging challenge of attentively listening to unheard and neglected voices within and beyond the Church, that echoed across so many of our sessions in the first two seminars. In this light the practice of such ecclesial listening carries a preferential and intentional attentiveness to the voices and experience of those who remain unheard and neglected, those who remain on the peripheries and have been silenced or quietened, those marginalised and excluded by Church structures and practices, those voices who are disillusioned alongside those who are familiar and comfortable.

Such ecclesial listening is essentially defined we determined by inclusion and must therefore avoid ecclesial exclusivity in favour of an inclusive accessibility in its structure, method and focus. This specifically includes an intentional attentiveness to the voices, experience and lives of women across the Church, of people of colour alongside those of children and young people.

It is a practice that is perhaps seeking a new, agile and flexible ecclesial expression - that fosters and enables participation and access of all women and men of good will - to accompany and complement a more established pathway of synod. A culture and practice of attentive listening and courageous speaking can find a home we reflected in such new and old expressions of discernment, and delicately hold open a space to hear God's voice and discern God's presence – blended in the lives and realities of all God's people, in our scriptures, in our sacraments, in our Church and in Christ.

It is through such a shared path of re-discovery and discernment we reflected that a new self-understanding can arise of what it means to be human for us – an expanded and integral understanding of humanity that more accurately and authentically informs and shapes not only our future ethics, but also our operant ecclesiology and the focus of our shared ministry - in a wounded yet prophetic Church re-sensitised to its defining interconnectedness, and the inalienable dignity of all its people - disciples of Jesus responding together to the ecological and economic crises from a new experience of praying from, and working from, and living in our common home.

Accompanying trauma clearly emerged for us as a key significant calling of the Spirit to the Church as we emerge from Covid, that recognises both the deep impact of the trauma of this pandemic upon each and all of us, alongside our re-awakening to the deeply embedded injustices and weeping scars through which humanity cries out for healing and wholeness - thus asking the question of how we as Church can create spaces and ministries of attentive accompaniment and healing in which each and all might be both patient and physician.

Such active agency emerges as a meta practice that underpins an attentiveness to, and accompaniment of trauma, and can deepen and embed a wider participation in the Church. A practice that at once holds in creative tension, in each person and community, the potential for accompanying and being accompanied, for both listening and speaking, for being both patient and

physician, for both learning and teaching. An active agency that has the potential to find a home in a new model of shared (local) leadership for a Church emerging from Covid and a new way of being in relationship and communion together as Church, defined by reciprocity and interdependence rather than privilege and power.

In this light it is possible to see how we concluded that **people and relationships** should be at the heart of our Christ shaped Church as we emerge from Covid – people, relationships and encounter defining the horizon of our worship and action, our outreach and self-understanding, for ‘being a Christian’ as Francis reminds us, ‘is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction.’<sup>41</sup>

Thus whilst our journey of discipleship finds its roots in the gospel Beatitudes, and is shaped by the preferential option for the poor and the common good, the universal destiny of the goods of creation and the dignity of all, solidarity and subsidiarity - some core principles of Catholic Social Teaching - it is also enriched and reformed by our encounter with truth as revealed in the experience and discernment and tradition of the pilgrim people of God.

This seminar series has enabled us with an evident incompleteness and provisionality to discern some of the key signs of the times from our perspective, our contextual critical analysis of the challenges and opportunities before the Church as we tentatively emerge from Covid, that include the grave injustices of racism and clerical child abuse alongside the rich blessing of lay leadership and the contribution of women in sustaining the Church before, during and beyond Covid.

Perhaps, we concluded, this is something of what the Spirit might be saying to the Churches.

---

<sup>41</sup>*Evangelii Gaudium*, 7

In drawing together the threads of this rich dialogue it would not be appropriate at this stage to produce a blueprint for a new Church, nor necessarily a coherent ecclesiology, as that would evidently contradict the inductive method that we have employed throughout this process. It is important however to humbly offer an insight into our participants' tentative reflections on the possible practices that can shed some light upon how a faithful and re-imagined Church might 'fit together', both in response to the emerging challenges and opportunities in a world emerging through Covid, and in creative fidelity to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

It is in this light that the implications that are drawn below must evidently be both provisional and tentative in nature, so as not to contradict the defining character of the method of our seminar series which as noted is both inductive and dialogical. They are offered therefore in a spirit of humility and as possible seeds which local ecclesial communities may wish to sow and nurture as they discern and determine the path ahead according to their context and circumstances, for it is the faithful people of God, lay and ordained, in the midst of their own lives, homes and communities that God has graced with the pertinent knowledge and wisdom, in conversation with our scripture and tradition, to discern the next steps as they journey together with God.

The ethical, cognitive and ecclesial imperative for an essential ecclesial attentiveness and inclusion of those voices and people who are currently neglected and unheard in the wider life of the Church has been set forth in the earlier sections of this report, but how such an expansion in attentiveness and inclusion might translate into and facilitate the full and active participation of all the body of Christ across the life and praxis of the Church merits further reflection and analysis. In light of our seminar series, it is perhaps from this **principle of participation** within our own tradition, as expounded in the corpus of Catholic social teaching, that such reflection and analysis should begin to explore how we might systemically embed this principle of participation across our own ecclesial life, structures, relationships and praxis. For just as the Church understands the principle of participation as a 'duty to be fulfilled consciously by all, with responsibility and with a view to the common good'<sup>42</sup> and that participation in the life of the community is one of the contributory guarantees of a functional democracy, so the embedded extension of this principle within the life of the Church itself can contribute to the much needed realisation of a functional and flourishing

---

<sup>42</sup> Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, 189,

contemporary Church as we tentatively emerge from Covid, that builds upon the expanded and enriched expressions of participation that have emerged during this time of pandemic revealing new and re-imagined wineskins for our Church.

We are called to re-imagine **participation** in the areas of **ecclesial governance** and ecclesial **decision-making** that have clearly emerged before and during this time as flawed and deficient, with respect for example to the protection of children and the vulnerable, for financial stewardship, and ecological strategic development. Whose voice matters and counts amongst the people of God, lay and ordained, in terms of consultation, deliberation and acting in synod and communal discernment demands careful and attentive reflection and discernment.

We are invited to re-imagine **participation** in the area of **ministry** that calls for an embrace of plurality in both its' essence and exercise, so that it fosters and nurtures the vocational calling of all the faithful people of God, lay and ordained – an invitation that finds encouragement in the recent formalised extension by Pope Francis of the ministries of lector and acolyte and the ongoing reflection upon the ministry of deacon, that also poses essential questions for our current and future Church to answer upon the nature and exercise of the ordained priesthood.

We are called to re-imagine **participation** in the area of **leadership** and consider how this might fruitfully be shared and extended across parish and diocesan life beyond the current actors – for the pandemic has revealed both a competence and a credibility in the exercise of ministry and function in the lay faithful that has not necessarily been present in our ordained leaders alone. Indeed a multi-disciplinary 'team leadership' has emerged as critical for navigating the path of the pandemic in parish life across many covid response/action groups – revealing anew different and fruitful ways for our Church to 'fit together' in terms of leadership as we emerge from Covid.

We are invited to re-imagine **participation** in the area of **liturgy and worship** which has found new and creative expression through this time of pandemic – expressions that that can be continued and developed as we emerge from Covid and find new life through a recovery of the breadth of our liturgical repository. We are called to reconsider our celebration of Eucharist and what constitutes presence and belonging and active participation in light of the new 'online' modes of liturgical participation that we enjoyed during the pandemic and can rightly include those currently excluded at home or through illness who are no longer reduced to objects of prayer but can fruitfully take up

for example the ministry of the word and intercession through virtual liturgical participation. In so **doing** we will nurture and develop a new ecclesial culture in which it becomes normative for the all the baptised faithful, both lay and ordained, to exercise liturgical and active ministry in all areas of the Church.

We are called to re-imagine **participation** in our attentive ecclesial response to the **personal and collective trauma** experienced through this time of pandemic, that has been physically and psychologically, emotionally and spiritually symptomatic as well as structurally symptomatic in terms of race and gender, socio-economic deprivation and abuse of children. How we gently accompany and enter into the suffering of others in terms of radically com-passionate ministry and healing, at a distance and near, liturgically and sacramentally demands a creative, sensitive and shared considered response.

We are invited to re-imagine **participation** for our attentive ecclesial listening to the many **unheard and neglected voices**, within and beyond our Church, that asks questions of how we might preferentially attend to and hear disconnected voices whilst maintaining connection to familiar voices; what might such listening look like in practice and where and how might it begin; and who are the gatekeepers that can nurture and facilitate such new beginnings and renewed ecclesial relationships.

Such reimagined expressions of personal and structural ecclesial participation demands something new we concluded from our current Church leaders as we emerge from Covid - the prioritised commitment to take the time to pause and reflect on the depth and gravity of this profound generational experience for humanity and our local and global Church, and thus to refocus their attention, retune their ear and become the silent ones who are recognised for their 'attentive, watchful listening of the heart'<sup>43</sup> and embrace the summons of Pope Francis to an 'apostolate of the ear.'<sup>44</sup> The world needs leaders of the Church, according to Pope Francis, who are balanced and mature, 'pastors who are intrepid and generous' and significantly 'capable of closeness, listening and mercy.'<sup>45</sup> Indeed the Church needs leaders who will not see their 'ministry as a series of things

---

<sup>43</sup> Thomas Merton, *Contemplative Prayer*, (London: DLT, 1975), p. 33

<sup>44</sup> Pope Francis, *The name of God is mercy*, p. 15. 'Mostly, people are looking for someone to listen to them. Someone willing to grant them time, to listen to their dramas and difficulties. This is what I call the "apostolate of the ear", and it is important. Very important.'

<sup>45</sup> Christopher Lamb, 'Francis urges Bishops to vet priests ahead of ordination', *The Tablet*, 22.10.2016, <http://www.thetablet.co.uk/news/6299/0/francis-urges-Bishops-to-vet-priests-ahead-of-ordination>, [accessed 24.10.20]

to be done or norms to be applied, but will make his life a 'place' for listening openly to God and to his brother and sisters.<sup>46</sup> It is the practice of a deep attentiveness that can enable the Church and her leaders to begin to realise such a vision for a Church and ministry that is both intimate and attentive, and merciful and just to the polyphone of face and voices within and beyond their current gaze.

We are perhaps summoned however by the Spirit to **re-imagine** and reflect upon our **participation in the life of the other** that underpins each and all of these implications for us as a Church emerging from Covid - for deep connectedness, relationality and people emerged not only as what participants and people have rediscovered as precious and essential for human flourishing but also as critical for a flourishing and faithful Church. We are summoned by the Spirit to participate in the 'reality of other people's lives' a summons which allows us and our Church to 'become wonderfully complicated.'<sup>47</sup> Such complicated participation is predicated as I suggested earlier on the presence of God the Holy Spirit alive and active in each and every member of the baptised faithful. It is the full and active participation in the Body of Christ by the Body of Christ, that I suggested can find fruitful expression in a participative Church that can transform its' shape, ministry, praxis and teaching as we emerge from Covid, for a journey towards full and active ecclesial participation can ignite a recovery of an ecclesiology of the baptised who participate in Christ's priesthood of priest, prophet and king, without neglecting the ordained ministry of priests and Bishops.

These are but a few of the many ecclesial implications that arise from the listening and discernment, analysis and re-imagining of our seminar series. They are given here more as 'departure points' for further dialogue with a substantive authentic grounding rather than as coherent destinations that reveal a blueprint for the future. As such they offer a map and a focus of the future research and dialogue of the *Centre for Ecclesial Ethics*.

---

<sup>46</sup> Congregation for the Clergy, *The Gift of the Priestly Vocation*, 120, (Vatican City: L'Osservatore Romano, 08.12.16), <http://www.clerus.va/content/dam/clerus/Ratio%20Fundamentalis/The%20Gift%20of%20the%20Priestly%20Vocation.pdf>, [accessed 20.07.21]

<sup>47</sup> *Evangelii Gaudium*, 270

This report draws together the fruits of both the 'cross parish seminars' held across zoom in early January 2021 - that engaged participants from parishes in the dioceses of Arundel & Brighton, Brentwood, and Clifton dioceses - and the three-fold seminar series *Our Church emerging from Covid: preparing the future* held across the months of January to March 2021.

From the autumn of 2021 the *Centre for Ecclesial Ethics* has an programme that will structure our further analysis and focus upon some of the fruits and provisional conclusions of this seminar series that include:

- the publishing of the final report for the **Seminar Series 2021** Final report
- the **CEE Invitational Seminar** that will explore the challenges, obstacles and rich contribution of public non-ordained leadership in the Catholic Church
- the **parish/diocesan discernment workshops**: that will aim to enable local Church communities to discern both their contextual ecclesial opportunities and challenges emerging from Covid, and how they might respond in light of our recent covid experience and in fidelity to the gospel.
- the **CEE Synod study days at MBIT**, Cambridge that will explore the nature and implications of synodality for the Church.
- the **CEE Inaugural Pope Francis Advent Lecture** in December 2121 that will reflect upon and explore the principle emergent theme: *A blended Church, in a blended world, for a blended future*
- the **CEE Inter-disciplinary symposium** - that will bring together a gathering of academics from a diversity of disciplines to explore in dialogue a 'renewed and blended Church emerging from Covid' and the implications of significance of 'attentively listening and embedding unheard voices in the life and praxis of the Church.'
- the **CEE accompaniment of Diocesan Synod** in local dioceses

## CONCLUSION

*'This is a time to choose what matters and what passes away, a time to separate what is necessary from what is not...a time to get our lives back on track with regard to you, Lord, and to others.'*<sup>48</sup>

*'Many people want to return to normality ...but the pandemic is a crisis, and we do not emerge from a crisis the same as before: either we come out of it better, or we come out of it worse. We must come out of it better...Today we have an opportunity to build something different.'*<sup>49</sup>

In the year-and-a-half that has followed Pope Francis' extraordinary moment of prayer in March 2020, we have witnessed and been part of an extraordinary human response to a virus that has upended our lives and engulfed the world, unveiled deep injustices and entrenched existing inequalities. It is a response defined by attentiveness and compassion, ingenuity and sacrifice, lamentably peppered with shards of greed and selfishness. Yet in the midst of this crisis that has been defined by so much trauma, suffering and death, we have also had the opportunity to discern and reimagine how our complex lives and communities might fit together in a new way such that indifference and individualism, self-preservation and inequality are no longer the defining characteristics of our ecclesial and global community, but rather that a common justice and a common dignity are the cornerstones upon which a new way of being and relating is founded.

This invitation to discernment and reimagining, identifying what is precious and necessary, and what is not, has been open also to our Church and faith communities. It is perhaps in this light that we can understand this global and local time of crisis also as a time of hope, filled with new possibilities - a space and time of *kairos* - in which we are called to conversion and renewal, as we accompany each other in our witness to the good news of Jesus Christ in our fragile world. It is in this time of hope, filled with new possibilities that we re-imagined a new way as an 'opportunity to build something different.'<sup>50</sup>

---

<sup>48</sup> Pope Francis, *Urbi et Orbi: Extraordinary Moment of Prayer*, 27.03.20, [https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2020/documents/papa-francesco\\_20200327\\_omelia-epidemia.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2020/documents/papa-francesco_20200327_omelia-epidemia.html), [accessed 23.11.20]

<sup>49</sup> Pope Francis, *General Audience*: 19.08.20, [http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/audiences/2020/documents/papa-francesco\\_20200819\\_udienza-generale.html](http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/audiences/2020/documents/papa-francesco_20200819_udienza-generale.html), [accessed 23.11.20].

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

It is a way that has been crafted and sculpted from the fruits of our dialogue which attempted to attentively listen to each other, reflect on our experience in conversation with our scripture and wider tradition, and discern together something of what *the Spirit is saying to the Churches*.<sup>51</sup>

The participants in our seminar series *Our Church emerging from Covid: preparing the future* concluded that we have to be both different, yet faithful, as a Church emerging from Covid, for we cannot emerge from this crisis the same, they reflected, as if nothing has happened. Our re-imagining of new wineskins for our Church, our participants continued, must be informed by and draw upon this profound generational experience, whilst remaining in creative fidelity to the gospel of Jesus Christ that defines and sustains us on our pilgrim journey. In sympathy with our global pastor Pope Francis, our seminar participants profoundly understood that each crisis does indeed have a lesson to teach us, and we need to learn how to listen to it with the ear of the heart.<sup>52</sup>

Our seminar journey across three months in early 2021 enabled us to discern, with an acknowledged provisionality, some of the key *signs of the times* from our context and perspective, and offer a contextual critical analysis of the challenges and opportunities before the Church as we tentatively emerge from Covid, that included the grave injustices and scandals of racism and clerical child abuse, the ecclesiological ‘stumbling block’ of an inattentive neglect of the many voices that constitute the richly diverse people of God, alongside the rich blessings and integral contribution that lay leadership, women and priests make to sustaining the communal witness to the good news through the Church before, during and beyond Covid. This report has set out what our participants believe ‘matters’ for our Church as we emerge from Covid and ‘prepare the future’, an analogical remembering and recovery of the Lukan ‘lost coin’.

It was through the slowly dissipating fog of the global covid pandemic, that our participants reflected deeply upon the cry of the people of God that they had encountered and heard echoing loudly within and across our Church communities, and thus discerned and reimagined a new pathway for all within and across our Church to embrace - a **‘way’ of deep listening and attentiveness** that draws us beyond ourselves through encounter to the needs of the other and the common good, and expands and enriches our vision and understanding of what it means to be human and to be a community of disciples of Jesus in our world of today and tomorrow.

---

<sup>51</sup> Revelation 2:7,11,17,29; 3:6,13,22(NRSV)

<sup>52</sup> *Amoris Laetitia*, 232, [http://www.vatican.va/content/dam/francesco/pdf/apost\\_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco\\_esortazione-ap\\_20160319\\_amoris-laetitia\\_en.pdf](http://www.vatican.va/content/dam/francesco/pdf/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20160319_amoris-laetitia_en.pdf), [accessed 19.11.20]

It is way that our seminar participants believe can find expression in a **ministry of attentiveness, accompaniment and healing** that responds tenderly to the grief and suffering, the sickness and death, and trauma of this pandemic; a way that can find expression in a **ministry of deep attentive listening** to the unheard and silenced, the marginalised and the quietened voices that have been neglected within and beyond our Church in conflict with our espoused ecclesiology; and it is a way that can find expression through **personal and communal attentive ecclesial discernment** that is attentive to the least breath of the Spirit as we attune our ears and eyes to what God hears and what God sees as we emerge from Covid.

A recovery of such an **attentiveness** to the suffering and pain, sickness and death, grief and bereavement that has defined much of our journey through this pandemic, will enable our Church to first and foremost become anew a Church of healing, compassion and tenderness in the model of Jesus. It is through however an habitual attentive engagement with so many **neglected and familiar voices** from the people of God, that we will not only remain sensitised and attuned to the grave injustices of our day unveiled more sharply by Covid, but we will also be enabled to draw upon our 'deepened reservoirs of empathy', that have expanded through this pandemic, to both reflect deeply upon our enriched understanding of what it means to be human, and to become neighbours to all, beginning with those most vulnerable and fragile.

It is on this new pathway that we will further discover, discern and imagine the foundations and contours of a new way of fitting together as communities of disciples in our relationships with God, each other and our service of the world, and nurturing and nourishing the **people, connectedness and relationships** that we have rediscovered are so precious to us as, and integral for a faithful and flourishing Church. We are summoned by the Spirit, our seminar participants concluded, to become a **deeply listening and attentive community of disciples**, journeying together in **mutual accompaniment** as we **discern** the will of God for our Church at this time in our history as we tentatively emerge from Covid.

It is in the light of this rich reflection and discernment that the hope and passion, energy and constructive ecclesial critique expressed in this seminar series paves a possible pathway of renewal for our Church as we tentatively imagine our gradual and stuttering emergence from the multi-layered impact of this global Covid-19 pandemic.

The initial analysis and conclusions in this report, that are grounded in our shared experience through the Covid-19 pandemic, are far from exhaustive and notably provisional, yet they offer an important and foundational insight from which we can continue our research that focuses on the opportunities and challenges before the Church as we embark upon a pathway of ecclesial renewal. As such they provide scope for further interdisciplinary analysis and reflection by the *Centre for Ecclesial Ethics* and her interlocuters in the months and years ahead as we plan and refine the focus and scope of our work and ministry.

This research sets forth a pathway upon which new wineskins can emerge for our Church through an attentive ecclesial accompaniment of trauma and a systemic ecclesial attention to all voices - and carries the potential to be threaded together as a new garment to renew the body of Christ as we emerge from Covid, a garment whose threads are drawn from the baptismal robe of each member from wherever and whoever we are – and ‘fit us together’ in a new way for a new time through new relationships embracing God’s new covenant. A garment drawn from the real lives of ordinary women and men that can shape and support the deepened participation of all God’s faithful people in a new way of being Church, that is shaped by a shared authority and defined by a diversity in ministry, that is balance by a blended leadership and enhanced with an accurate and authentic anthropology that is attentive to the whole person and every person, and thus can enrich our ecclesial ethics, stretch our ministerial imagination and enhance our ecclesial horizon as we hold together in love ‘the demands of the gospel and human fragility’.<sup>53</sup>

The Spirit is speaking - *we are being called to **listen** attentively, **accompany** tenderly and **discern** together faithfully.* We are called by the Spirit to act with courage and humility.

---

<sup>53</sup> Pope Francis, *General Audience*, 19.08.20.





## 1.1. SEMINAR ONE PROGRAMME: WEDNESDAY 27<sup>TH</sup> JANUARY 2021, ZOOM

### Our Church emerging from Covid: preparing the future

12.30 pm onwards	Gathering...
1.00 pm	Welcome to the Centre for Ecclesial Ethics at MBIT Introductions Aims and method of CEE Seminar Series and Seminar One
1.30 pm	Session 1: You and others – part 1
2.15 pm	Short break to stretch – 5 mins
2.20 pm	Session 1: You and others – part 2
3.00 pm	Long Break – 35 mins
3.35 pm	Session 2: Faith
4.05 pm	Short Break – 15 mins
4.20 pm	Session 3: Our community, our world - local and global
5.00 pm	Short break – 15 mins
5.15 pm	Session 4: Our Church - local and global
5.55 pm	Short break to stretch – 10 mins
6.05 pm	Reflecting on our day
6.20 pm	Preparing for Seminar 2: what happens next?
6.30 pm onwards	Departing...

## SEMINAR ONE - LISTENING

Wednesday 27<sup>th</sup> January, 1.00 pm

### 'QUESTION MENU' SESSION 1

#### You and others

In session one, you are each invited to share what has been most important or significant for you during this time of Covid, with reference to one or more of the following:

Each person will have 5 minutes to share in this session with the whole group

Our first session is intentionally open and fluid so as to enable each person to share what has been most significant for them during this Covid pandemic. As you will see from the questions for the following sessions, we will have further time to delve more deeply into each of these areas

You

Others

Faith

Church

## 'QUESTION MENU' SESSION 2

### *Faith*

In session two, in smaller groups, you are each invited to respond from your own experience to some of the following questions that are of interest to you, in conversation with the group<sup>1</sup>

This session will last for **30 minutes** and allow for more conversation

*Each group will have a facilitator to support and guide our conversation.*

- What has the **practice of your faith** looked like during Covid: in lockdown? post lockdown?
- What personal **practices of prayer and ritual** have you engaged in through Covid?

- What impact did the **closure of churches** have on the practice of your faith, the celebration of the sacraments and outreach to the bereaved, the sick and the vulnerable?
- Have you experienced any **change in your understanding** of Catholicism during this time?
- What **challenges or struggles or barriers** have you faced in terms of faith and practice?

- On reflection, is there anything in terms of faith that is **no longer so important** for you?
- On reflection, is there anything in terms of faith that has **emerged as more important?**

---

<sup>1</sup> Cf *Catholic Women Speak* network facebook pages, from where some of these questions are adapted.

## 'QUESTION MENU' SESSION 3

### *Our community, our world: local and global*

In session three, in smaller groups, you are each invited to respond from your own experience to **both** of the following questions, in conversation with the group

This session will last for **40 minutes** and allow for more conversation

*Each group will have a facilitator to support and guide our conversation*

**a) thinking about some of the darkness and ills that have been unveiled by the coronavirus pandemic – challenges that face our communities and our world**

- what are the **wounds and scars** that we have seen humanity bearing during this pandemic - wounds and scars borne by humanity as a whole, but also borne by particular people and peoples in concrete time and specific place
  - perhaps identify these **scars and wounds, local and global**, and spend some time discussing the details about the scars and wounds that you have seen, and their respective symptoms.
- **What relationship, if any, has our Church had with these local and global wounds and scars?**

**b) thinking about some of the light that has emerged through the Coronavirus pandemic – the opportunities for good that have opened up in our communities and our world**

- through your experience what **'light'** have you seen and heard, both **locally and globally**, as a response to the challenges and inequalities experienced by people and communities
  - perhaps identify these **local and global examples of light**, that have emerged and spend some time discussing the details about these examples that you have seen, and their respective expressions. How and why were you involved?
- **Where role has our Church played, and could play, in these local and global examples**

## 'QUESTION MENU' SESSION 4

### *Our Church: local and global*

In session four, in smaller groups, you are each invited to respond from your own experience to **both** of the following questions, in conversation with the group

This session will last for **40 minutes** and allow for more conversation

*Each group will have a facilitator to support and guide our dialogue*

- What are the **signs of flourishing** that you have seen and experienced emerging in ***the Church***, local and global?
- What is it that you have seen or experienced that ***nourishes and sustains*** these examples of flourishing during Covid?
  - What else could have helped to nourish and sustain these signs of flourishing?
- What are the **symptoms of decay** and **dysfunction** that you have seen and experienced emerging in the ***Church***, local and global?
  - What are the ***root causes*** of such symptoms that you have seen and experienced during Covid?

## 1.3 SEMINAR ONE EMAIL INVITATIONS

Dear all,

I hope that you and yours are safe and well during these challenging days. (apologies if this is a repeat posting...troubles with email!)

I am very much looking forward to meeting you all in 'person' over zoom next Wednesday 27<sup>th</sup> January for the first seminar in our series Our Church emerging from Covid: preparing the future. We will begin at 1.00 pm and ensure that we finish by 6.30 pm. The link for the 'zoom room' will open at 12.30 pm if you wish to join early, settle in and have a chat (I will send this link the day before, on Tuesday 26<sup>th</sup> January). Thank you to everyone for their flexibility with this new timetable, which I hope will free up both the morning and evening for everyone.

Our first seminar in our series is about listening, attentively listening to what we and our fellow participants see and experience: ourselves, with others, in our world and in our Church, during this time of the global Covid-19 pandemic. This might draw from what we have seen and experienced in these realms:

- that has arisen directly because of Covid;
- that has been amplified and intensified during this time of Covid; or
- that might have simply arisen during this same period in which Covid has engulfed us.

I have attached to this email the programme for this first seminar, in which you will see that we have four main sessions during our time together. I have also attached the seminar question menus that include the questions that will serve to frame our reflections and guide our conversations in each of these four sessions.

For Session 1 we will remain as a large group, and each participant will be invited to share for five minutes what has been most significant for them during this time of Covid with respect to themselves, or others, or faith and/or Church. More details are set out in the attached seminar question menus. This session is intentionally open and flexible so as to gain an initial overview of our experience during this past year and to enable each of us to contribute. We will engage in a more detailed exploration of these areas of experience in the following sessions.

Thus in Sessions 2,3 and 4 we will break into smaller groups to foster a richer conversation. In each of these smaller groups there will be a facilitator to guide us through our questions and to support our dialogue. The suggested questions in your seminar question menus attachment are given in advance so that we can have a read through and begin to reflect and ponder how we might wish to respond and contribute during each session. So please have a read and a ponder, maybe jot down a thought or two, and then relax – no scripts or presentations are necessary!

As you will also see from the programme, we have numerous breaks throughout our time which I hope will enable us all to stretch our legs, have a bite to eat and drink, and take some time to think and process – all of which I trust will make our conversation more fruitful.

Towards the end of the day we will look back and reflect on the fruits of our seminar and remind ourselves of the preparation for our second seminar that will be about analysis.

I have also attached the participant introductions once again so that we have the chance to acquaint ourselves with each other in advance of our time together.

Thank you once again for your time and generosity in participating in our seminars, which I am sure will prove to be an enriching experience for all of us who participate. If there is any further information or clarification that you need at this stage, please do not hesitate to get in touch and I will get back to.

With my best wishes,

Liam

Liam Hayes  
Director | Centre for Ecclesial Ethics  
Person H Beaufort Institute of Theology | Cambridge

1.4 SEMINAR ONE SUMMARY REPORT

**PART I - Record and reflection on the seminar held on Zoom, 27<sup>th</sup> January 2021, 1.00 - 6.30 pm**
**Introduction**

1.00 pm - 1.30

pm

Person F, Director of the Centre, opened the seminar with some introductory remarks.

**Chatham House Rules** were proposed with no declared opposition.

Before the sessions formally began, each participant was asked to name one word or brief phrase that summed up their experience or reflection during the COVID-19 pandemic. Words that came up included: *enduring, finitude, disturbing, challenging, anguish, solitude, interesting, eye-opening, the everyday, tricky, challenging, discombobulated, challenge, chaos-change, relationships, vulnerable, resilience.*

**Session 1: You and others**

1.30 pm - 3.00

pm

*This was held as a plenary. Each participant was invited to share briefly (up to 5 mins) what has been most important or significant for them during the pandemic.*

*Person H* reported that she felt deeply disturbed, regarding both her faith and her belonging to the Church. She had noticed that many people had been shaken up by the pandemic and that a 'fault line' of injustice had been made evident. Some of her certainties had been challenged. She said that no easy answers were available and that the Church needs to engage in rigorous thinking. All too often, it produces traditional and platitudinous answers. She singled out as particularly disturbing the Church's response to the ICSA (sexual abuse) report. On a more personal level, Person H noted that she tried to stay connected while living alone, highlighting the importance of maintaining connections with people who have been supportive, and cultivating networks. She found both Zoom and her own support bubble helpful. Person H continued to express her dismay at a Church that, in her view, is currently promoting a theology and ecclesiology that are not genuinely teachings of the Church. She was surprised by amount of creativity that is not being used and concluded that she had seen both the joy and the pain experienced by many people.

*Person J* remarked that, as a young student, her most salient experience was of being cut off. She feels cut off both from her family and Church community and has struggled to find Church communities online. She has, however, connected to older people and enjoys hearing their memories of VE Day. She finds it particularly hard being a member of the Church without being able to take communion and has found socially distanced masses difficult to participate in. She also finds it hard to meet other Catholics.

*Person K* said that she and everyone else had been affected by the high level of mortality associated with the coronavirus and expressed her sadness about this. She was shocked by the whole situation, which she likened to a clock that had stopped and brought the whole world to a halt. But she also remarked that we had been given the gift of time for thought and reflection, which the previous pace of life had made difficult. She noted that the social isolation forced upon us all had brought us into closer interaction with others, with people reconnecting and looking out for one another. She had begun to realise the importance of human interaction and human interdependence.

*Person K* said her faith was her anchor, even though she had found it challenged. She could either 'drown in surreality' or go to the foot of the cross, despite her fears and worries.

*Person P* remarked that he lives in a multi-generational household and that the pandemic has, for him, been a time of great uncertainty. It has brought great changes to the lives of everyone in his household and, for him, a sense that we cannot control our own destiny. His faith is a lifeline, a constant feature of his life and a lens for discernment. He stressed that a mature faith always leads us to consider the situation of others, and under this heading he stressed that faith had taught us more clearly than before that *we all exist in relation to others*. He also remarked that the online Church was no substitute for physical gathering as a Church community, in which everyone knows each other's name. He now worships at the Chapel of Ease and plays a role in the LGBT+ community. He concluded by remembering Pope Francis standing *on his own* and offering *kenosis* – emptying himself of his status and privilege and offering himself completely to others in love.

*Person L* reported that she has to stay at home as her husband is very vulnerable. She realised there was nothing anyone could do about the situation caused by the pandemic. Not wanting to pray alone, she found online services at which she could pray, and she is still doing so. Her most significant experience during this period has been her realization of our finitude, and this caused her anxiety which was worsened by the closing of the Churches. She thought especially of the importance of the mutual comfort of the lonely, and especially of those who died alone. In the midst of these thoughts, she derives particular comfort from the Angelus.

*Person Q* emphasized the significance of human relationships, with friends, family, the Church and her faith. The pandemic has led her to reconnect with friends, and her mother has moved in with

her. She noted that many people are less busy and are reconnecting with one another. Her voluntary work is now more difficult to do and in connection with this, she has noticed that London in particular is a city where wealth and poverty are directly adjacent. She noted that for the middle classes, the pandemic has proved more of a struggle than for the poor, for whom life goes on as before. The pandemic has helped her to slow down somewhat. As far as her faith goes, things have been hard and at one point she was moving away from the Church [check accuracy of paraphrase] but is now moving back towards it. Her prayer life has been sporadic, but within it she is learning to listen to God more and talk less. As for the Church, she has always been frustrated with it and it can seem very dead to her. She is frustrated with the hierarchy but feels more connected to the Church's mystical aspects.

*Person D* noted that he had become more aware of nature during the pandemic, not having previously taken as much notice of it. He realized the onset of COVID-19 was going to be an historically defining moment, which will invite comparison with the onset of the Second World War. The pandemic has made us all slow down. He had re-read Karen Armstrong's book 'The Case for God' and in the light of it, reflected on the comparison between the present situation for the Church, especially in that it had ceased to hold services, and the way the Jews had to change the way they practised their faith after the sacking of the Temple. He invoked Pope Francis' observation that God was now knocking on the door of the Church to get out of it, not to get into it. *Person D* believes that old ideas about the Church and faith were now up for discussion and that this is a serious challenge. There were both positive and negative aspects to this – on the negative side, this is disruptive, but on the positive side it makes us all re-think important things.

*Person R* reported a more positive experience: she had secretly enjoyed the lockdown! She is a natural introvert and had always worked from home, so her working circumstances after the lockdown were similar to what they had been previously. She could continue her interest in observing wildlife and she experienced deeper and more intense relationships with others. She misses travel but feels more grounded and stable. On the negative side, however, she found the wearing of masks very difficult because of their silencing and distancing effects. She acknowledged that the use of Zoom had mitigated this. She despairs of what she sees as the mishandling of the pandemic by the government and feels compassion for people working in the NHS. She worries about the effect of the whole situation on her elderly mother. As far as her faith is concerned, *Person R* feels more grounded than ever. She found Christmas was simpler than usual but was saddened by the fact that no Catholic authority said that *Christmas cannot be cancelled*.

*Person N* remarked on how many of our old assumptions had been stripped away. He has become more aware that, in the end, only people matter. He summarized his experience as one of solitude. Since the lockdown began, his days have been shaped by the Liturgy of the Hours; this, indeed, became his main focus. As the external signs of communion with others went away, a deeper communion took over. *Person N* spoke of facing truth, including the truth of oneself. As he became more aware of people and their needs, he noticed the struggles of people poorer than himself. He experienced a sense of helplessness about this, wondering what he could possibly do.

He was especially saddened by the radical change in funerals. Without the usual Requiem Masses, funerals were conducted at a different level and offered only 'pastoral opportunities.' He experienced loneliness – solitude was not always good, and he missed people.

*Person B* worried about the schooling of her two young children. At first, she was happy that they were safe at home, but later became scared by the many deaths caused by the pandemic. As an introvert, she likes having her own space, and this gave her an opportunity to think about what was necessary, what was important, and what was not important. As regards others, she realized the coronavirus had revealed gaps in the Church. For example, the Church has not been listening to women, and in general is very distant from everyday realities. Person B compared this with the conduct of the Pharisees, who loved dishing out rules without facing their consequences. Covid-19 had brought out some dreadful realities, and no one in the Church was saying anything to help.

*Person G* found that the Covid pandemic has expanded our understanding of human experience and deepened our reservoirs of empathy. For example, it has given us the experience of police checks and limits on our freedom that are common for many people in other parts of the world. In Ireland, there has been a renewed sense of the common good, despite all the restrictions. This sense has been especially awakened by the experience of being catapulted into the lives of others. As a university associate professor, she found online teaching exhausting. In general, she experienced a curious blend of distance and intimacy, which led to a sense of powerlessness. She tells people to stop watching the news and is impatient with people who said they were bored during the lockdown. She believes that personal contact will come to be valued more as a result of the situation. An important question is of how our shared experience can help us to reason about the common good and social justice, and how the Church's concern with these things can be recharged.

*Person S* said that he enjoyed his role and was usually very busy. But he saw that with the coronavirus with us the ordinary structures of life disappear. With respect to faith, he found that during the days of the Paschal Mystery he was constantly 'hit'. He was in a bubble with other people and a cat, and a particularly tricky problem for him was of how to provide leadership for the diocese. He was grateful to listen to the experience and advice of others.

*Person C* said that the most important thing she had to bear in mind was that leadership is part of her role. But she had faced significant challenges in carrying out that role, while feeling a great sense of responsibility. She wants to relieve people's pain but feels powerless to do so. She therefore strongly feels the challenges of leadership and says there are big questions to sort out. She also remarked that the pandemic has exacerbated existing social inequalities and was reminded by the Black Lives Matter movement that it has had a disproportionate effect on BAME people. She found the reality of structural racism painful. She wanted to hug people but could not.

She was missing people's physical presence and found it tough to listen to people on Zoom. She remarked that other people talk of anxiety and mental ill health. However, Person C considers herself lucky in having a family.

*Person E* has been finding the effect of the lockdown on teenagers troubling – for example, their being tethered to electronic devices. She was worried about the impact of lockdown on the education system. She remarked that the pandemic started from a distorted relation to the natural world, and this unnaturalness had now extended to the necessity of prayer outside Church buildings and the lack of the incarnate presence of friends. However, she had enjoyed embodied experiences of the natural world. She found it challenging being the leader of a new institute while adapting to working from home, and to the blurring of the gap between home and work. Headington Church, where she is a member of the congregation, was normally lively, but things had changed. There are few white people who attend, and many are keyworkers.

*Person A* said that at first, she managed well with the new online existence and was able to use it to keep an eye on her parents in Poland. All her days were filled with work and she also delivered shopping to neighbours. However, things took a serious turn for the worse and she collapsed and had a breakdown during the first lockdown. She had to take seven months sick leave. She felt locked up in herself and felt a considerable amount of guilt and anguish during this period. She returned to work as a co-leader rather than sole leader. She felt there were no boundaries between her work and her personal life and came to see that the state of our bodies can tell us a lot about our unhealthy tendencies – in her case, towards considerable over-work. She learned that self-care is a virtue. As part of renewed self-care, she took up baking and artwork. The Rosary became her favourite prayer and she prayed for the sick and the deceased, sometimes in an Anglican Church. She participated in online Mass at many Churches and was grateful for all she had received. She remarked finally on the spirituality of slowing down.

*Person M* said that he felt lucky – lockdown did not make as much difference to his life as it did to many others, since he was already accustomed to working from home and had usually gone to work only to teach and attend meetings. However, he found that the first lockdown exacerbated anxieties he was already experiencing about work, especially when he was suddenly required to switch to online teaching and use Zoom, with little or no prior experience. He also found it frustrating, though manageable, not to go out and see people. But he was grateful for his family and friends and tried to be mindful of others who were far less fortunate.

*Person F* said that the three words that most came to mind during lockdown were strength, vulnerability and powerlessness. He had had surgery before the pandemic struck and this gave him an extra challenge. He had glimpses of what poverty was like and his sensitivity increased to other people's vulnerability. He noticed a calmness in people who don't have control over their

health. Indeed, people had become his 'real presence'; he reconnected with other humans and with birds.

**Long break: 3.00 – 3.45 pm**

*For this and all subsequent sessions, participants were divided into three small groups, each with a facilitator. The discussion was framed around specific questions and sub-questions that were distributed in advance. Where relevant to how discussions went, they are reproduced below.*

**Group A      Facilitator: Person A**

*‘What has the practice of your faith looked like during Covid: in lockdown? Post lockdown?’*

*Person H* said she has not given physical liturgical expression to her faith during the lockdown but has found virtual, online liturgical expression very nourishing.

*Person D* told us he was also a ‘virtual parishioner’, who was also enjoying meeting online for music rehearsals. These gave him a sense of continuity. He remarked that the Church is found day by day in the form of these new connections, and that this has led him to reassess what was important.

*Person G* spoke of the value of the cross-racial and cross-cultural parishes that had been made possible by the switch to online services. The rise of these online services had strengthened communion with people she might otherwise have little in common with.

*Person A* (facilitator) told how she had looked for cathedral services online and had surfed through Latin and Anglican masses. She did not judge what they were offering and assumed that all who were offering them were doing so for good reasons.

*‘What personal practices of prayer and ritual have you engaged in through Covid?’*

See the remarks (above) of Person H, Person G and Person A, which touch on personal practices of prayer and ritual as well as practices in general.

*‘What impact did the closure of Churches have on the practice of your faith, the celebration of the sacraments and outreach to the bereaved, the sick and the vulnerable?’*

The general feeling was that the closure of Churches had been difficult but had also provided new online opportunities. Some participants (see above) had found online services sources of nourishment.

*Person G* had experienced challenges in surfing online to find 'a tolerable liturgy'. She also remarked (see above) the move to online services had provided new opportunities to associate (virtually) with people from different backgrounds whom one might otherwise not meet.

*Person D* remarked that young Catholics are far more at home in the digital world than older ones, since they grew up in a digital community.

*Person A* drew a parallel with evangelical communities, which make great use of digital means to attract people but also want to be physically together with other worshippers. She noted that initially people were worried by not being able to go to communion but accepted that this was becoming more usual.

*Have you experienced any change in your understanding of Catholicism during this time?*

*Person G* spoke of the 'dual role' of religion in forging connections between the faithful but also forcing them to continue asking 'big questions'. This had been especially brought to light by the lockdown.

*Person H* noted with concern that the Church's authority has been used to justify the abuse of power. But she had also encountered much prophetic witness that has nothing to do with the practices of the faith and that many people's baptismal gifts have been wasted. She also came to see more clearly that the authentic teaching of the Church is that God meets us in *suffering*. Even if we cannot understand why God allows such large amounts of suffering, we have a clue to the answer in the fact that God suffers with us.

*Person D* noted that doctrinal differences were becoming less important to ordinary people in the Church. He noted that some Churches were forging connections with mosques, leading him to observe that 'only we divide God'. The pandemic had led to a greater understanding of the 'totality of God'.

*Person A* noted the ideological tensions in the Church. Belonging to a particular parish was becoming distinctively less important.

*Person H* stressed the need to belong that was satisfied by the Church but added that the Church was increasingly missing a sense of belonging to the people. Something has to die so that something [the sense of belonging to the people] can be reborn.

*Person D* noted that during the Reformation it was the laity who nourished the faith. Something of this needs to be restored.

*Person G* was frustrated by the unwillingness of the Church to ordain women. She associated this general attitude with 'right wing Catholic voices' which proclaimed that the Catholic Church was still subject to unfair discrimination.

*Person A* noted the shortage of clergy and the need for new training ground.

*What challenges or struggles, or barriers have you faced in terms of faith and practice?*

*Person G* remarked that although her faith gives her comfort and help in surviving the pandemic, it was necessary to face disturbing questions about theodicy – the traditional arguments used by the Church to explain suffering and evil. She found a tension between the comfort and the hard questions.

*On reflection, is there anything in terms of faith that is no longer so important for you?*

Some participants implicitly answered this question under the headings above. In particular, there was some frustration with the distance between the institutional authority of the Church and the understanding and experience of ordinary lay Catholics. There was also a certain implicit suspicion of exclusivism, with some participants welcoming the commonalities between Catholics and those of other faiths.

*On reflection, is there anything in terms of faith that has emerged as more important?*

In general, the importance of community and connectedness was stressed. Reflectiveness and compassion in the face of suffering seemed, to some, more important than strict doctrinal unity. This was not a weakening of faith, but a renewed understanding of it in the face of uncertainty and suffering.

**Group B      Facilitator: Person N**

The group decided to focus only on the second block of questions, namely:

*What impact did the closure of Churches have on the practice of your faith, the celebration of the sacraments and outreach to the bereaved, the sick and the vulnerable?*

*Have you experienced any change in your understanding of Catholicism during this time?*

*What challenges, struggles or barriers have you faced in terms of faith and practice?*

*Person B* was very saddened by the closure of Churches, especially when it was dragged out. She had to find new ways to engage with the Church and realized worship was possible without the sacraments. The absence of Mass shocked her into re-thinking her relationship with God and found this could be maintained online (she joined an online parish in Guildford). Doing this helped her understand what Mass and Catholicism were really about.

*Person L*, as a cradle Catholic, was used to following the rules and had brought her children up in the faith. Before lockdown, she had felt she had 'done her bit'. She came to see more clearly that there was more to worship than these things: it includes using her talents to the glory of God and reaching out to people, to forge links between the Church and the community. In a more secular vein, she had come to see the importance of exercise and eating properly.

*Person J* said she had always had faith in God, but the move to online Mass had made her faith in the Church a more complicated matter. For her, the physical act of receiving communion had always been her strongest connection to God. The necessity to celebrate Mass online without communion led her to find certain things problematic about the Church. During the easing of lockdown she had returned to Mass at her university chaplaincy, but she had worried about attending Mass at places where the congregation was older and therefore more vulnerable to catching the virus. Asked what she was specifically missing when she couldn't take communion, *Person J* replied that it was hard to say, but she felt there was something special about communion, as it was in this that she really experienced God.

*Person B* added that she found the second lockdown harder than the first, as she had been able to take communion during the interim period. Lockdown affected her well-being and sense of connection with God.

*Person P* had initially found it shocking not to be able to share the Eucharist in physical communion but had soon joined an online community with streaming from the Presbytery of his Church. He is ambivalent about live-streamed Masses, as he always was about TV Masses. He remarked that the situation was encouraging people to explore their own resources; people who watched online Masses developed a practice of their own. He loved the idea of God 'breaking out of Churches', something which also has a material aspect, as his Church runs a food bank from a huge container outside. The Church itself is also a kind of food bank; his parish priest calls it Eucharist in the streets.

*Person B* then voiced a particular worry about confession. She did not understand why it was not possible to do confessions on Zoom or by phone. This was particularly important to the dying, who may need that sacrament.

*Person N* related an anecdote about a parishioner who asked whether he could bless his candle. This led to a conversation about who was doing the blessing on Zoom – the priest, or the parishioner? *Person N* admitted that he could not answer this.

*Person L* remarked that God knows our limits and wondered whether he would hold us accountable for not doing things we were unable to do.

*Person J* expressed concern about an overly traditional approach being used. She noted that American evangelicals had long held dramatic services and blessings on TV and wondered whether the Catholic Church had been too slow to embrace this practice online.

*Person Q* admitted that she felt a bit disconnected from the Church at present but noted the benefit of the online Church in providing a way for her to return. In the past, she had been scandalized and hurt by the Church and had become distrustful of it. Most priests she had encountered had pushed her faith [face?] away. She still struggles with God and the Church but misses the in-person Sacrament of Reconciliation. She has the same understanding of Catholicism as before the pandemic but doesn't understand people's worry about not being able to go into Churches when one can pray anywhere. The Church is too inward looking and should try to reach out more. It is always there, and there is more to it than Sunday.

*Person P* told how he had signed up to Richard Rohr's Daily Meditations and the notion of the Cosmic Egg, which distinguishes one's self, one's group and the God or Reality that lies beyond both. He likes the idea that this is 'real religion'.

*Person J* talked about Christmas and Easter. For her, Easter is far more important theologically and she has doubts about the historicity of the Nativity accounts in the gospels. Christmas is more about being with one's family and community. She is happy for Christmas to be secular. But she really missed Easter last year, which took place during lockdown.

*Person Q* likes the spiritual sense of Advent. Christmas, for her, is about celebrating Christ's birth and to recognise him at the table is important, especially as he came to us in poverty and simplicity. She found this easy to do last year.

*Person J* reiterated that she missed the Easter Masses last year more than Christmas. She found herself working in a shop when she should have been with her Catholic grandmother.

#### **Group C      Facilitator: Person F**

*Person R* opened by quoting a letter in *The Tablet* about Church closures, which said that God will not punish us for what is beyond our control but seeks to support us. She remarked that the surprise came when the Churches re-opened after the first lockdown, when the faithful discovered they had the same sense of God as previously. God is no more or less present during the lockdown than when Churches are open for services. Her own experience is one of constancy, summed up in the phrase 'the everyday'.

*Person S* recounted that he was getting emails from people with sharply differing views about what the Church should do during lockdown. But the most important responsibility is to Christ. He had not enjoyed the Covid period but had had a sense of constancy. He sees that many people are unsettled, and he has witnessed a variety of emotions in them. He advocates the motto 'live with difference and variety'. We should not be afraid if people are bewildered.

*Person K* noted that people's experiences of the lockdown are varied. She recalled three people who wept when told the Churches were closing, but also noted that there were many other developments that offered nourishment. When all seems to be falling apart, there is always something to hold on to, such as prayer platforms and pilgrimages. There are many opportunities to develop spiritually and it is always necessary to keep communities together. The Church online is now a Church for everybody; new people can join. But in one way, the lockdown caused a

breakdown of the Church community and there were many losses. It is now important to work our way out of these problems.

*Person C* said it was interesting that faith and Church were now being separated in many people's minds. Her own faith was 'impacted' after her realization that the Church closures would last a long time. She missed seeing people when the Church buildings were closed and noticed that Church communities were split by the closure. However, she used a prayer app and was able to continue participating in a weekly faith sharing group. She found the unrelenting pressure of work very difficult – this included volunteering in Churches as part of a cleaning rota and a food distribution team. Her work/life boundaries became blurred and this affected her prayer life. She stressed that *not everyone has the technical equipment* or knowledge to take part in online services. She noted that although her Church was not open as previously, it was still open as a coordinating platform. She was grateful for being able to bring prayer life 'into the everyday'. This made Sunday morning less of a priority by comparison.

*Person F* remarked, in response, that the Church buildings were closed but the Churches were more open than ever. *Person R* agreed with this.

*Person E* expressed agreement with *Person C*. She said that her Institute is embedded in a Jesuit community, where the separation between Church and work [world?] does not exist in the way that it does for others. The Covid outbreak had damaged that community and some people in it were very vulnerable. She had noticed a tension between traditional and new ways of doing things, with the latter not fully understood by the older community at Campion Hall. Concerning prayer and faith, *Person E* had undertaken a virtual Ignatian retreat with the Jesuits and was amazed at how well it worked. She regularly spends 60-90 minutes early in the morning in the outdoors, to feed her spiritual life. Her Institute has agreed to allow its members more time together in 'retreat mode', which she finds a very sustaining process. She faces huge organizational challenges concerning funding and other matters. Her research work has been cut out as a result, which she finds hard because she is a compulsive writer. But she has written a chapter on faith and she stresses that faith is a *gift* – an infused theological virtue, connected with love for God.

*Person F* asked about the relation of agency to faith. *Person E* answered that faith comes from a combination of our free will to receive it, together with the fact that 'it is not all up to us'. She has never been so busy.

*Person K* was grateful to be reminded that faith is a free gift, open to everyone. Someone might just stumble on it. Faith is a bait – we might let it go, but something brings us back and we are hooked.

*Person F* wondered how our experience of the Covid situation might be related to our capacity to 'taste' faith.

*Person R* answered by emphasizing the role of agency in the way people are interacting within the conversation with God. People show agency in exploring for themselves how to express or articulate their faith, perhaps worshipping at home, sharing meals at home and reinterpreting things for themselves. Exploration shows agency; people understand their engagement with God in different ways.

*Person C* declared that the gates had been thrown wide open. The Church is now in people's homes and in the community. People might agree to start a weekly meeting and then it carries on. These initiatives are very powerful and lead to greater solidarity with people for whom the Eucharistic Mass is not available.

*Person F* concluded the conversation, remarking that we are all being taken to a place we would rather not go to.

**4.15 – 4.25 pm      Short break**

**Group A      Facilitator: Person A**

*Person A* initiated the conversation, asking first about the *wounds and scars that we have seen humanity bearing during the pandemic*, with the emphasis here on communities and work rather than the Church (see Question Menu, Session 3)

*Person K* noted the disparity between rich and poor. She gave an example of qualified nurses from Ghana who have come to the UK and found that they cannot get through the professional glass ceiling. Instead, they remain staff nurses till retirement. Nurses in this position are usually black and they remain on the front line even though they have degrees. Covid has shot them down. If they speak up about it, they are seen as troublemakers. They give up the fight because they need the income. Most of these health care workers are poor. The Church needs to *befriend* people like this and look into the specifics of their situation.

*Person S* added that too many people have to keep quiet about similar situations, like his Romanian house mate who is a male staff nurse. Among the many reasons for this paralysis is that some people have never had agency and the pandemic has brought this out. *Person A* added that this also affects those on zero-hours contracts and victims of human trafficking.

*Person R* said society operates double standards concerning pay: people who do socially useful jobs like bin men and carers in care homes are on the minimum wage but are still taxed. She refuses to 'clap for carers' because this is a meaningless gesture – the way to recognise carers is to pay them properly. As a society, we don't know what the common good is, and government strategy doesn't know what the common good is when it comes to the lowest paid.

*Person S* said he had been irritated to get an email offering a vaccine 'by the back door'. It is all very well to demand vaccines for UK citizens, but vaccines are not available for many people worldwide. This raises uncomfortable questions about the fate of the disempowered.

*Person R* said she would be willing to delay having herself vaccinated, in order for the vaccine to be distributed more equitably around the world. She is embarrassed to speak to Africans who do not have access to the vaccine and reiterated her concern about our lack of understanding of the common good.

*Person S* said his mother died two years ago and he is grateful that she is not dying now, as he wonders if she would have been able to cope with getting Covid.

*Person R* told us her mother was left alone in a room in a care home for 5-6 months during the pandemic. This was scandalous and it haunts her. There are many such stories that show a general disregard for the elderly in the way care is structured.

*Person A* pointed out that in Eastern Europe there were delays booking the vaccine as well as structural injustices. In the part of Poland she comes from, there are no care homes, so care must be provided by families.

*Person P* said it is iniquitous that we pay a lot to people who look after our money but only a pittance to those who look after people. He was pleased that his Bristol parish responded well to Covid and the outreach was good – there was a large food bank at the door of his Church. His parish supports four to five hundred people and his parish has the largest number of people in the RCAA. Unlike many other agencies, his Borderlands charity for refugees and asylum seekers remained open during the lockdowns. There are the signs of light.

*This brought the discussion to the signs of light emerging through the Coronavirus pandemic – the opportunities for good that have opened up in our communities and our world.*

*Person K* recalled the Black Lives Matter demonstrations, the protests at the Capitol in Washington DC and the killing George Floyd that sparked them. In these things, she witnessed a levelling of all humanity: now, anything is possible anywhere. We can now see these injustices because we are all at home due to Covid. There was no human planning behind this. This new realization of bad events must lead to a certain light. God has shown us that we are all created in His image and likeness, and we must therefore *do* something about all the suffering.

*Person A* talked of the murder of women judges in Afghanistan and the problem of fake news. However, she thinks that, in response, we have seen much more commitment to truth. She was also moved by the presence of the Catholic Church at Joe Biden's inauguration. She said these were good signs.

*Person P* said he looks for good signs but is also made miserable. He was shocked by the antics of Donald Trump's supporters and noted the problem that so many people believe him. *Person P* said that Covid shows us all our vulnerability.

*Person R* remarked that the darkness of George Floyd's killing shows us that we don't understand the US. But the fact that, for the first time, the position of black people in the UK was being discussed, gives us hope – even though the discussion was short-lived. What does it mean to say that 'white is the norm'? She thanks God that some cultures have now come of age.

*Person A* then moved the discussion to *the role the Church has played, and could play, in these local and global examples*. Is there a need for something more concrete *in the Church* for (e.g.) bias training?

*Person K* said the Church does well with things like food banks. But it fails to provide other things, such as facilities for plugging phones into sockets. This is a real need for phone recharging facilities. *Person P* replied that he volunteered for 'Wild Goose', an ecumenical charity in Bristol, which provides that kind of service.

*Person S* reminded us that we need to listen, without knowing all the answers. It is also important to be able to *see signs of abuse*.

*Person P* was pleased that some street homeless people were given accommodation during the lockdown and stressed that it was important not to chuck them back on the street once the lockdown is over.

**Group B      Facilitator: Person N**

*Person L* opened with the plight of her brother who works in Dubai, loves his job but cannot leave the UK to return to it because of flight cancellations. She noted that many foreign nationals in the UK who have lost their jobs due to Covid cannot get back home for the same reason [check some personal details].

*Person C* noted that CAFOD [of which she is Director] has had huge requests for help from her charity. There are terrible Covid cases in sub-Saharan Africa, and this brings out the enormous inequalities there, which also exist (for example) in India. Such problems also exist in UK communities and her charity has been asked to help out local families. All this highlights great levels of deprivation.

*Person H* added to this the problem of people losing their jobs due to Covid and getting into debt. This too is now a global reality and she suggested that helping to alleviate this could be a new role for the Church.

*Person E* remarked that members of indigenous communities often help each other by supplying indigenous medicines. They also avoid dying in isolation. The Church can learn from the poorest communities by noticing how they manage these things. In general, the Church is called to see the interconnectedness of the global, local and natural worlds.

*Person C* remarked that since the pandemic began, there has been no 'bandwidth' for discussing anything but Covid. But because the virus is global, it requires the government to think about the global stage.

*Person N* (facilitator) noted the high death rates from Covid in his parish and stressed the terrible effects of the virus on non-white people (who are often in keyworker roles) and on the elderly. There is also a large number of families being referred to social services due to problems created by family breakdown.

*Person H* commented that the rise in the need for food banks and the large number of Covid-related deaths highlight social inequalities and food poverty.

*Person C* replied that these things are part of the 'darkness' [mentioned in the session brief]. The light begins in local communities. The Churches are physically taking part in those communities, via local initiatives and food growing. Church people are getting more involved in community work: a lot is happening at grassroots level, but it is not being talked about – for example, communities that send out food parcels.

*Person H* added that many young people are using social media to promote such community activities, and the Vatican has a special commission on Covid.

*Person C* remarked that much work has been done on how communities can be healed and that both excellent and bad ideas on this have been coming from the Vatican.

*Person H* noted the sad divisions within the Church. In particular, the Black Lives Matter movement had revealed deep wounds and scars that need to be engaged with.

*Person E* remarked that in the US, political identity was now more important to many people than religion. The current ideological clashes brought out the need to challenge evil, for example by adhering to the Paris Agreement on climate change. She also stressed that we need to grasp spiritual truths, as well as material and moral truths.

*Person H*, referring to personal experience (on the suggestion of the facilitator) told how she was a volunteer for the Samaritans and that there are important and powerful other resources that offer help, such as NHS helplines. These are examples of light that has emerged through the pandemic.

*Person M* asked whether any responses made, or that should be made, were distinctively Catholic (or Christian). Why wouldn't any decent person want to help, whatever their religious beliefs or lack of them?

*Person E*, in response to Person M' question, noted the importance of tapping into the spiritual world, which was connected to the natural world. We all might have some understanding of the common good, but Catholics have a different underlying motivation for pursuing it and a different understanding of what is lost when we do not pursue it.

*Person H* added that the Christian hope of resurrection reassures us that God is in the midst of suffering and that this life is not the end.

*Person C* referred to social science research that suggests that faith increases the likelihood of social contributions.

*Person E* highlighted the importance of the virtue of mercy and its connection with compassion and empathy. These traits are promoted in a particular way within Christianity.

### **Group C      Facilitator: Person F**

*Person F* opened the discussion by inviting reflections on the *darkness and ills* and the *wounds and scars* unveiled by the coronavirus pandemic (see Session 3 Question Menu). He asked in particular about the Church's role in relation to the wounds and scars. Had it been complicit? Had it voiced opposition?

*Person J* noted the differences in people's experience of the pandemic. She said that some people were relatively privileged and could consider what was important. But others were overworked. She worked in a shop and saw that for some people, work like this was their whole life, and they found themselves working longer and harder during the pandemic. She saw how hard her mother was working to get her classes online. She noted that many overworked people work in shops and hospitals, on low wages.

*Person B* had come across the particular problems facing women, especially those struggling with infertility or difficult pregnancies, raising children, living in abusive marriages and having to work. Catholic women face particular difficulties since Catholic teachings make it hard for them to engage with services offering IVF and contraception. They hear the teaching but in their personal lives they have to figure out for themselves how to be Catholic, since no one tells them, and no one listens to them. She compared people who don't help them to the Pharisees, who imposed rules but didn't lift their weight. Many Catholic women flout these rules and hope for the best, but they also feel guilty. Catholic women in abusive marriages are just told to pray more. This is the experience of most Catholic women, although some priests are helpful. *Person B* also noted the rise in domestic violence during the pandemic, but she doesn't hear the Church say anything about it. Love and charity are not extended to single mothers who have hard lives and have to work to earn money.

*Person F* commented that we are hearing things about privilege, inequalities, gender and abuse. These problems do not arise only during the pandemic.

*Person D* noted that Covid has magnified *global* inequalities. He noted Pope Francis' recent statements on vaccination – wealthy nations have put in bids for millions of vaccines, but poorer countries are at the back of the queue.

*Person G* agreed that Covid has exacerbated inequalities, but she emphasised the appalling effect of the lockdown on the *dying*. She was appalled that we could not *touch* our loved ones in hospitals and care homes. It was very disturbing to see dying people in hospitals deprived of touch. There will be much trauma to deal with that comes out of this. This tragedy is shared by rich and poor alike. She has given up on the prophetic leadership of bishops on these things. The kindness has been almost invisible. The trauma from this will be a huge pastoral challenge. It is a *huge darkness*.

*Person F* added that there was a great sense of loss that came from not being able to grieve at funerals. The deprivation of touch is a great loss. His sister works in intensive care and he witnessed her trauma arising from this.

*Person Q* commented that people have become vulnerable without power. Our humanity has grown from seeing the good that comes from suffering. We are in a common struggle together. Although Covid has given some relatively privileged people the chance to slow down, other have had to work even harder. The poor have always felt pain like this, but the rich are starting to see it and they can now empathise more and see Christ in others. Covid is less of a trauma in countries where people are used to struggling. When we are privileged, the trauma of Covid brings out our lack of resilience, and the fact that we have ignored homelessness and domestic violence for so long. *Person Q* observed that when we put the homeless in hotels, it was mainly to protect *ourselves* (an admittedly cynical take) and when we supply vaccines to other nations, it is to stop them from infecting *us*. The Church and the government have been slow to reach further out. On the good side, we are more likely to make a difference because we are all united. We are beginning to see the good done by people who work tirelessly. But we are also seeing much political division in the Church and society in general – people keep asking whether you are left wing or right wing when the focus should be on God. Brexit and US politics are good examples. The Church is not well equipped to deal with these divisions – it has its teachings, but little prophetic vision. It needs to work on its skill of reaching out and being charitable.

*Person F* intervened to focus the discussion on the *light that has emerged* from Covid and the *opportunities for good* that have arisen, in responding to inequalities. [See Session 3 Question Menu].

*Person D* responded that before the pandemic, Pope Francis had clearly articulated the need for a proper response to the natural world and the environment. This was prophetic, since Covid has shown us both the fragility of the environment and our capacity to look after it. Francis reminded us of our duty of stewardship of the environment. Covid has given us a chance to reassess our values. This is a positive thing. *Person F* agreed.

*Person B* observed that one positive thing to emerge was that we suddenly saw it was possible to do things previously thought impossible - for example, creating the furlough scheme, providing free school meals during school holidays and housing the homeless. We are finding ways towards a warm heart. After Covid struck, good things started to happen. But they have been done by (e.g.) celebrities rather than the Church. However, the Church was right to fight for Churches to stay open during the second lockdown.

*Person J* hopes we cannot go back from where we are – we have seen that we *can* provide more free school meals, etc. and we can justifiably raise taxes. Governments have shown that they can do these things and there is no excuse for not doing them in future.

*Person F* introduced the concept of human dignity. People with no experience of the Universal Credit system have been horrified by the lack of respect for dignity it shows and what engaging

with this system does to people. But he also noted that many food banks were providing chocolate as well as basic essentials, and this shows respect for dignity by giving people what they want (rather than only what they 'need'). Person J agreed, mentioning a food box that provided biscuits.

*Person F* moved the discussion to more global issues, such as the ICSA report on sexual abuse, Black Lives Matter and the mother and baby homes scandal in Ireland.

*Person D* noted how Church of England archbishops had called for prayer over these things, which was the first time we had seen a Church response, apart from complaints. This was welcome, if rather late in the day.

*Person J* said she was sceptical of Church hierarchies and doesn't look for any more guidance from priests and bishops than from anyone else. She also noted the gendered hierarchy of the Church: men schooled in seminaries don't always have the insights that she is looking for!

*Person G* replied that what the leadership says is still important, in particular concerning child sexual trauma [CST?] and the death penalty. When the Church moved towards a more abolitionist stance on capital punishment, it made a difference on the ground. We should expect the leadership to say something important about things that matter. The continuity of Catholic teaching is important.

**5 – 5.15 pm    Short break**

**Group A      Facilitator: Person A**

*This discussion was conducted around the two main questions detailed in the Question Menu for Session 4:*

*What are the **signs of flourishing** that you have seen or experienced emerging in **the Church**, local and global?*

*What are the symptoms of **decay and dysfunction** that you have seen or experienced emerging in **the Church**, local and global?*

*Person P* remarked that the Eucharist makes the Church. Wherever there is a common gathering around the Eucharist, the fullness of the Church is present. We cannot deny the Eucharist on the supposed grounds that there is little scriptural or theological basis for it.

*Person S* told how he was recently with some American seminarians and found the vast majority of them were supporters of Donald Trump. He was shocked by their vitriolic attacks on Pope Francis. But he conceded that we must accept that there is a variety of views in the Church: there are two mutually intolerant wings, but most Catholics lie in between. Unfortunately, however, he had heard some shameful views.

*Person R* thought the real question was: whom are we *not* seeing? She feared the online world leads us to coalesce only with like-minded people and reinforce our own theology. In some ways the online world is a force for unity, but in other ways it reinforces division. She wondered how the experience of the pandemic will affect our understanding of the sacramental priesthood. Some people talk of a return to clericalism and a lack of progress in taking the lay faithful seriously. But we need a new role for the priesthood in leading a more meaningful liturgy of the Word. *Now* is the time for the role of the laity in a secular world. We must explore their role more thoroughly.

*Person A* (facilitator) observed from the conversation that it was hard to separate the signs of flourishing from the signs of decay. She remarked on how blended learning was being embraced in universities, together with the increase in diversity, but noted the accompanying dangers of belonging only to one's own 'identity' group.

*Person K* suggested we highlight the contribution of footballer Marcus Rashford [who persuaded the government to supply free school meals during holidays] as a significant *light* that emerged. She believes there are Marcus Rashfords in our parishes. There is a lot of creativity there, but it needs to be brought out. The Covid situation encourages us to bring our creativity and diversity to the table and see that going to Church is not just for Sundays. But all too often, there is no encouragement. For this to happen, much depends on parish priests. The clergy need to trust the laity to make use of its creativity. The Church is already rich in skills and they just need to be brought out.

*Person P* added that priests need to be discerning of their parishioners and see what they can do. They need to understand that priests are not sacramental machines.

*Person S* noted how Pope Francis discerns beyond the divisions. But this is frightening for priests who want control and order. Some bishops handle their agency and power well, but some do not. Francis told priests to discern. Person S is discouraged by what is happening in North America and finds more life and nourishment elsewhere.

*Person A* noted the themes already emerging in the conversation – creativity, discernment and diversity. But she wondered whether these things are better promoted through shared roles. She compared her own situation of now having a Vice-Principal with whom she shares her leadership role. She faces the question of how to lead an institution that is diverse and has many functions. It has worked well so far and Person A wonders whether this can be replicated in parishes. On this model, the priest would not be the only person in charge but would share responsibility with two or three others. Two people thinking together may be helpful for discernment.

*Person P* noted that this was already happening in his parish. The future model will involve the laity leading. His bishop knows about this and seems supportive.

*Person S* added that older priests are more able to share power. But the younger seminarians do not all show the same willingness and some highly ‘clerical types’ are found in them. But he is optimistic about the eventual sharing of leadership. The Catholic Church has highly varied approaches. (Person A wondered how to phrase the issue. Maybe the term needed is ‘healthy complementarity’). Person S continued that he needs women to inform him. When he first came to his current role there were no women trustees, and he was told two things: 1) ‘You will never lack a good meal’; 2) ‘You will never hear the truth’. Both these things were true!

*Person R* suggested there could be lay CEOs of parishes.

*Person A* expounded the general idea as one of two people in charge who can make decisions without having to go to the top. She has investigated similar arrangements in business.

*Person K* suggested that these ideas should be introduced to seminarians. She has known Churches where business proceeds well without the presence of a priest. No one is invisible. No job is owned by any one person. There are many gifts and talents in these Churches, and it is wrong for anyone to say they alone have all the answers. Priests must feed their flocks, not stifle them. Discernment and charity are essential, since God gives to all the ability to serve.

*Person R* [bringing the discussion squarely back to decay and dysfunction in the Church] stressed that we are still not hearing from *survivors of sexual abuse*, especially of abuse by clergy. We need to hear about the impact of this on them and their faith. They have prophetic voices and a great deal of courage, but we are afraid of them. It is extremely important to mention them.

**Group B      Facilitator: Person N**

*Person C* opened with signs of flourishing in the Church. She found that every nightmare story brings a story of joy, with people helping their communities around the world. Over 6 million people in 33 countries have been helped by CAFOD. There is great generosity in communities, whether Catholic or not. Community action sustains people and is deeply rooted in our commitment to one another and in our seeing God in others.

*Person L* noted that her Church had opened a food bank, which was something new in her Church.

*Person H* remarked that people had taken responsibility for making things happen. This is partly shown in the global impact of CAFOD. Many older women, who are not digitally proficient, have used traditional methods of helping others. The creativity and sense of responsibility unleashed by the pandemic are sure signs of flourishing. People at grass roots level are not waiting for the institution to initiate responses. But more of this is needed. People should not have to wait for permission.

*Person N* has seen people typing names and institutions in live chat forums, as an example of such initiatives, which has been an expression of intercessory prayer during the online parish mass

*Person L* has seen pictures online of people who are being prayed for,

*Person C* added that people doing these things had no sense of needing authorization from priests!

*Person N* added that people are now using technology to join different Masses.

*Person H* said that the Church will need to ask itself how it manages its financial resources. It needs to be creative about this. Grass roots involvement both in distributing money and other kinds of aid gives people a sense of identity. All this serves to build the community.

*Person C* said she had received feedback saying how helpful CAFOD has been. But at parish level, no proper advice is given to priests on the use of technology, or interactive social media. Parishes are stuck in their 'silences' and old ways of doing things.

*Person N* noted some defeatism in the Church – the attitude that we should hunker down till it's all over. There was a lack of creativity coming down from the top, so local groups act spontaneously. He noted dysfunction in the Church resulting from hierarchical, patriarchal and clerical attitudes – a recurring theme.

*Person C* continued the theme of dysfunction with reference to the Church's preoccupation with averting scandals. She was also frustrated by the fact that nothing useful related to the pandemic is coming from the Bishops' Conference of England and Wales – for example, it hasn't yet put a Catholic bishop on Radio 4.

*Person H* noted that another sign of dysfunction was the failure to generate policies, especially concerning safeguarding. Old wineskins cannot hold the Church; new wineskins must be found. Pope Francis has spoken of a need to look into local structures. The framework is already there in Vatican II but has not been tried. Disorder must come before re-ordering can take place. The Church needs to look at how the 'arc of change' takes effect.

*Person N* then asked what 'our' part should be in making things better,

*Person H* replied that it was a matter of listening. For example, the Mission Statement [of what?] changed without anyone being consulted. Established structures for dialogue need to be honoured.

*Person C* observed that the Church had a different nature in other parts of the world. A global Church can learn the necessary lessons at micro- and macro-level. If she messed up in her job at CAFOD she would be fired. But in the Church in general, there is not enough accountability.

**Group C      Facilitator: Person F**

*Person F* opened the discussion by asking for views on the decay and dysfunction of the Church.

*Person Q* commented that a sign of decay is that it is hard to see signs of flourishing. The Church should be leading but isn't. We all need to be able to exercise our hearts in order to be charitable. This takes practice, along with the ability to stay with people in their pain. This has proved very hard when it comes to victims of abuse. People in the Church were very quick to deny responsibility and were slow to empathise. Priests have not advertised the issue because the revelations scare them. They lack the ability to listen.

*Person F* asked what might help us to do this. How should we 'tutor our hearts'?

*Person Q* continued that we need to be able to open ourselves up and be vulnerable. We need to be open to the value of women and the feminine, and to other forms of diversity such as extraversion and introversion. Extraverts and introverts both offer gifts. Priests need to be able to see the real person in the parish; many priests struggle with reaching out and giving. A great deal that is positive has occurred – from the Holy Spirit there has been so much flourishing, and people are returning to Mass and confession. Even one new person is cause for celebration. But people in power find it hard to adjust to change. The leadership sometimes *prevents* good things from happening. They have too much power and forget that they are servants. But God is really in charge. True servants allow others to offer their gifts. It is too easy to forget the lowly people who serve the Church, like cleaners. More understanding is needed for those who ask: in my difficulties, how should I understand these teachings? It is a question of holiness and humility. Many catechists *Person Q* has worked with struggled with priests and felt undervalued.

*Person F* observed that different forms of leadership emerged with Covid. The old deference partly disappeared. A new theology of leadership, as opposed to priesthood, is needed.

*Person G* continued the theme of dysfunction. There is dysfunction in the Catholic Church at different levels – e.g. local and episcopal. From the time the abuse crisis emerged in Ireland, she has tried to respond theologically and create a record *for the future*. It was important that Catholic

theologians say something. In Ireland there was a backlash against the Church, but the Catholic Church in England and Wales has been protected from that backlash. As a Catholic theologian, she has been attacked both from within and outside the Church. It is very hard being a public Catholic. She has faced two challenges at a personal level: firstly, because she is seen as a critic within the Church who talks about child abuse and failed leadership, and secondly because she represents the Church in the public realm. She has a 'dual identity' because she knows the pain caused but is also attacked for things she did not do. She observed that the Church in Ireland is now in a humble place. But she has to deal with caricatures of women religious, especially in relation to the mother and baby homes scandal in Ireland. On that issue, she was adamant that there was never any excuse for cruelty but noted some people had been made scapegoats. She said it was relevant to consider the historic link between Church and state in Ireland, as part of the background to the issue.

Under the agreed Chatham House Rules, Person G cited a prominent senior English Catholic who told her the clerical child abuse crisis was an Irish problem. She was appalled at his arrogance and colonial attitude. She also mentioned the reaction of the Irish Church to the fallout. When RTE aired a comedian's offensive remark against God, Archbishop Eamonn Martin complained, but there had been little response from Church leaders to the other impacts of the original scandals. The Church in Ireland bears shame, and this influences its impact on matters of the common good. The revelations and their impact cannot be bypassed.

*Person B* remarked, bearing in mind the BLM protests, that the Church in the UK has many black people in it. Many of them do not feel integrated into their Churches or parishes. They have faith but feel disconnected, leading the rest of their lives outside the Church. Black people do not expect the Church to provide for their social needs. Cleaners and catechists in her parish are mostly black, and they sense that they have to perform those roles because there is no other choice. They also sense that there is no respect for the way they carry out these roles. Person B does not believe this shows overt racism – it is more a matter of unconscious bias shown in subtle put-downs. This needs to be addressed, as it is part of the Church's decay. Black people need to feel they are understood and are not aliens. Many black people say this, and it needs discussion.

*Person Q* echoed this. Not only black people but Filipinos, Latin Americans and Eastern Europeans feel the same way. This is sad, because they are the future of the Church.

*Person F* asked about the connection of all this with leadership, asking whether BAME men and women see and recognize themselves in the leaders of the Church? What would be a good theology of diversity of leadership?

*Person Q* said she did not want tokenism. The parish and the hierarchy are interlinked and the question for both is whether the criteria for leadership should be holiness, and/or being in touch with and *loved by* parishioners? It was important to promote priests who were loved by parishioners. Attention should not be given to the loudest voices but rather to the 'hidden Christians'. We should ask: what would Jesus look like if he were in the Church?

*Person D* asked about the shape of a desirable leadership. He suggested that parishes should be regenerated as missionary, like his Rosminian parish. The bishop must appeal to the laity because of the new-found endorsement of an educated laity. He must have the qualities the laity require in a leader.

*Person F* added that in his doctoral research, people he had interviewed believed that bishops were seen as pastorally irrelevant arising through their lack of proximity and because the laity had had no say in their appointment. They were 'disconnected elders.'

*Person J* related how her current bishop once visited her school. His death was reported in the news because he felt a personal bond with the community and attended parochial Masses. Other bishops, unfortunately, are not up to speed with feminism or women's ordination.

*Person B* agreed with others that leadership need not be clerical. One reason is that many priests have a limited understanding of the needs of families, women and black people. Priests are important but should not be the only ones with authority. The laity should also lead, and not just with 'token' lay people. Moreover, people should be able to choose leaders who represent them. For example, predominantly black parishes should have [a proper chance to have?] black leaders.

*Person F* concluded the discussion by remarking that the Covid pandemic has unveiled the inadequacy of the current leadership of the Church and has revealed the diversity of the people the Church leaders should represent.

## PART II - Summary reflection on Seminar One

It was clear from attending the seminar that everyone taking part was deeply committed to the well-being of the Catholic Church, even if one or two currently felt a little detached from it, and everyone had considerable insight and experience to contribute. The tone overall combined some deep frustrations at the way the Church currently is, with optimism that change both was already starting to occur and that future change was possible and desirable.

The opening plenary session allowed many general observations to emerge, and many of these were elaborated in the following three sessions. The contributions were rich and voluminous, and the following general summary can only be impressionistic.

**Session 2 on faith** (including prayer and practice) brought forth both a widely shared sense that the Church had failed to rise to the pandemic, and a sense that a hitherto largely unseen creativity and initiative had made themselves known, especially among the laity. Both criticism and optimism emerged. Some participants were distressed by the Church closures and the lack of the physical Eucharist but had come to see the value of online services which were able to reach out to wider and more diverse communities. A few participants had been led to ask theologically hard questions about evil and suffering, but the general focus was on how the Church could flourish in these unusual circumstances.

There was a widely shared feeling that more lay involvement was needed in governance, that leaders had been slow to act creatively or listen to ordinary lay people's concerns and experience. Some also emphasized that Church authority was often used as a way to abuse power and a recurrent theme was the lack of concern for victims of sexual abuse. With this issue, as with several others raised in the seminar, it was sometimes hard to disentangle general dissatisfaction with the Church, from specific dysfunctions that either *arose from the pandemic* or were revealed by it.

It was reported that young worshippers in particular were quick to see the potential for online services and this led towards a more 'democratic' conception of authority. Of particular importance for some contributors was the dismay at not physically meeting fellow Catholics in Church, and especially the horror at not being able to touch the sick and dying and not being able to hold Requiem Masses – something that the move online could not ameliorate.

For some, the pandemic had revealed the possibility of greater agency, which tended to arise from the grass roots. This had, for some participants, been connected with a desire (loosely speaking) to

separate 'faith' from Church attendance and take prayer into the 'everyday'. The interesting theological question is of how these suggestions for reform can show itself entirely faithful to existing Church teaching. Perhaps this a problem some participants struggle with. It was notable that no strongly 'conservative' voices were heard at the seminar to defend existing structures of leadership. No doubt this could lead to discussion of the distinction between the value of these structures *per se*, and the way that leaders have fulfilled their role, in practice.

**Session 3 on community** brought forth great concern about the disparities between rich and poor, which had been exacerbated and revealed by the pandemic. This was shown in arbitrary pay disparities, job losses and the rise of debt. The influence of Catholic Social Teaching was evident here.

The treatment of BAME people, the elderly and women, both in the Church and society, were issues of concern, as was the lack of a proper conception of the common good at government level. There was also mention of 'vaccine poverty'. Some remarked that the coincidence of the pandemic with the Black Lives Matter movement made us better able to recognise some longstanding injustices, since Covid was acting as a leveler in general.

These reawakened concerns were seen as part of the 'light' that the pandemic had brought out. Other instances of light were the charitable works the Church was engaged in, again largely led by the laity, and a renewed commitment to truth to oppose the scourge of fake news. The light also included a 'can-do' attitude in getting Church services online, setting up food banks, a renewed concern for the natural environment and a renewed commitment to human dignity.

Existing problems were recognised as clearly preceding Covid, but there was a sense that Covid had both made them worse and brought them to light. There was a general feeling that the 'light' emerging in response was coming mostly from the grass roots and there was disappointment with the way already powerful people, whether in the Church or not, were rising to the challenge.

**Session 4 on the Church** focused many of the points already made. There was a feeling that when it came to social action and the need for Church reform, the bishops were out of touch and did little to encourage the initiatives coming from the grass roots. It was also frequently said that the Covid crisis can and should lead to greater sharing of Church leadership. The Church's failure to listen to women and especially the victims of sexual abuse was mentioned again, and this appeared linked to the 'darkness' of defensive clericalism, which was already showing itself in the rise of staunchly conservative seminarians. There was also an overall lack of accountability in the Church hierarchy.

On the positive side of 'light', the work of Church based charities like CAFOD was mentioned, and the renewal of activity on behalf of people who had not been listened to. There were also moves towards shared leadership and greater accountability. On the whole, however, the session on the Church seemed to dwell more on 'darkness' and less on 'light' than the previous session on community. Whether the views of the seminar participants are representative of the Church as a whole is an important question, as is the influence they are likely to have. And as previously mentioned, it was not always clear whether the situations discussed had particular relevance to the pandemic or reflected the state of the Church in general.

This opening Seminar, taken as a whole, was rich in wisdom, experience and passion. There was a great deal to take in. The impression given was that there are many ordinary lay people who care deeply about the Church and are able and willing to make real contributions towards further reflection and change.

*Piers Benn (Listener/observer)*

*February 2021*

### Part 1 - Emergent themes: headlines

- New models of Leadership: shared; blended
- New ways of being Church
- A 'blended' ecclesiology
- A new model of priesthood:
- Synod: local parish; diocesan; national
- Race and Black Lives Matter
- Clerical child sexual abuse in the Catholic Church
- Covid and women
- Ecological crisis
- Participation
- Home - a rediscovery of the significance of home
- Disconnection – connection
- Time
- Recovered experience of Discernment
- An expanded understanding of human experience
- Online joy and challenge
- Re-emerging personal Agency
- Awakening – sensitisation – seeing anew – 'covid conscientisation' to:
- A Catholic response to Covid
- Poverty of voices: creating a space
- Food: poverty; liturgical solidarity and action a response of a catholic sacramental imagination?
- Death
- A new ecclesial culture
- A 'Cheers' ecclesiological model – deepening relationships
- Public non-ordained Catholic leadership
- God

## Part 2 - Emergent themes: some more detail

- **New models of Leadership: shared; blended**
  - a need to explore a model of shared leadership: shared power and authority
  - draw on diverse models of good practice: people-priest; priest-priest; business-networks; faiths
  - 'Kenotic leadership'
  - Co-responsibility
  - New models of ministry – priest not the only community leader
  - A new model of leadership as we emerge into new model of Church beyond Covid
  - 2 and 3 journeying in leadership
  
- **New ways of being Church**
  - A plurality of contemporary expression of Church: recognised and validated
  - cf diverse global Catholic expression
  - cf Amazon, South America, Africa
  - cf Covid
  - so to intentional development of ecclesial expression and model
  - rebirth from frayed wineskins to new wineskins to hold the same treasure
  
- **A 'blended' ecclesiology**
  - Blended ministry
  - Blended Church
  - Blended liturgy
  - Blended presence
  - Blended leadership
  - Blended action
  - Blended participation
  
- **A new model of priesthood:**
  - Growing beyond dispensing of sacraments
  - role defined by discernment and accompaniment
  - Clericalism; hierarchy; patriarchy
  - Liberating and unburdening pastors
  
- **Synod: local parish; diocesan; national**
  - In-depth encounter with the experience, wisdom and imagination of all baptised people of God
  - Expanded understanding and imagination
  - An Interconnected experience and unveiling through Covid pandemic
  - A trusted process, recognised by the Church, to enable all to listen, discern and respond to the signs of the times with which all in the Church are now confronted
  - Some resonance noted with this process of the CEE and with Liverpool Synod 2020

- Recent call by + Francis to Bishops of Italy to Synod, and to wider Church
  
- **Race and Black Lives Matter**
  - Inequality
  - Leadership
  - Racism
  - Unacknowledged and ongoing
  
- **Clerical child sexual abuse in the Catholic Church**
  - Leadership
  - Accountability - Code of conduct
  - Inadequacy of response of IICSA
  - Power
  - A new open and honest and 'gospel' ecclesial culture
  
- **Covid and women**
  - Significant and distinctive experience
  - Anthropological attentiveness and ecclesial understanding
  - Engagement and support
  
- **Ecological crisis**
  - Distorted relationship with natural world
  - Lessons from Covid pandemic
  - Integral ecological response
  
- **Participation**
  - In the life of the Church: barriers and opportunities to participation
  - Inclusion and exclusion in worship and community
  - Diminished barrier for re-engagement of those marginalised and lapsed (online gateway)
  - In development of teaching: whose voice, whose wisdom, whose experience
  - In wider society: solidarity; organising; subsidiarity
  
- **Home - a rediscovery of the significance of home**
  - Staying at home
  - Relationships at home
  - Faith at home
  - Church at home – domestic Church support
  - Safe at home - Crises in the home
  
- **Disconnection – connection**
  - Connected experience
  - Awareness of interdependence and interconnectedness
  - Experience of Isolation and disconnection
  
- **Time**
  - A rediscovery of the gift of time
  - A theology of slowing down
  - a foil to rapidification

- **Recovered experience of Discernment**
  - In personal life and in communal life
  - Recalibration of needs and priorities
  - Deepening of what is integral for survival and flourishing
  
- **An expanded understanding of human experience**
  - Expanded anthropology: a more sufficient and a more accurate understanding
  - Empathic connection - Newly imagined relationships
  - Deepened reservoirs of empathy
  
- **Online joy and challenge**
  - Creativity
  - New leaders
  - Exclusion
  
- **Re-emerging personal Agency**
  - Across worship, organising and Church action
  - Exploration of resources from font of people and repository faith
  - Rhythm of faith – rituals of prayer
  - Creativity – responsibility
  
- **Awakening – sensitisation – seeing anew – ‘covid conscientisation’ to:**
  - Conversion and change through covid...gradual metanoia
  - Relationships – people – nature – God
  - Creation - environment
  - Human beings near and far
  - Remembering that we need each other again
  - To keyworkers, the vulnerable, the elderly
  - To a hidden reality from which we averted our gaze
  - Poverty – inequality – food
  - A Journey from personal good to Common good
  
- **A Catholic response to Covid**
  - Is there a distinctive Catholic response to pandemic
  
- **Poverty of voices: creating a space**
  - Who is missing? Who are we not seeing? Who is not being heard?
  - Creating a space, a framework and developing practices for encounter and listening
  - All voices are heard beginning with the periphery
  
- **Food**
- poverty; liturgical solidarity and action a response of a catholic sacramental imagination?
  - Food as a popular and frequently imagined expression of Catholic faith and action
  
- **Death and suffering**
  - Universal trauma
  - Unaccompanied - No touch

- reduced ritual
- Ministry of healing and accompaniment to come
- 
- **A new ecclesial culture**
  - Valuing – dignity – collaboration – shared pilgrimage
  - Structures of governance
  - Shared Decision making
  - Clear Accountability
  - Listening and attentive
  - Operant and espoused ecclesiology -
  - Mature and adult approach reflective of life beyond Church
  - The arc of change – the ark of change – a new covenant – new Church
  - Co-responsibility
- **A ‘Cheers’ ecclesiological model – deepening relationships**
  - Name – story – need – gift – griefs – anxieties – context – culture are known
- **Public non-ordained Catholic leadership**
  - Speaking freely and without fear in public catholic life
  - Personal, professional, theological freedom of expression
- **God**
  - A time of reacquaintance
  - A time for intimacy
  - At time of absence



### Our Church emerging from Covid: preparing the future

12.30 pm onwards	Gathering...
1.00 pm	Welcome and glancing back... Aims and method of Seminar Two
1.15 pm	Session 1: Discernment - some food for the journey
1.35 pm	Session 2: Identifying and discerning our emergent themes
2.30 pm	Short Break - 15 mins
2.45 pm	Session 3: Prioritising our emergent themes
3.45 pm	Short Break - 15 mins
4.00 pm	Session 4: Implications of our emergent themes
4.45 pm	Reflecting on our seminar
4.55 pm	Preparing for Seminar 3: what happens next? Closing Reflection
5.00 pm onwards	Departing...

## 2.2 SEMINAR TWO QUESTIONS

### QUESTIONS FOR SESSION ONE: Discernment - becoming a discerning Church

In our small groups we will be invited to share and discuss our thoughts and reflections on the article in 'The Way' by Nick Austin, 'Discernment a work of the Church' and its resonance with our seminars. Some of the following questions may help to structure and stimulate our discussion, which is intended to serve as a foundation to inform our own discernment in the subsequent sessions.

- Question 1            In our article on discernment and the Church:
- What sentence, phrase stuck out for you? Why?
  - Is there anything that inspired you?
  - Is there anything that you found a little challenging?

- Question 2            In light of our article on discernment and the Church:
- What might discernment look like for your local Church?
  - What might discernment look like for you? With whom?

- Question 3            How might we foster a culture of discernment in the Church?

### QUESTIONS FOR SESSION TWO: Identifying and discerning our emergent themes

In our whole group we will be invited to share our thoughts in response to the questions below – we will each have approximately 3 minutes to contribute. Here we will hear participants' reflections upon both the summary report and the development of their own thinking since the last seminar.

- Question 1            From your experience of the first seminar, what is missing as an emergent theme in the report from our reflections and dialogue in seminar one

- Question 2            Since your participation in seminar one and upon further reflection, is there anything new that you now wish to propose as a critical challenge or opportunity facing the Church emerging from Covid, that you didn't mention or discuss in the first seminar?

## QUESTIONS FOR SESSION THREE: Prioritising our emergent themes

In our small groups we will be invited to share our reflections and responses to the questions below, having read the Provisional Themes Report from Seminar One

Question From the emergent themes listed in the provisional themes report, and any additional themes that you have identified:

- 1) what do you identify as the three most significant emergent themes for our Church today
- 2) why have you chosen these three? and why are these themes so significant?

## QUESTIONS FOR SESSION FOUR: Exploring the implications of our themes

In our small groups we will be invited to explore the implications of one key emergent theme, with the specific task of answering the following key question:

Question What needs to be considered, what needs to be taken into account, with your emergent theme in relation to:

- becoming a good and better Church?

Supplementary In relation to your theme, and its implications: (if time permits)

- a) what are the associated barriers that need acknowledgement and addressing
- b) what are the existing / recently emerged opportunities that merit further exploration

## 2.3 SEMINAR TWO EMAIL INVITATIONS

Dear All

I trust that you are safe and well as our journey during these challenging times continues.

Thank you once again for generously agreeing to participate in our second seminar on Wednesday 24<sup>th</sup> February 2021, from 1.00 pm to 5.00 pm. The zoom link for our seminar is below, and once again the link for our zoom room will be open from 12.30 pm.

<https://theofed-cam-ac-uk.zoom.us/j/99546956171> -- Meeting ID: 995 4695 6171 (No password - and this will also be the link we use for our third seminar)

I have attached once more the Provisional Themes Report from our first seminar for convenience, and as promised, I am also attaching the Programme for our second seminar which includes the questions for sessions 2 and 3 that you have already received.

Our seminar will be greatly enhanced by our preparation, and once we have read the report it might be helpful to note down our responses to the questions, to support our contributions and conversations during the seminar. You are not asked to send anything in advance but simply to come to the seminar ready for a brief sharing of your notes/key points with other participants.

- In Session 2 we will each have 3 minutes in the whole group to share our responses to questions 1 and 2 (see attached 'Programme' document or previous email)
- In Session 3 our responses for the session 3 questions will be shared and discussed in our smaller groups.
- In Session 1 we will share our thoughts and briefly reflect together upon Nick Austin's short paper on Discernment in small groups (reattached above for ease)

There is one more thing I ask you to reflect upon and jot down before our meeting on Wednesday - Upon reflection what is the one phrase, or word, or theme that stays with you most strongly when you look back upon the fruits of our discussions in seminar one?

Thanks again for your generous participation and I look forward to seeing you on Wednesday. If I can be of any further help before then please do not hesitate to be in touch.

With warm wishes,

Person F

**Dr Liam Hayes**

*Director | Centre for Ecclesial Ethics*

Person H Beaufort Institute of Theology | Cambridge

## SEMINAR SERIES 2021

Our Church emerging from Covid: preparing the future

—

### SEMINAR TWO SUMMARY REPORT

*Wednesday 24<sup>th</sup> February 2021*

Given below is the summary report of our reflections and dialogue from our second seminar, which has been produced by Dr Piers Benn and to whom we are most grateful.

This offers us an overview of our discernment and analysis during this seminar, and provides an informed platform from which to begin our third seminar on 24<sup>th</sup> March 2021.

Included at the end of the report is an appendix that presents a brief summary of the emergent challenges and opportunities that we individually and collectively identified and prioritised during our seminar.

With thanks in advance for your time given in the reading of the report,

Liam

Seminar Series 2021: Our Church emerging from Covid: preparing the future.

*Seminar Two: Discernment and Analysis*

Record of the seminar held on Zoom, 24<sup>th</sup> February 2021, 1.00 - 5.10 pm

**INTRODUCTION**

1.00 - 1.15 pm

Introduction to the day

**SESSION 1**

1.15 - 1.35 pm

**Discernment – some food for the journey.**

*This session was held in three small groups, each discussing three questions with sub-questions (already supplied).*

**Group A      Facilitator: Person A**

*Person A began by asking what had inspired or challenged us in Nick Austin's article on discernment and the Church?*

- We should welcome the idea of discernment as a ministry within the Church, highlighting that this was a process of listening for, rather than to, the Holy Spirit.
- We should welcome bold and Person D free speech (parrhesia) but stress that this means listening with humility to others, and that all parties to the exchange have to engage in it with openness and humility for it to work. But the boldness is liberating.
- Not listening to the faithful with discernment is a way of closing the Church to the Holy Spirit, since every baptized Christian has the potential to discern what the Holy Spirit is saying to them.
- Unfortunately, the Church has failed for centuries to listen to the voices of women in the Church or provide a forum for women to talk to each other – in contrast with bishops, who have a forum for talking to each other.
- There is a challenge to get more baptized Catholics to speak up, rather than wait for decisions to be made. Unfortunately, people who most need to be listened to are often the ones who are least heard, such as the homeless, refugees and addicts. Those who get to participate in 'fantastic discussions' are well-educated graduates.
- Discernment can be noisy or silent. Honesty is its most important quality, but tone matters as well. Willingness, respect and being open in the right way are all important.
- For there to be willingness to practise discernment, the process has to feel real. Listening to all voices must not be a tokenistic, box-ticking exercise. We should ask what the Church community is doing in response to the Gospel, rather than fulfil an agenda set by others.
- There do not appear to be spaces where discernment can take place. We are all busy doing things, but agendas don't exist within a Church setting.

- Discernment requires an awareness of the risk of being taken to an uncomfortable place.
- The starting point for discernment should be a prayerful effort, rooted in scripture, to bring in the Holy Spirit, without working to a pre-set agenda. Prayers can be led by different people, including laity, in an effort to hear different voices and share what they say.

**Group B      Facilitator: Person N**

*Person N opened by asking what stood out in Nick Austin's article as being particularly significant, inspiring or challenging?*

Responses emerged as follows:

- Austin's article was about forming consciences.
- The article was helpful and deep. Catholics are good at talking but not so good at listening.
- Catholics often suppress their thoughts, so the notion of parrhesia (humble, Person D and bold speech) that is part of discernment, is empowering.
- Austin was right to say we have no choice but to discern. Unless we only talk to people who agree with us, we must listen to others and discern, expecting that truth is somewhere in there. Discernment also requires listening to people who do not normally speak and working out how we can hear them.
- Discernment is practised not only in the Ignatian tradition but also in non-Catholic traditions such as the Reformed or Quaker.

*Person N asked what discernment would look like personally and how we can foster it?*

- Pope Francis is calling us to be more discerning. This is exciting since there is no other way to be Church. The idea of discernment is full of excellent ingredients, but Catholics often fall out with each other. There is a need to hear and listen, and also a duty to have the courage to speak.
- It would be empowering to open up a network of discerners which would not only involve Jesuits. This would open us up to God, who works in all of us. Such a listening forum would need to empower the congregation, since each person is responsible for their own discernment. Such a network or forum should not be too theologically oriented.
- However, this encounters the problem that in parish communities, people are not used to being asked what they think. If they are asked, they wonder what they 'should' say rather than what they really think.
- Even if people have been asked what they think, they have not been listened to. The Church has a problem with the open-ended nature of discernment.
- Discernment can be too self-conscious, as if it were like solving a mathematical equation. But apart from the core beliefs, the Church needs to be open-ended concerning the things it needs to transform. Listening can be transformative, but at the institutional as opposed to the parish level, the Church finds listening difficult.
- Unfortunately, open-endedness is scary for clergy.

- Another word for discernment would help. By way of comparison, we all need clothes, but we may not like 'fashion', even though fashion is about clothing. A new word could make everyone comfortable with discernment.
- The Church conversation is disconnected from the poor, such as an extremely poor family whose voice we do not hear. How can we hear what they say, if they don't know where the next meal is coming from? [Possible paraphrase: if they are pre-occupied with finding food, they will not have the time/energy to engage in conversation with the Church].

**Group C      Facilitator: Person F**

*Person F opened the discussion, asking what sentence in Austin's article stuck out and what the participants wanted to say in general about it.*

- There is a problem of finding a balance between discernment and guidance. There is a parallel in the arguments within the Anglican Church about divorce and women priests, and the proposal that these matters should be left to parishes. This leaves it unclear whether or not the Church of England supports divorcees and women priests. It would be better to take a clear stand.
- Grace is unpredictable.
- There is a distinction between individual and communal discernment. Many individuals in the Church are too frightened to speak, including priests and women. There are fundamental differences of opinion and rational arguments won't lead to their resolution.
- There is a fear of plurality in the Church, which makes it hard to cultivate a culture of discernment. In the Acts of the Apostles, rational argument could not decide a specific issue, so the apostles resorted to drawing lots. We need to work out how we can cultivate a culture of discernment to address disagreements and the possibility of plurality.
- Lay people are not often called to discern. But the practice of discernment needs to extend beyond the Bishops' Conference.
- Pope Francis is a Jesuit discerner, but the Church is not a discerning Church.
- The Pope called for the Universal Church to be in synod, and we need to work out what this means. We also need to understand how we might listen more attentively in the parish community.
- Parishes need leadership from someone within. There need to be models of how this can work that can then be shared.
- There is a problem of hierarchy, and it cannot be fixed at a parish level, because priests are more in harmony with the hierarchy than with parishes.
- There is a collective fear of the outcome of discernment, partly because in discernment there is no hierarchy. We need to ask why there is a fear of plurality in the Church.
- We need to ask what might be the sources that inform our discernment.
- Discernment requires us to be adults, yet Catholics don't want this! The Church does not form Catholics to be adults.

## Identifying and discerning our emergent themes

*This session was held as a plenary. Everyone was invited to share their thoughts on the following questions:*

1) From your experience of the first seminar, what is missing an emergent theme in the report from our reflections and dialogue In seminar one.

2) Since your participation in seminar one and upon further reflection, is there anything new you now wish to propose as a critical challenge or opportunity facing the Church emerging from Covid?

*Person C:* The impact of trauma is missing in the report. It is very easy to underestimate the extent of this. There is now a challenge to get a reality-check, focusing on what we are up against and what is holding us back. We also need to concentrate more on the voices of victims, the isolated and the excluded.

*Person B:* The report should focus more on the impact of Covid on women, also bearing in mind that the issues women face during Covid are the same as the ones they faced before. The report also misses the impact on children, who are an especially important part of the Church, as well as being its future. There needs to be more attention to their formation and growth. In particular, there is a lack of attention to the voices of children, to what they say about their experiences of the pandemic.

*Person A:* We need to focus more on stories. What story are we telling about ourselves as a Church during the Covid period? Storytelling is a means of understanding. There are and will be stories of Covid, including loss and bereavement. We could collate these stories and give voice to the unheard.

*Person H:* The report does not say what is the theology underpinning it. Is it a full redemption theology? What story are we operating from? We also face the big challenge of an ecological conversion, which will require the changing of hearts and minds. We need to say how our finances and other resources are being used and how they should be. Covid is a catalyst for this.

*Person D:* The Church had already been talking of conversion and metanoia as a personal matter. But Covid has helped us to see these things as corporate processes and changes. Conversion should now be understood as something the Church undergoes. This will help it do something about its mission.

*Person G:* As already mentioned, the report underestimates the impact of Covid-related trauma, as well as the climate crisis. It also didn't say enough about how we can consult the excluded and the isolated. [NB – the screen froze for about one minute here]. The Church should not speak only as physician – it is also a patient.

*Person J:* The report needed more emphasis on how the voices of women and children are to be heard. It also underestimated the needs of the disabled. She had had personally embarrassing experiences when a priest showed little interest in her own disability. The Church [or Church buildings?] need to be made more accessible for everyone.

*Person S:* His job changed enormously during the pandemic. There was a lot of adversarial noise. Discernment does not have to be noisy (?). But the real challenge is knowing which voices we should listen to.

*Person N:* The list of things missing as emergent themes, and possible new proposals, is overwhelming. The Church is messy, but in some ways, this is good – there is room for everyone. But although the Church engages well with people over 40, where is the engagement with the young? Which other voices are not heard? Are poor people in terrible accommodation being heard? What of the place for evangelism, witness and mission? God ended up at the end of the list [context of this remark a little unclear] – most people come to Church because they want a place to pray.

*Person R:* On what is missing, the report fails to mention the need to listen to women and children. As for new proposals, we need to acknowledge the perception of ‘us’ as arrogant and the Church as systemically arrogant. We need to make the Church humbler. This should lead us to ask whether the physical return to Church is important. What are we looking for in returning physically to Church? There is a danger of failing to recognise and implement real changes. Real change will happen when victims [of abuse by the Church?] wash the Pope’s feet!

*Person K:* The report fails to mention baptism. During the pandemic, some parents were desperate to baptize their children, but could not. How should we address this as we go back to physical attendance? We need to connect with parents burdened with this problem and tackle the backlog of baptisms. Additionally, we need to address the effects of online livestreaming. How do we draw back those who withdrew and went online? How can we receive them back as brothers and sisters?

*Person Q:* The idea of holiness is missing from the report. It sounds a remote concept but if we are holy, we can see the Christ in all of us. Also, when it comes to responding to trauma, we need to see what we are up against. We worry about our skills, but many skills we have are not used. A lack of holiness is what leads to a lack of skills. Furthermore, women and the disabled are not welcomed. There is still racism, shown in black people being seen as Church cleaners. There is a lack of attention to LGBT issues. There is too much political polarization.

*Person F:* The upshot of the conversation so far is that we need to focus on how we attend to trauma and develop a ministry of healing for the sick and the bereaved. This will mean learning how to become attentive. Attention to unheard voices is needed, which include the poor, children and men and women across black and ethnic minorities. How does listening to trauma translate into Church activities? In sum, the crucial question is: what does it mean to be attentive and to listen?

## Prioritising our emergent themes

### Group A      *Facilitator: Person A*

*Person A asked what had emerged for the group as an important theme, and what was missing. What were the three most significant themes? Why? How have they been discerned?*

- Person Q: Saintliness; humility to recognise that we are the patients; the importance of marginalized people being active agents in working for change.
- Person G: Accompanying trauma; listening, especially to the excluded and disillusioned; constructing something out of the accompaniment of trauma and listening to those traumatized.
- Person A: Participation; co-responsibility; discernment. In particular, enabling the participation of unheard voices. These themes take us to the questions: Participation in what? What does it mean to be co-responsible?

*Why were these themes chosen?*

- We need the humility to see ourselves as patients, because the Church is like a broken body – parts of that body have been neglected and do not function. Holiness entails thinking of the body's head as Christ, who knows what God wants for the rest of the body. The Church needs to support all parts of its body.
- In particular, the clerical sexual abuse crisis was an interruption of a rich ecclesial ethical tradition. It brought forth marginalized people who are crucial in shaping those ethics for the future. This is now an additional need. The Covid crisis asks us to do what we were already doing, but it provides additional context.
- Accompanying trauma requires humility. The accompanying can take the form of practices as well as words. We need pointers and principles to guide the practices.
- The Church already has the theology and spirituality, but we need to learn from what we are not familiar with. In particular, one might follow rules but not be exposed to the relevant aspects of spirituality.
- If the Church is to accompany trauma, it must not only listen to victims but also value the healers and pay them properly. There needs to be financial investment in healing roles.
- If we are also the patients, the listening means listening to ourselves, as well as to others and to God. We need new and difficult voices.
- There is a question of how we are we to create the spaces for accompaniment, holiness, humility and agency. It was suggested that Covid had inadvertently helped here, in helping us to go from seeing to judging.
- However, there remained the problem of how we can fulfil the roles both of patient and physician, even if not at the same time.
- The Church has become corporatized, but we see good things happening when the Church is the servant of the laity. This is important for its role in accompanying trauma.

- Re accompanying trauma, Person A suggested this should be first on the list of emergent themes. But we need to know who is doing the accompanying and who is accompanied? We are helped here by the idea of active agency – an active agent is both a listener and a speaker. In this way, we can be both patient and physician.
- There was also agreement that discernment is an important emerging theme. This was a matter of looking at the signs of the times. It is related to practical holiness.

**In summary**, the group decided that the three most significant emergent themes were **accompanying trauma**, **listening to marginal voices** and **discernment**. Listening to marginal voices requires humility and a sense of being a patient. The Church emerges as scarred rather than bruised, and the scars connect with the metaphor of the Church as a struggling, broken body.

**Group B      Facilitator: Person N**

*What are the three most significant emergent themes for our Church today?*

- Person B: 1) The Church should listen to women rather than speak on their behalf. 2) Problems of leadership need addressing – bishops should delegate more, since they cannot see all that happens. There should also be councils and synods made up of people from different demographics. 3) There needs to be a distinctive Catholic response to secular problems like Covid.
- Person R: 1) Above all, there needs to be a new model of leadership based on authentic ecclesiology and ecclesial culture, with new ways of being Church. 2) There should be greater participation of women and minorities. 3) We need to learn the lessons of the child sexual abuse scandals.
- Person J: 1) The Church needs to move beyond leadership rather than have a new model of leadership. 2) This is particularly relevant to the roles of women and minorities – it isn't clear how one can be a Catholic and a woman. 3) The Church should lead in dealing with the ecological crisis.
- Person D: 1) The ecological crisis – the Church, especially under Pope Francis, could be leading the wider society. 2) There should be encouragement to participate in synod. 3) There needs to be a new ecclesial culture.
- Person N: 1) The need for holiness – this is what is specific to a Catholic response. It means looking at the world in a sacramental way. 2) The need to hear unheard voices, including women, the young and the poor. 3) The need for mission and evangelization – the Church is stuck talking to itself and not the world.

*How can we discern? Are there common threads to discernment?*

- We should listen to the unheard. Leadership should be servant leadership, and this involves listening.
- In connection with the above, who are 'we'? Does the word 'we' include women? Often, it seems not – women are not allowed to be Church. Who are the leaders? In a priestly ministry, what is the role of the laity?

- Following on from this, what does it mean to be Catholic? Is Catholicism necessarily hierarchical? If you can be a Catholic woman, we need an important conversation about whether the Church must be hierarchical. If you cannot be a Catholic woman, then what is the Church for, and whom is it supporting? Perhaps the theme to be prioritized over hierarchy is women.
- On listening, reference was made to Pope Francis' *Evangelii Gaudium*, which said that the call to renew our parishes does not yet suffice to bring them nearer to the people, to make them environments of living communion and make them mission oriented. In the light of this, it was suggested that participation and listening and responding to all voices was necessary.
- This led to the theme of synod, noting that change was necessary before synod could begin. Synod was a way to hear voices and was itself a form of leadership.
- However, there was a difference between being represented in leadership, which synod would enable, and feeling welcome in the Church. For example, gay women might have to suppress part of their identity in order to participate in Church. However, women's rights should be prioritized at present, since recognition of gay rights will not happen soon.
- The idea of synod raised the question of how effective it could be in taking concerns to the Vatican. There was ground for hope, because although there are certain things the bishops cannot change, they can still report discussions of those things to the Vatican.
- With synodality there is a need to be transparent. We should be able to say confidently: 'These are the things that we in the Church want raised'.
- There was some discussion as to how to finalise the list of emergent themes, and whether certain themes were really contained within other themes – e.g. whether the themes of mission and listening to the unheard were contained within the theme of synod, and how the themes related to the Covid pandemic. There was also a suggestion that identity and sexuality was an emergent theme.

In summary, the group decided that the three most significant emergent themes were the need for **synod, listening to women** (as integral Church) **and other unheard voices** (allowing them to 'be themselves') and the **ecological crisis**.

**Group C**      **Facilitator: Person F**

*What are the three most significant emergent themes for our Church today?*

- Person C: Framed within the question raised earlier of what is distinctively Catholic about the suggested responses, the priorities were: 1) A focus on we as a Church and the need to find new ways of being Church and of being flexible; 2) Ecclesial culture, with an emphasis on the Church as a culture of the broken (since Christ was broken on the cross) and the consequent need for a culture of healing and responding to trauma; 3) Personal agency and the need to stop infantilizing ourselves, as opposed to being properly formed to have a voice that can be heard, valued and trusted.
- Person H: 1) Embracing development of theology and faith, including our understanding of redemption and salvation, and hence developing a theology of responding to climate change; 2) Renewing the spiritual, liturgical and sacramental life of the Church and embracing different ways of celebrating liturgy; 3) Trauma – the need to respond with practical caring and human contact, and develop an ecclesial culture based on human dignity. The Church itself is wounded, especially by the sexual abuse scandals. It can heal if it humbly asks. The respect for dignity required by trauma also extends to listening to women and the unheard.
- Person K: 1) The need for confident, prophetic voices in the Church which speak to non-Catholics as well as Catholics. 2) The need for a proper process of apology to the victims of abuse. 3) The need to bring in non-Catholics, so we can be members of a human, not only Catholic, community. To this end, it would help to recognise BLM, and have a blended liturgy that can appeal to all cultures.
- Person S: 1) In his role many voices do not reach him, and he needs to know who is missing. This is made worse by the shocking intolerance of mutually opposed camps. 2) There needs to be a new ecclesial culture modelled on Pope Francis. We should embrace the idea of pilgrimage, but the atmosphere of intolerance prevents this. 3) The need for shared decision making and a public, non-ordained Catholic leadership, in which leaders are known by their fruits rather than their position in a hierarchy.
- Person F: 1) blended ecclesiology: blended God, blended humanity, recalibrated blended Church. The concept of blended liturgy (accommodating online liturgies) leads to the idea of blended presence. We can start with God's blended presence (e.g. in creation, the sacraments) and then ask how our presence is blended. In the light of this, how do we recalibrate our Church's response? In liturgy, worship, action and evangelism we need a blended ecclesiology so we can more closely reflect God and each other. 2) Leadership: we need a mature Church. The lockdown has helped with this, with a decline in infantilization and deference. However, we still have a monochrome model of leadership. The lockdown has led to development of competencies developed outside the Church door, but the Church tried to keep them out. Kenotic leadership is needed, with a sharing of authority and power between priests and laity. 3) Intentional listening to unheard voices.

*Is there one especially important theme?*

The themes have a lot in common. There has been a shift in ecclesial culture away from pre-occupation with structures and towards healing, with a focus on neglected voices. The theological emphasis has shifted towards inclusion. There is more concern with ordinary people in poor circumstances, such as a family of six in a one-bedroom flat. This is the Gospel: Jesus reached out to the 'unclean'. We should remember the early Christian community, with the initial fear and sense of loss, followed by the Holy Spirit giving hope. Covid is encouraging us to form a model of Church that is about its original theology.

The emergent themes were **leadership, especially blended leadership; a new ecclesial culture involving blended responses; the intentional attention to unheard voices, especially in responding to trauma.**

3.30 – 3.45 The session reverted to plenary, at which rapporteurs fed back their groups' chosen themes (above) to all participants. (see also appendix)

## Exploring the implications of our themes

### **Group A**      *Facilitator: Person A*

*Person A asked the group to explore the implications of one key emergent theme, from the three prioritized earlier.*

- The group agreed to focus on discernment as the key emergent theme.

What needs to be considered regarding discernment, in relation to becoming a good and better Church?

- Discernment can be done in prayer and charitable works. It leads to active involvement and accountability.
- Discernment requires patience, compromise, attentiveness to reality and analysis. Discerning the meaning and theological significance of a situation is always hard.
- Discernment is open-ended. However, those at the receiving end of discernment may not listen or act on its fruits. This is an obstacle to success.
- There is a danger of talking only to people who agree with you.
- Discernment must be open-ended in a way that will shift things in ways no one can expect. But for this to work, there needs to be ecclesial willingness to talk and listen.
- Discernment must be bold and respectful. It requires asking whether we are listening to all relevant experiences and emotions. It is different from decision-making.
- There is a sceptical challenge to discernment: what, if anything, makes its fruits knowledge? After all, two discerners can reach opposite conclusions with equal effort and sincerity.
- The best way forward is to propose discernment as the basis for constructing an ecclesial ethics. It could be modelled on twentieth-century models of discernment which involved prayer and sociological research.
- It helps to think of Church discernment as operating at three levels: international, England & Wales and parish level.
- Fruitful discernment could be aided by creating a think tank or other forum, which would recognise that the Church is scarred and traumatized. This forum could focus on marginal voices and analyse situations through their lens. Priests often cannot hear these voices because priests expect to be listened to. This creates a particular problem for those without a platform, and even more for people scarred by clerical abuse.
- We must also think of the priests – bishops don't like them, and parishioners don't like them! Many are just waiting for retirement.
- Many victims of clerical abuse were silenced. There should be a renewed focus on those affected by bad practice in the Church, though without denying that some priests were falsely accused.
- There needs to be a generic framework for recognizing the obstacles to discernment that we are discussing. We must accept that not everyone will be listened to. But it is important that any forum for discernment should avoid scapegoating people or end up creating further division.

- Another challenge is that Catholics are so used to talking in terms of rules that discernment, which takes account of ambiguities, is especially difficult. To re-emphasise the earlier point, discernment must be both bold and respectful.

**Group B      Facilitator: Person N**

The group agreed to take **synod** as the one key emergent theme.

*It was then asked what needs to be considered with this theme, in relation to becoming a good and better Church?*

Key points emerged as follows:

- ‘Synod’ usually refers to bishops getting together to discuss issues like marriage and the family. But what our group is referring to is bishops calling a synod within a diocese, to discern what the Church should be doing in future.
- It is useful to look at how synod works in the Church of England, but it is less clear that a Catholic synod could bring about the changes that the C of E synod can.
- People must be represented, including distinct groups, e.g. the disabled, the poor, single mothers and the less well-educated. People who most need to be heard are those who are the least likely to be heard.
- There could also be smaller groups within the synod, representing specific groups, e.g. the young, the disabled, BAME and LGBT people.
- There needs to be flexible and accessible modes of communication to allow the sharing of ideas among everyone. There are also practicalities to work out, such as transport.
- It will be hard to gain trust that the process will produce a result. People will need to know what Church culture the synod is coming from. The culture and leadership will determine whether there will be a synod and to what extent it will be listened to. Some bishops will not be interested at all.
- People’s capacity to contribute should be developed. Synod should be started at a level lower than the diocesan, so that people will see that it is worth contributing to. There is a precedent in the Liverpool congress of 1980. Even if discussion cannot change much, the feedback might put pressure on bishops to create a culture of change. But this will be a big challenge, since nothing like this has happened since 1980.
- Because of resistance to change, people should not expect to be given something. The most important thing is that people who are Church will represent people who are Church. The process matters as much as the product.
- Doubt was expressed again about whether a synod report about what we all know could change much, especially if it has no authority. In response, it was suggested that if (for example) synod said there should be a youth or LGBT coordinator in every parish, there would a possibility of change, or at least the lay recommendations would be acknowledged.

*The practicalities of synod*

- Should the synod be national or diocesan? This is one thing to be considered with regard to synod in relation to becoming a better Church. One suggestion was that unless an

understanding of the process is first built up at diocesan level, it is unclear how it can succeed at a national level.

- There could be a system of synods that feed into each other, or even feed down.
- Participation in synod could be by invitation, in order to get younger people involved. This could also help with finding convenient times for meeting, especially for single mothers and poorer people who cannot change their working hours.
- To get (e.g.) homeless people represented, we need to find people who already know them, who can work with them. Information can then be aggregated and analysed. Online surveys and social media can also be used.
- There would need to be adequate representation of all relevant groups, perhaps by using percentage quotas linked to their societal representation. This would also ensure homeless people are represented on a synod on homelessness and would also give authority to synod.
- It is important that there should be room on synod for dissenting voices. Pope Francis wants people to speak, including minorities.
- The subject of dissent led to the question of whether the Catholic Church is really one entity, given the split between liberals and conservatives. Surely people who disagree can be within one body.
- Nick Austin's article said we had to be discerners, otherwise we stick with people who agree with us and those who disagree go off in another direction.
- Finally, the idea of synod resonates with the edict that national Churches should determine their own practices. Latin America and Western Europe face different problems; different practices (though not doctrines) may suit different places.

### Group C      Facilitator: Person F

*Person F opened the session by relating the questions given for this session to the more specific questions: Are there new ways of being Church? What will become of parish life? Are there new models of Church? bearing in mind **one key emergent theme**.*

- There is a need for different models of leadership. But to achieve this, we already need a good leader to lead us towards it.
- Without a new ecclesial culture, we shall be stuck where we were when it comes to leadership. This new ecclesial culture is about a new understanding of how we are as Church.
- The Church has been altered by the fact that during the lockdown, the bereaved could not ritualise in the normal way. As a result, there will be a demand for memorial services – perhaps joint ones. We therefore need to be creative about reaching out and doing communal things in a new way.
- God will reveal how we can be Church in this crisis. He does not abandon us.
- Life cannot go back to normal after the pandemic, as if nothing has happened. So we need to name the Covid period and ask others what their experience of it was. The period will need to be placed in a theological or scriptural context.
- People will have to mourn their dead and have the necessary services. The lack of ritual during the pandemic has left a hole.

- These things should lead us to ask what we have learned, and how we can learn more rather than refuse to talk about the period. This relates to a new ecclesial culture.
- We should also reflect on what we have done well and should carry on with, like services on social media.
- But there remains the question of whether these changes are a precursor to new ways of being Church. These new ways cannot be enacted unless we create a space to listen to our experience and ourselves.
- We cannot go back to the situation as it was, especially as many people have been traumatized. The level of emotion about other things like BLM was raised by not being able to hug people. Communication lost nuance and people became quick to take offence due to having to converse online.
- Many in the Church would dismiss the trauma caused to many people. But we need to listen to the voices in the Church that reflect on their experiences.
- The Church should ask people four questions: How have you been? How has the period felt for you? What piece of scripture speaks to you about it? What should we continue with, and what should we do differently?
- Some people have been sustained not by scripture but by something more ordinary, such as a neighbour or a dog!
- On leadership, are bishops talking about the Covid period and how will they talk about it to the rest of the Church? If the Covid crisis doesn't affect the Church, then something is radically wrong.
- How should we speak to the many who will not return to the Church after the pandemic ends? There are people with unmistakable 'Catholic DNA' who feel pushed out. There must be many people who have felt like this for a long time. It is important to have a conversation with them.

*How would creating a new space help make us a good and better Church? How would attending to unheard voices help?*

- So far, we are not a talking Church. The Covid trauma has affected humanity, so we need a model of a new Church. We are not meant to talk in Church, so traumas cannot be brought out. A renewal would involve healing, which comes from talking and listening attentively. Such a renewal needs a name.
- The Church is a community and not just a parish council. It can draw on many skills in asking the right questions. Being part of the body of the Church means more than merely listening. Coming together in pain and finding one another is Church.
- The Church would be improved in a very human way – people would help out and make phone calls. The prayers of the faithful would be more spontaneous, with less inhibition by rules and rubrics.
- The experience of blendedness would bring joy. It would come from evangelism without words. Online masses have 15 minutes for intercessions, which was impossible in buildings. Non-formulaic prayers are powerful. People could ask who is ill with Covid and names could be called out.

- We want answers, but God is in our humanity. Attention to Christ is crucial. A Christful people is a discerning people. A Christful Church and a Christful individual are discerners. Most problems would be solved if people listened with respect.

*How would you describe in a sentence or two what you have been saying so far, in relation to the theme of listening to the unheard?*

- Work out how to provide the space to acknowledge what trauma has felt like. We should explore the opportunities that might arise in that space.
- Help people who are fearful of going back to normal life or feel they don't need the parish community as much as before.
- Ask what we have learned, what we should keep hold of and what we should change.
- Find a space for asking how the wider Church community can recover from the Covid period.
- Acknowledge that skills are needed to enable people to ask questions and voice concerns.
- Ask what is holding us back, such as fear, exclusion and existing structures.
- A blended response is important, since people want different things.
- Everyone should be encouraged to have a conversation with someone over the next two weeks, asking how the period has been for them, then feed it back.
- A big, national Church conversation is needed.
- It is critical to find the right method of taking stock, for any new understanding of Church.

*The seminar ended with a brief summary (below) of what had emerged from the plenaries and small groups, and some closing reflections.*

**Group A** proposed the **establishment of a think tank to provide a space for discernment**. The proposal arising from this discernment can then be accepted or rejected.

**Group B** remarked that **synods are difficult, but worthwhile!**

**Group C** noted that before all else, there needs to be an **attentive listening space** where people's personal views, experiences and traumas can be acknowledged.

CEE Director Person F concluded that this had been a 'messy', but very fruitful seminar – it was not linear. It was not a tapestry, but many balls and strands of wool aimed at creating something new that had yet to be gathered together. We have explored discernment collectively, but so far in a very introductory way. Our discussion is still a work in progress, but all the richer due to all the participant contributions.

*Piers Benn (listener/observer)*

March 2021

### Individually discerned and prioritised emergent themes

- Saintliness;
- humility to recognise that we are the patients;
- marginalized people being active agents in working for change.
- Accompanying trauma;
- listening, especially to the excluded and disillusioned;
- constructing something out of the accompaniment of trauma and listening to those traumatized.
- Participation
- co-responsibility
- discernment. (In particular, enabling the participation of unheard voices)
- listening to women
- leadership
- distinctive Catholic response to secular problems like Covid.
- new model of leadership
- greater participation of women and minorities
- learn the lessons of the child sexual abuse scandals.
- move beyond leadership rather than new models
- roles of women and minorities – it isn't clear how one can be a Catholic and a woman.
- the ecological crisis.
- The need for holiness
- The need to hear unheard voices
- The need for mission and evangelization
- The ecological crisis
- to participate in synod
- new ecclesial culture.
- new ways of being Church
- Ecclesial culture: Church as a culture of the broken
- Personal agency
- Embracing development of theology and faith
- Renewing the spiritual, liturgical and sacramental life
- Trauma – the need to respond
- The need for confident, prophetic voices in the Church
- The need for a proper process of apology to the victims of abuse
- The need to engage beyond Catholics
- many voices, include the missing need to be heard
- a new ecclesial culture modelled on Pope Francis, embracing notion of pilgrimage
- The need for shared decision making and a public, non-ordained Catholic leadership,
- blended God, blended humanity, recalibrated blended Church
- shared Leadership
- Intentional listening to unheard voices.

### Collectively discerned and prioritised emergent themes

- accompanying trauma
- listening to marginal voices
- discernment.
- Synod
- listening to women and other unheard voices
- ecological crisis.
- Leadership
- a new ecclesial culture
- intentional attention to unheard voices, especially in responding to trauma

### Collective discernment of one key emergent theme

- establishment of a think tank to provide a space for discernment.
- Synod
- attentive listening space



### 3.1 SEMINAR THREE PROGRAMME – WEDNESDAY 24<sup>TH</sup> MARCH 2021, ZOOM

#### Our Church emerging from Covid: preparing the future

12.30 pm onwards	Gathering...
1.00 pm	Welcome and glancing back... Aims and method of Seminar Three
1.30 pm	Session 1 - Discernment, diversity and disagreement
2.00 pm	Session 2 - Synod & Big conversation: listening to all voices
2.20 pm	Short Break - <u>15 mins</u>
2.35 pm	Session 3 - New wineskins: Scripture
3.20 pm	Short Break - 15 mins
3.35 pm	Session 4 - New wineskins: re-imagining our Church
4.30 pm	Reflecting on our Seminar Series The path ahead... Closing Reflection
5.00 pm onwards	Departing...

## 3.2 SEMINAR THREE QUESTIONS

The focus of our third seminar will be discernment and re-imagining.

A re-imagining of new wineskins for our Church  
that support and sustain a faithful, attentive and courageous response to the  
challenges and opportunities that we face emerging from Covid.

*In advance of our seminar we are invited to read and reflect upon the accompanying seminar summary report that captures our wisdom and discernment from the second seminar, and to prepare our initial thoughts and responses to the questions for each session given in this document.*

Thank you once again for your time and generous participation in our seminar series.

## QUESTIONS FOR INTRODUCTION: Looking back and reflecting since seminar 2

In our whole group introductions we will once again be invited to share our thoughts and reflections since seminar 2 in order to deepen our discernment. We are asked to specifically reflect upon the following questions and during the session be prepared to share our key insight into the one question that interests us most. We will have a minute or so each to share our thoughts.

Question 1            Since seminar two, and reflecting upon our summary of the conversation , is there anything further that you now wish to add as a critical challenge or opportunity facing the Church emerging from Covid?

or

Question 2            What is your key 'takeaway' from our last seminar – what did you hear that struck you as most significant for you/the Church?

## QUESTIONS FOR SESSION ONE: Discernment, diversity and disagreement

From seminar two it emerged that our experience of communal discernment in the Church is a rather rare and sometimes challenging experience that merits some further reflection.

In this session we will reflect upon our attempts to discern both individually and communally, and the challenges and opportunities that diversity and disagreement offer to such discernment.

Question 1 If you had to describe discernment to a friend who had no real experience of it, what would you say:

- a) from a personal perspective
- b) from a communal perspective

Question 2 What did our experience from seminar 2 teach us about discernment?

Question 3 In light of our experience of attempting to discern together in our last seminar:

- a) What might discernment look like for your local Church?
- b) What challenges do you foresee? How might we respond and prepare for these?
- c) What benefits do you foresee? How might we grow through these?

It might be helpful to jot down your thoughts and reflections in response to one/some of these questions and bring them with you to share for this session.

## QUESTIONS FOR SESSION TWO: attentively listening to all voices

From seminar two it emerged that one critical emergent theme facing the Church as we emerge from Covid is the imperative to attentively listen to the unheard and neglected, the silenced and quietened, and the marginalised and familiar voices across and beyond our Church.

One possible ecclesial implication of this is to explore the potential for parish, diocesan and national synod in our Church that can serve as a communal practice of discernment that strives to attentively listen to all voices across and beyond our Church.<sup>54</sup>

Yet to complement synod it is possible to facilitate a more nimble and agile 'big conversation' across and beyond our Church that can engage with the experience of our present time as we begin to emerge from this phase of the pandemic. So in this brief session we will explore the possibility of facilitating a 'big conversation' in our Church that attentively listens to all voices and can:

- support parish communities to re-engage, rebuild and refocus emerging from covid
- understand more deeply what matters to women and men across our countries today
- gain a clearer understanding of the *sensus ecclesiae* of ecclesial challenges/opportunities facing our Church emerging from Covid
- enable a deeper participation in the life of the Church for all the people of God

and begin to identify some key partners and networks for developing and delivering such a conversation in the summer of 2021.

Our 'Big Conversation': attentively listening to the unheard and neglected, the silenced and marginalised, the quietened and familiar voices.

We are invited to reflect upon the following questions regarding a big conversation across and beyond our Church and to bring our notes to our small groups for discussion:

- 1) WHO are the voices that need to be listened to?
- 2) HOW are these voices to be listened to?
- 3) WHO are the gatekeepers that can introduce us to these voices?
- 4) WHAT are the existing networks and resources that can support these conversation?

---

<sup>54</sup> It is noteworthy that Pope Francis has convoked the 16th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, which will be held in the month of October 2022 on the theme: "For a synodal Church: communion, participation and mission". Francis has also recently called the Church in his diocese of Rome to Synod. It is also recently reported that the Irish Bishops' conference will be calling the Irish Church to synod in the near future. In his recent letter to the German Church during their synodal journey Francis wrote he observed that 'listening, reflection and discernment' aim to make the Church "more faithful, able, agile and transparent to preach the Gospel with joy." He concluded that we are called to 'walk together along the way, as an apostolic body, and listen to each other under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, even if we do not think the same way.'

## QUESTIONS FOR SESSION THREE: Scripture - Re-imagining new wineskins

‘Every crisis contains a rightful demand for renewal and a step forward. If we really desire renewal, though, we must have the courage to be completely open. We need to stop seeing the reform of the Church as putting a patch on an old garment, or simply drafting a new Apostolic Constitution. The reform of the Church is something different.’ (+ Francis, Address to the Roman Curia, 21.12.20)

‘The simile used by the Lord Jesus is as simple as it is demanding. The wineskin in the short parable is a container made of soft leather that is still able to dilate allowing the young wine to breathe as it continues to ferment. If, however, the wineskin were dry and stiff from the wear of time, then it would no longer be flexible enough to withstand the intense pressure of the new wine. It would break, causing the loss of both the wine and the wine skin.

The evangelist John will use the same metaphor of the best wine served at the wedding at Cana to indicate the prophetic novelty of the joyous and lively proclamation of the gospel. The best wine and the new wine thus become symbols of the actions and teachings of Jesus which cannot be kept in the old wineskins of secularised religious schemes that are incapable of opening themselves up to new promises. (Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated life and Societies of Apostolic life, *New Wine in new Wineskins*, 2-3, 2017)

## QUESTIONS FOR SESSION THREE: Scripture - Re-imagining new wineskins

‘whenever we make the effort to return to the source and to recover the original freshness of the Gospel, new avenues arise, new paths of creativity open up, with different forms of expression, more eloquent signs and words with new meaning for today’s world (Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 11)

In advance of session three, we are each invited to re-read our ‘new wineskins’ scripture passages from Mark and Matthew.

In our whole group we will then be invited to listen to a short paper reflection by Ethna, in which Ethna will reflect upon re-imagining new wineskins as we emerge from Covid.

Following some questions and brief discussion, we will break into our small groups for some deeper reflection and dialogue that draws upon Ethna’s input and our own responses to the scripture.

This will serve to inform and stimulate our re-imagining in session four.

## QUESTIONS FOR SESSION FOUR: Re-imagining a 'good and better Church'

'Finally, we recall the image of the "mirror that does not lie." The beatitudes are the mirror where we look at ourselves, which allows us to know if we are walking on the right path: it is a mirror that does not lie.' (Letter of Pope Francis to the People of God in Germany, n.12, June 2019)

In this session - informed and stimulated by Ethna's input, our response and our scriptural reflections - we will explore the key practices and values of the new wineskins that might animate and sustain the relationships, worship and actions of our Church emerging from Covid.

Conscious of the emergent themes and people whom we have kept in mind during our seminar series so far, we are invited to reflect upon the following questions:

1. What are the three 'cornerstone' practices that should define the Church as we emerge from Covid? (examples of which might include, story-telling, hospitality, listening)
2. What are the three values that should be at the centre of all the Church's relationships, actions and worship as we emerge from Covid? (mindful of our diverse realities and lived experience from which we have attentively listened and discerned...)
3. (a) Present a picture of what this emerging Church might look like in terms of:
  - Relationships;
  - Worship;
  - Action

What are the shape and method of our relationships, action and worship to be if we are to faithfully attend to the challenges and opportunities that we have identified through our personal and collective discernment and analysis so far

(b) How would this contrast with the Church in a pre-covid world.

It might be helpful to jot down your thoughts, ideas and reflections in response to these questions and bring them with you to share for this session.

## 3.2 SEMINAR THREE SCRIPTURE

### *Scripture Session 3 - Mark 2: 13 - 28 (NRSV)*

Jesus went out again beside the lake; the whole crowd gathered around him, and he taught them. As he was walking along, he saw Levi son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax booth, and he said to him, 'Follow me.' And he got up and followed him.

And as he sat at dinner in Levi's house, many tax-collectors and sinners were also sitting with Jesus and his disciples—for there were many who followed him. When the scribes of the Pharisees saw that he was eating with sinners and tax-collectors, they said to his disciples, 'Why does he eat with tax-collectors and sinners?' When Jesus heard this, he said to them, 'Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick; I have come to call not the righteous but sinners.'

Now John's disciples and the Pharisees were fasting; and people came and said to him, 'Why do John's disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?' Jesus said to them, 'The wedding-guests cannot fast while the bridegroom is with them, can they? As long as they have the bridegroom with them, they cannot fast. The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast on that day.'

'No one sews a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old cloak; otherwise, the patch pulls away from it, the new from the old, and a worse tear is made. And no one puts new wine into old wineskins; otherwise, the wine will burst the skins, and the wine is lost, and so are the skins; but one puts new wine into fresh wineskins.'

One sabbath he was going through the cornfields; and as they made their way his disciples began to pluck heads of grain. The Pharisees said to him, 'Look, why are they doing what is not lawful on the sabbath?' And he said to them, 'Have you never read what David did when he and his companions were hungry and in need of food? He entered the house of God, when Abiathar was high priest, and ate the bread of the Presence, which it is not lawful for any but the priests to eat, and he gave some to his companions.' Then he said to them, 'The sabbath was made for humankind, and not humankind for the sabbath; so the Son of Man is lord even of the sabbath.'

### *Scripture Session 3 - Matthew 9: 9 - 17 (NRSV)*

As Jesus was walking along, he saw a man called Matthew sitting at the tax booth; and he said to him, 'Follow me.' And he got up and followed him.

And as he sat at dinner\* in the house, many tax-collectors and sinners came and were sitting\* with him and his disciples. When the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, 'Why does your teacher eat with tax-collectors and sinners?' But when he heard this, he said, 'Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. Go and learn what this means, "I desire mercy, not sacrifice." For I have come to call not the righteous but sinners.'

Then the disciples of John came to him, saying, 'Why do we and the Pharisees fast often,\* but your disciples do not fast?' And Jesus said to them, 'The wedding-guests cannot mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them, can they? The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast.'

No one sews a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old cloak, for the patch pulls away from the cloak, and a worse tear is made. Neither is new wine put into old wineskins; otherwise, the skins burst, and the wine is spilled, and the skins are destroyed; but new wine is put into fresh wineskins, and so both are preserved.'

### 3.3 SEMINAR THREE EMAIL INVITATIONS

Dear All,

I trust that you continue to remain safe and well during these days, and that the longer days and (slightly) increased temperatures will continue to lift our spirits as we journey towards Easter.

Many thanks once again for your generous participation in our second seminar last month. Having spent quite some time immersed in our seminar zoom videos since we last met, and having read through Piers' summary report of the second seminar, I am genuinely excited and moved by the fruits of our personal and collective discernment to date, which have the potential as you will see, to translate into some exciting and genuine initiatives in our Church that directly respond to our insight and dialogue.

Piers has conscientiously produced a condensed seminar summary report of the contributions and dialogue from our second seminar which captures not only our reflections on discernment, but also our personal and communal prioritisation of the key challenges and opportunities facing the Church. I have attached this report along with the programme and questions for seminar three.

Our third seminar will be held on the zoom platform once again on Wednesday 24<sup>th</sup> March 2021, from 1.00 pm to 5.00 pm. I am delighted that everyone will be able to make this seminar. Once again I shall send the zoom link around the day before, and the zoom link will be open from 12.30 pm onwards.

The focus of this third seminar will be re-imagining and looking forward, in light of our listening to experience, discernment and analysis during our first two seminars. We will begin to re-imagine how our Church can 'fit together' as we emerge from Covid so that we can faithfully and creatively respond to the emerging challenges and opportunities before us. As you will see from the programme we will continue to explore the challenges of communal discernment, and begin to imagine new wineskins for the Church. Through a creative dialogue between scripture and our own insight and experience, we aim to draw out the values and practices that might underpin the relationships, worship and action of a re-imagined Church emerging from Covid.

In advance of our third seminar it would be helpful once again if you could read and reflect upon:

1. the seminar summary report from our second seminar (attached)
2. the questions for each of the seminar 3 sessions in our programme and questions document (attached)

These brief preparatory questions to reflect upon for our Introductory session and sessions 1, 2 and 4 are found in the coloured boxes in the attached programme and questions document. It might be helpful to note down your initial responses to the these questions, to support our contributions and conversations during the seminar. Once again you are not asked to send anything in advance but simply to come to the seminar ready for a brief sharing of your notes/key points with other participants.

In our INTRODUCTORY SESSION, we will each have a minute or two in the whole group to share our responses to either question 1 or 2 below:

Question 1      Since seminar two, and reflecting upon our seminar summary report, is there anything further that you now wish to add as a critical challenge or opportunity facing the Church emerging from Covid?

or

Question 2      What is your key 'takeaway' from our last seminar – what did you hear that struck you as most significant for you/the Church?

Finally....in response to one of the key issues that emerges from both seminars - namely to attend to the unheard and neglected, the marginalised and silenced, the peripheral and familiar voices within and beyond our Church - in session 2 we will explore how we might creatively facilitate the beginning of such an essential dialogue...have a little look at the questions that might inform our creative planning!

I know that time continues to remain a precious gift at present, so I am most grateful once more for the time that you can give in preparation for our third seminar, which I know will enrich our conversation and discernment.

With my thanks once again for your participation and time, and please do not hesitate to get in touch if I can help in any other way.

Liam

**Dr Liam Hayes**

*Director | Centre for Ecclesial Ethics*

Person H Beaufort Institute of Theology | Cambridge

[lh702@cam.ac.uk](mailto:lh702@cam.ac.uk)

SEMINAR SERIES 2021

Our Church emerging from Covid: preparing the future

—

SEMINAR THREE – RE-IMAGINING

Wednesday 24<sup>th</sup> March, 1.00 pm

SUMMARY REPORT

Dr Piers Benn

\* NOT FOR PUBLICATION OR WIDER CIRCULATION \*

**Introduction**

*1.00 pm - 1.30*

*pm*

Person F, Director of the Centre, opened the seminar with some introductory remarks in which he reflected upon our personal and collective experience over the past four weeks, and the fruits of our discernment and analysis in the first two seminars.

In plenary, each participant was then invited to speak for about one minute in response to either of two pre-set questions:

1. Since seminar two, and reflecting upon our summary of the conversation, is there anything further that you now wish to add as a critical challenge or opportunity facing the Church emerging from Covid?
2. What is your key 'takeaway' from our last seminar – what did you hear that struck you as most significant for you/the Church?

Person N      Discernment is difficult: if you don't know the relevant people, it is hard to discern together. It forces us to ask: how much do I care about all this? How do we deal with disagreement?

Person M      He is impressed by the kindness and commitment of the participants. He was still wondering whether there was a distinctively Christian dimension to it, since people of many faiths and none often show great social concern and tend to converge on many of the same values.

Person H      She had witnessed much good will and humility but saw a fundamental need for change in the ecclesial culture.

Person D      Church deliberations are not conducted in a vacuum but are mirrored in society at large as both the Church and the wider society deal with Covid. The Church and the secular world have a common aspiration.

Person B      She is very happy with how we have moved forward in the seminars. If the Church focuses on hearing the unheard, as the Gospel teaches, ecclesial structural change

will follow. We should also pay attention to people seen as sinners – they express the brokenness in all of us. The Church should engage with them.

- Person K We must include the ‘invisible groups’ of people – those who come and go without anyone noticing. We should include the Traveller community and try to draw them in. As well as including the voices of women, we should not forget the men who don’t feel attached to the Church.
- Person J She is still worried by what it is to be a Catholic and whether a Catholic can hold other identities. She is upset because although being a Catholic is very important to her, she cannot be like the married couples she sees in Church because the Church excludes gay people. The Church needs to speak to gay people and other groups she considers excluded.
- Person C The recent CDF [Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith] announcement [that same-sex couples cannot have a Church blessing of their union] was dispiriting, because it lacks compassion and returns us to an obsession with ‘pelvic theology’. How can we deal with the dissonance that arises when the Church wants to do something beneficial, but finds it cannot because of some bit of dogma?
- Person A She is struck by the importance of creating the right climate for discernment. How can we make the climate right for extending discernment to, for example, transgender people? How can we deal with ideological differences, in general? These are hard problems.
- Person S The main takeaway from the seminars is simple: listen to unheard voices. During the pandemic we have been hearing a narrower range of voices.
- Person R She is intrigued by the question of whether Catholicism is necessarily hierarchical. Of course it is hierarchical, but there are different ways this can manifest itself. We should follow the spirit as well as the letter, and there is a need for a non-ordained hierarchy [or a hierarchy of non-ordained people? Weight given to non-ordained voices by the hierarchy?]
- Person G She had noticed a deep desire within the Church for transformation, but also different degrees of patience in awaiting it.

Person Q Like all organizations, the Church needs a hierarchy. However, those higher up need also to be servants. There are still neglected categories of people, such as single people. This observation only scratches the surface and progress is hindered by political polarization. But we need to ask what unites Catholics. Is it a desire for social justice, concern for the environment or something similar?

Person P The word 'inclusivity' was missing in the report on the second seminar. It is scandalous when the Church excludes people, such as LGBT. Concerning the CDF declaration [above], there has been a strong 'side' reaction to it. The CDF is losing credibility and it is odd that Pope Francis endorses the declaration. There is a need to 'upend the pyramid'. A Church that does not listen has no authority to teach. We need to revisit the idea of the Base (?) Christian Communities.

## Session 1: Discernment, diversity and disagreement

1.30 pm - 2.00

pm

*All participants were divided into three small groups, to discuss the questions asked in a pre-circulated document.*

### **Group A      Facilitator: Person A**

*How can we describe discernment?*

- The saying in John that 'the truth will set you free' is helpful. The discussion is about beliefs we hold because of teaching and those we can hold through knowing the truth of God in a personal way. The Ignatian tradition teaches that the closer you are to Jesus, the closer you are to God. 'God rubs off on us.'
- Discernment involves looking back on the day and asking: what am I grateful for? What was difficult? This discernment can be a daily practice and is best done with one or more other people. This reduces the risk of delusion!
- Discernment is aimed at hearing more clearly what God wants, as opposed to what I want. It can mean seeing things in a different way, within a Catholic perspective.

- Discernment is about looking for insight and trying to evaluate our situation and experience. Three things needed for it are: attentiveness, empathy and self-awareness.
- What is often called 'conscience' can be another name for discernment. The exercise of conscience is not a matter of listening to an external oracle, but a matter of reasoning in the light of principles and the particular facts of a situation.

*What did our experience of the second seminar teach us about discernment?*

- Attentiveness and listening are possible. Discernment is a useful workout. Attending to simple experience and humanity can be better than using our cerebral faculties.
- Discernment can be messy and requires patience. The best discerners are not self-conscious about it. Many ordinary people practise it in both simple and profound ways.
- Within the Catholic tradition, discernment can be difficult because the Church does not always give clear answers, for example about topical issues. There is a difference between what we get from teaching and what we get from experience.

*What might discernment look like for your local Church? What are the challenges – for example, areas of ignorance or blind spots?*

- Catechesis is poor and we need to 'clean our ears'. Discernment is a long way away and needs practice and time.
- The Church must declare a commitment to change before calling synod.

**Group B      Facilitator: Person N**

*How should we describe discernment, from a personal or communal perspective?*

#### Personal discernment

- It is like a guiding voice. It is both elusive and substantial. It asks what Christ would do.
- It involves listening, feeling and heeding intuition and instinct. It can involve a 'moment inside you' saying you must do X, even if you don't know why.

- It is a matter of listening to the voice within, but this voice is in a kind of dialogue. It is like the Ignatian examination of conscience - when you 'mark your own homework'.
- It is a way of working out how to react in the right way. It aims at distinguishing what is essential from what is incidental.
- Concerning essential decisions, discernment applied to a spectrum from those pertaining to the fundamentals of our lives to small, everyday decisions. It means a life of prayer and reflection.

### Communal discernment

- It is like a voice that speaks in different languages, vocal and quiet at the same time. To work, it requires very attentive listening.
- It listens to the wisdom of many different people but requires one wise person to pin down the fruits of communal discernment.
- It is like a voice guiding the group, shown in the second seminar. The Holy Spirit can move a group discussion.
- It is hard, and the difficulty is affected by whether you are an extravert or an introvert.
- It doesn't simply tell you what you want to hear. It requires attunement to how you are reacting to the other voices. What is the interplay between these voices and how I feel? Why am I challenged? These questions ask us to move away from our defensive spaces.
- It aims to conform deliberation to the true perspective of the Church, by being attentive to the essentials of scripture and 'capital-T Tradition' while avoiding getting caught with 'small-t tradition'.
- Communal discernment is more a matter of the process than the final decision. Through the process you become more like the kind of people you are meant to be. As a result, decisions become easier.

*What did our experience from seminar 2 teach us about discernment? What might discernment look like in your local Church? What challenges and benefits do you foresee?*

- In one parish Church, there is not much space for discernment, though there are opportunities to practise it under a different name. There was a reflection on *Laudato Si*, bringing a chance to think about what the parish was doing. This was the nearest it came to discernment.

- In the broader Church, the 'discernment muscle' is not well honed.

*What would need to happen for discernment to work?*

- The word 'discernment' is an obstacle and should not be used at the outset. Some would ask 'Who am I to discern?'
- In another parish Church, all are invited to be 'in council'. This is, in effect, discernment in action. It 'kind of works' and can take messages higher up, but it is difficult to engage large numbers of people.
- Another Church has Wednesday evening meetings, but many people find it hard to arrange childcare or reimbursement. It would be better to have them after Sunday Mass. However, meetings on Zoom have been better attended.
- Discernment in another local parish means bringing the people of God together to discern difficult topics. However, it doesn't work in the parish council. Certain people dominate it and don't let others speak. The Quaker model is better in that congregations have the patience to listen. The Church needs something like this.
- The Church needs a listening forum, so that we can hear not only 'high spiritual' academics, but all voices, since God speaks to all of us.
- PCC meetings on Zoom have been more fruitful than conventional ones. Zoom meetings have the advantage of a 'mute' button... [laughter!]
- Discernment need not take place at a meeting. There are other forms of discernment.

**Group C      Facilitator: Person F**

*How should we describe personal and communal discernment?*

Personal discernment

- Discernment results from the formation of conscience. At a gut level, one knows right from wrong.

- It is about trying to understand what God wants from me and trying to be in tune with the Holy Spirit.

### Communal discernment

- It is about reaching consensus. But this is hard when some voices are bold, and others lack confidence.
- It leads to hard questions. If you seek a decision, how do you reach it? Do you look for the Spirit? Can there be a minority decision?
- On a pastoral instrument model, the parish council is attuned to the heartbeat of the parish, with people in touch with various groups and feeding back their experience. But this depends on a good theology of the Ministry of each of us.
- Communal discernment is the guidance of the Holy Spirit in sharing thoughts and experiences. To deal with disagreement, we can use the early Church as a model: people prayed, argued things out and then knew what to do.
- It is messy, but if we try our best God will always better his Church.

*How do we calibrate scripture, tradition, the Magisterium and the experience of the baptized into the discernment of the Church? How do we fit these sources of wisdom together in our communal discernment?*

- Personal discernment is a matter of trying to find out what God needs you to do. However, the pandemic has challenged preconceptions about this, since regular Churchgoers have found Churches closed. Hence there is a need to navigate in a different way, because things once thought absolute truths were now negotiable.
- There is a biblical lesson in the sacking of the Temple, when the Jews had to reinvent their understanding of God and worship. This led them to move from the Temple to the Book. Discernment for us now is a matter of reading the signs of the times, as the Jews did. We need to know what we need to do to create an effective response to new needs.
- Attempts at communal discernment can be unsatisfactory, due to an obstructive hierarchy and people's fear of speaking. The Quaker model of discernment is much better – people listen to the Spirit as the communal 'Gathered' and the meeting speaks to the light of God in each individual, based on a belief in equality of access to God, which is lacking in the Catholic Church.

- The Church lacks the structures, formation and practices for this egalitarian communal discernment. It lacks a mechanism to allow for dissent and disagreement.
- There are terrible divisions in the Church because we don't listen and speak to one another.

*What practices and formations do we have? We speak of a *sensus fidei* that allows an individual to know what is of God, but do we have a *sensus fidelium* or collective expression of faith?*

- The *sensus fidei* is supposed to exist only in people of fully formed faith. The official teaching on this doesn't recognise an inherent dignity and life in the Spirit of individual believers, beyond that which allows them to take part in what is traditionally prescribed [paraphrase?] This is a great problem for us because it allows the abuse of status.
- At one Church, where giving money to an environmental project was discussed, it was decided to reach a decision 'via contentment, not consensus.' Everyone could speak and was asked whether they were content with a decision, even if they did not agree with it. At least everyone felt they had been listened to
- This process could apply to discussion of same-sex unions. In the end, not all will get what they want. But at least the Church will have heard them attentively and *given reasons* for rejecting their proposals for change. That can lead to contentment, even if not consensus.
- The deep question is: what our knowledge of God and the good predicated on? Is it ordination, or baptism? Which it is makes a great difference to the Church. But it is not part of our theology that a bishop must know more than someone who has been baptized.

All participants remained in three small groups, to discuss the questions asked in a pre-circulated document.

**Group A      Facilitator: Person A**

Who are the voices needing to be listened to?

Person Q      We could take off from the legal 'protected characteristics' [race, religion et al.] and extend them to include different social classes and the laity. There are also differences between [within?] each group. Within the hierarchy we are not good at listening.

Person A      Perhaps we need to distinguish voices which are unheard for pragmatic reasons from those which are deliberately removed from the discussion.

Person Q      The extreme right also say they are unheard, including the 'autistic' priests. There is much left-right polarization. There needs to be unity, not hate.

Person S      The 'extreme' groups can be noisy and mutually intolerant. There are people at the fringes who claim to be unheard but can be intolerant themselves. If we listen only to the extremes, we get a skewed conversation. As a former psychology student, he notices the similarity between the extremes.

Person G      There need to be voices that *represent* different ages and levels of marginalization. The process of getting these voices heard needs to be managed properly.

Person A asked *how these voices are to be listened to and what opportunities and methods there are for listening?* No answers were immediately forthcoming.

Who are the gatekeepers who can introduce us to these voices?

- Person S      There are already networks like Caritas, which have non-Catholic members. The Catholic Church is not monolithic and there are many gatekeepers. But there is a question of who will lead these groups.
- Person A      In an academic setting, there are already groups that could be approached, such as transgender ones. One of her students is transgender and this has started Person A thinking about this issue. Other big networks include CAFOD and Caritas.
- Person G      There will be a need to recognise wounds, including of sex/gender minorities.
- Person Q      Both the left and the right accuse the other side of not being good at listening. When trying to allow different voices to emerge, there will be a need to understand the different communication styles used by different interest groups. It will be necessary to reach out to those who use these different styles.
- Group B      Facilitator: Person N**

Who are the voices that need to be listened to?

- Person J      She belongs to three groups – women, the disabled and LGBT. She can speak for them, but not for other groups like the homeless or refugees.
- Person K      We should listen to newcomers, as they bring a fresh perspective, as well as different ethnic groups within the parish. However, to listen properly we need to include them. As far as gatekeepers go, there is always one member of each group who speaks out.
- Person J      We should acknowledge the presence of members of particular groups, e.g. gay people. They are there in every congregation, but they are often not acknowledged as such.
- Person K      If we involve people, they become empowered and then they become committed. But we need to be creative in order to bring this about.
- Person P      He has experience of outreach, having helped to create a charity for refugees and worked in drop-in centres. People with addictions and mental health problems can

also be helped in this way. As for gatekeepers, all groups know someone who is willing to make contact.

Person N His parish brought people together under the *Caritas* umbrella, with 30-40 people representing diverse groups.

Person C We are not used to engaging with people in a really '*listening way*'. We need to sit down with people for a conversation, rather than merely do things for them. In that way, we not only serve people but acknowledge them. Existing congregations are 'captive', there for Mass. But we should also reach out to people who are not in congregations. We should do this less by inviting them to meet us, and more by proactively going out to meet them. The reason for doing this is that their voice needs to be heard; they are part of the body of Christ, and we have not been listening to them.

Person N There are listening campaigns every so often. They are slow and old-fashioned but there is some sitting down one-to-one and talking. They are in all the parishes but many people don't know about them.

Person C These initiatives can be threatening or unthreatening. They can be seen as marketplaces – whatever you are doing, you can turn up at them. You can be there to talk and have a 'stand'. It is fascinating to see who is there and notice all the points of connection.

Person K People are available and want to be connected, and it is important to understand the congregation. People are waiting to be invited. All Catholics want to be involved, but the processes and protocols are not clear. People who have long had certain roles, such as flower arrangers, should be invited to let others perform those roles. People must not be pushed away and there must be no cliques.

Person J It is also important to facilitate conversations within minority groups. Then they can speak in wider forums.

**Group C      Facilitator: Person F**

*Who are the voices that need to be listened to?*

Person B              Women and LGBT people.

Person D Young people.

Person R Survivors of abuse.

Person D A missionary Church must listen to why people have left the Church or feel disaffected. Why do they think the Church has failed them?

Person H People are disaffected and disengaged from the Church, but no one asks them why they are not going to Church any more. At the same time, many who are no longer 'giving ecclesiastical presence to their faith' are still very active Catholics; in effect, they are still practising Christians even if they don't liturgical expression to it.

Person R Yes, most people who support CAFOD are like that.

Person H Many people involved in local projects that support refugees and asylum-seekers are not necessarily active parishioners any more.

*Who are the gatekeepers who can introduce us to these voices? How would the process take place?*

Person B Many women are actively involved in the Church so we can use bulletins and social media groups for Catholic women. We can reach Catholic women who are not in a Church environment.

Person H There are organisations like *Women for the Ordination of Women* which could be at the forefront.

Person R There are also organisations like *Catholic Women Speak* and *Voices of Faith*. But the Church hierarchy is not hearing their conversations.

Person D People who work in social action but who may not be in the Church can be gatekeepers for the disengaged, who may include the homeless and long-term unemployed. We can talk to the relevant charities to find out what people like these are thinking. We can also contact *Church Action on Poverty*. However, there must be trust between advocates and the people listened to.

Person F        Nevertheless, the gatekeepers only open the conversation. They don't speak for the people in question.

*How receptive would people be to being approached to be part of a bigger conversation?*

Person H        The organisations mentioned are already trusted. It is about asking the accompaniers to have the conversation with those they are already accompanying.

*Is there a good way to have that conversation, e.g. in the online world or face to face?*

Person D        We can have the online conversation with the young. With the homeless and others, face to face is better.

Person R        It is harder to have the conversation with clergy abuse survivors. There is no gatekeeper for them.

Person H        There is guidance available on how to listen [paraphrase]. One can speak to someone in the parish one doesn't usually talk to.

Person B        Many Catholic women aren't included in the organisations mentioned. If the conversations are held online, people will feel more motivated to take part and have more confidence to say what they want to say.

Person F        In summary, it is important to develop networks and accompany people in their hardship or trauma, both in parishes and online. This seminar needs to be extended to include many other people, to enable local transformation of communities. These things will help us to become a discerning Church.

Person D        Unless people practise speaking their minds, synod will not work.

Person H        Make use of all the Catholic press.



*In a pre-circulated document, participants had already received short extracts from Pope Francis' Address to the Roman Curia, 21.12.20 and the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated life and Societies of Apostolic life, 'New Wine in new Wineskins, 2-3, 2017.*

*All participants remained in plenary, whilst Ethna offered a reflection on this theme, my (Piers) summary of which follows:*

The Parable of the Lost Coin in Luke 15 is linked with ecclesial ethics. Two photos were shown: one of a nun cleaning a street in Rome with a bishop looking on, the other showing the same street but with the bishop cleaning it.

There is a tension between those who advocate the spiritual reform of the Church and those who advocate structural reform. However, both are essential. The Covid pandemic has accelerated a perception of a need for structural reform, and this is not as impossible as earlier thought.

The Parable of the Lost Coin can be interpreted as being about the rejoicing when one sinner repents. But it can also be linked to the Parable of the Good Housekeeper. The essential idea of the Parable of the Coin is that of knowing that something has been lost: you search diligently for the lost item, even tearing your house apart, but then rejoice when you find it.

St. Augustine said that the parable tells us that Holy Divinity has lost her money and the money is us. God is the woman who seeks for what is lost. The parable is about the practices that come from knowing God in this way. Gregory of Nyssa said that human effort extends only to 'removing the filth'. But God brings to light the beauty of the soul the filth has covered over.

The goodness of God is in each of us. It is rediscovered when we attend to it. We are bidden first to light a lamp and bring to light what is hidden, then we must look for the lost drachma in our own house. The dirt hides what we are looking for, but what we are looking for is not entirely lost.

Augustine relates the parable to memory. How could the women in the parable search for the coin unless she knows she has lost it? If she – or we – had completely forgotten something we had lost, we would not be able to search for it. The importance of memory is brought out here.

The parable, and the analogous notion of God searching for and finding what was lost, can help to provide a foundation for what ecclesial ethics is trying to do. We are searching for what the Church has lost and trying to put our house in order. There has been a loss of the *Imago Dei* in the Church and we are searching for it again, in the structures of the Church.

Another parable, that of the Good Shepherd, is woven into models of leadership. Something has been lost during the last two decades: during that period, the model of ecclesiology has failed us abysmally. If we know we have lost something we can search for it. But this may involve turning the house upside down and dealing with the filth that comes to light in that search.

The background to this need is in the Gospel accounts of Jesus' conflict with the disciples of John the Baptist and the Pharisees. The upshot is four things: a call to follow Jesus, a call to community, a call to celebrate and suffer, and a call to newness. But there remains the question of what this amounts to with respect to new wineskins: do we need old wine in old wineskins, old wine in new wineskins, new wine in old wineskins or new wine in new wineskins?

For example, the question of blessing the union of same sex couples is bound up with new wineskins. Pope Francis has raised expectations with a change of gesture but has not followed this up. There is ambiguity and a failure when really hard issues have to be dealt with. Is new wine being proposed? Gerard Mannion believes the Church needs to have new wine in new wineskins. With respect to the abuse crisis, Cardinal Reinhard Marx says we need new wine in new wineskins in the structures of the Church.

In sum, ecclesial ethics needs to concern itself with spiritual, structural, legal, pastoral, theological and many other kinds of concern.

*After this reflection participants were split into three small groups for deeper reflection and dialogue drawing upon Ethna's input and their own responses to the scripture.*

**Group A      Facilitator: Person A**

*What were the group's first reactions to Ethna's presentation?*

- Ethna was doing discernment in her talk. She admitted her initial interpretation of the picture of the nun showed her own bias, and this showed the need to be open to new ideas and willing to reinterpret perceptions.
- People need to trust the Church and see that it *cares*. Many people are disgruntled because they don't trust the Church administration. If people saw that the Church cares, there would be less friction.
- Even if the Church rightly forbids people things they want, it needs to understand why they want those things. This is part of what it is to care about people.
- A Church Father regarded the parable of the housekeeper as 'quaint', because it pertained to women's concerns. This is shown in current attitudes: many women can make a difference to the Church, but because of the patriarchal system they are not listened to. Male roles are seen as more important. Women are not listened to and included in the structure of the Church.
- The parable of the housekeeper is the most domestic of Jesus' parables. It points to the importance of always going back and looking for what we once had. It is enough for the woman to find the coin she has lost and call people to celebrate. Jesus asks us to find the things that inspired Abraham and other biblical figures. This is no different from what Francis is doing now.
- The Lost Coin Parable is an example of Jesus speaking to women, who would identify with the protagonist; in other parables he speaks to different audiences. He speaks to people 'where *they* are at', not where *we* are at. If we want to reach out to the unheard, we need to speak to them in a similar way.
- The woman in the parable may not have been any richer at the end – she had simply found what she had lost. It is addressed to all women who are 'on the edge', for whom the loss of a coin would have meant someone could not be fed. Jesus is also speaking to all who live a hand to mouth existence, saying 'I know what you are going through'. He shows that God 'gets' them and that God would celebrate in the way they would. The Church should therefore be reaching out to people who don't feel that the Church understands them.
- Ethna's presentation was doing what the woman with the lost coin was doing: she was finding the story that had been lost in our consciousness and traditions. This story is less visible than others, like that of the woman at the well. Ethna corrects our traditional

approach to the story, suggesting that the idea of lostness and memory has image-rich possibilities for ecclesial ethics.

*Do you have any thoughts about how our discussion might relate to new wineskins?*

- The wineskins parable often makes us think we shall have something completely new. But the Church has a two-thousand-year-old tradition, and we should not change everything. Although there can be developments, the wine will not be completely new. We should not advocate a radical break with tradition.
- In the Gospels, Jesus speaks at a simple level. Complex theology came later with Paul and Augustine. The Church must remember that Jesus spoke to people where they were, such as shepherds. On new wineskins, there was never an 'ideal' Church in the past to which we should return. It is more important to look to the future. The Church has always had to negotiate with the world and always had flaws.
- We have been discussing tensions between continuity and newness. But maybe the Lost Coin parable is about rediscovering what is already there.
- The most important thing is the *interaction* of the new wine with the new wineskins. The one influences the other. If we reshape the Church, this will not only be about changing structures and relationships but also looking at the message. John Paul II and Francis have given new directions to the Church, e.g. on ecology. This is new wine, and it will need a new structure and a new relationship between clergy and laity.
- The old Church could not contain what we discovered from Vatican II. That Council implies that we need a renewed Church.
- During its first three centuries, the Church presented the moral teaching of the Gospel in a simple way using pictures and parables. The first historically recorded work is the *Didache*, which presented the way of virtue and the way of vice in a simple manner. But the teaching got more complicated and muddled through history, especially from Trent onwards. Its first disaster was the sixth century penitential books created by Irish monks.
- The Church got more hierarchical and ecclesial when it Christianised the Roman Empire. It moved from love to the control of a powerful State.
- To be relevant, the Church must notice the world, negotiate and adapt. This does not entail any change of doctrines.
- The Church changed when it sought power and status, contrary to the spirit of Christ. In his metaphor of new wineskins, Jesus teaches that the journey will be along a bumpy road, with an interplay between new and old. He was saying 'I shall be killed for this'. Oscar

Romero is the best parallel for Jesus saying 'You are bringing a different message and are upsetting the powerful and changing who has a voice. You will not be popular'.

**Group B      Facilitator: Fr Person N**

- Memory allows us to be reminded of what is precious and what the Church is about. To find the precious things that exist in the Church, the whole house needs to be turned upside down. But we have a memory of the truth that is there. It is easy to give up, but there is still a memory of something precious deep within.
- It is interesting that the Parable of the Good Shepherd has long predominated in our thinking. But the Parable of the Lost Coin came alive in Ethna's presentation.
- There are many people in the Church who are talking about a way of Church they feel they have lost. The challenges that come from this are not joyful – this is a bad sign.
- The Image of God was a central theme that arose from the presentation. What is it for this to be revealed in the Church?
- The ambiguity of Pope Francis [re same sex unions] is hard to live with. We should ask whether this ambiguity can be creative rather than destructive. It is important to name and not excuse what Francis said. Some of his statements are affirming, others retrogressive.
- It is true that Church teaching is grounded in a theory of natural law that has traditionally excluded same-sex relationships. But natural law can be broadened to include more than the physical/biological. There are also theological and anthropological dimensions to consider. The most important point is that we are made *to love*.
- A proper theory of natural law is more broadly about the nature of persons. In the light of this, why can't the Church bless all human love?
- Nevertheless, there is a real difficulty reconciling traditional Church teaching on sexual ethics with the more 'progressive' remarks above. Younger Catholics don't accept the old approach. But both traditionalists and liberals have been 'finding the filth', and the leadership has not dealt with this properly.
- Many priests take a pastoral approach to these questions, showing openness to pastoral circumstances. This is done 'on the quiet' but the need for this points to a hard and necessary conversation.
- The idea of doctrinal development is important. This has shown itself in the Catholic view of evolution, for example. Many new insights develop and there is no reason why this cannot apply to theology.

- However, change is very scary for people who love rules. Some of those people would kill Jesus!
- Pope Francis may not really support change on these matters. But at least he lets us talk about the issues.
- We struggle with Church structures that are no longer helpful. In the parish we have to work within the structures.
- Leadership is difficult. Leaders are supposed to strive for unity and to keep the people of God together, but they cannot lead everything.

**Group C      Facilitator: Person F**

*What did you hear that struck you in Ethna's presentation?*

- The image of the house being turned upside down is striking, rather like the upending of a pyramid.
- The parable describes an obsession with finding what is lost. It asks us what we are being called to be attentive to in the search. Is the search like trying to find a lost document whose discovery will make a crucial difference, or is a different kind of effort required of the woman in the parable?
- The 'housekeeping' idea struck a chord. Perhaps the housekeeper is not poor, but nevertheless the value she places on the lost item keeps her doggedly searching. The message is: don't give up. Restore the lost item - which could be a metaphor for the Church - to its proper place.
- The reference to Augustine is striking: how could the woman find the coin unless she knew she had lost it? This is a very significant insight. What or who have we lost? Have we become disconnected because we have forgotten who or what is precious? Has the Church ended up with a thin repository of precious people and things?
- We are not looking for people who have been very active in the Church but have now fallen away. Perhaps they have fallen ill. We should look for them and generally keep an eye open for each other. And even if we are looking we are not finding.
- If we had co-leadership in parishes, we could have parishes divided into small wards. These would be like small Christian communities which are highly active in the Church. They would bring to life people's awareness of each other. In some places, that is how the Church works. Sub-groups keep the Church together.

- One participant recalled how he vividly remembers the person who welcomed him into each of the three communities he has belonged to.
- Nevertheless, it is not clear what we want to change, and why. If inclusion is the purpose, we need to ask why. What does the Church offer outsiders and those who have left it? How much of the 'lostness' of those who have left is really to do with what we, as the Church, have lost? If we have lost our humanity and are really the patient, people will go elsewhere for love and friendship. Why should people who have been rejected want to (re)join the Church?
- One participant's parish Church doesn't even say 'Welcome' on its notice board.
- Perhaps the Church has lost something by trying to get everyone into it, thereby reducing itself to the lowest common denominator.
- The Church is a family. If someone is lost, they want to be found. When a family loses someone, it loses that person's contribution to that family. Family connections are never gone, whatever has been said between its members.
- If we say we can do without that family, we must what is the value of the thing we pretend we can do without? It is connection. When they lose a sense of connection to the Church, many Catholics (e.g. living in London but from West Africa) have become Baptists or Pentecostals.
- When there is real connection, people ask where you are and how you are. This may be overbearing, but you are not allowed to be lost. People have a right to run away, but we should always do what we can for them.
- But what is so special about the Catholic Church? Can't people find their needed connections in other communities?
- One response: everyone, whoever they are, is welcome to be part of the Catholic Church. They are joining a group of people trying to find God. The starting points tend to be at the periphery. Maybe the household needs to be turned upside down because we have excluded those at the periphery. Maybe the wineskins we have make a small minority comfortable, but we don't see or hear *individuals*. Our housekeeping of our world and Church has been catastrophic.
- The housekeeping needs to start in a different place with different people. For example, there are too many activities for married people with children. Others need to be included.
- But even if the Church becomes more welcoming, people might still prefer to join other Churches. It is still unclear why people would want to join the Catholic Church. People can already choose whom they want to hear, in an 'a la carte' way.

- The advantage of belonging to a particular community is that you do not need to explain yourself. The connectedness that comes from being Catholic is present even in a non-local Church. There is a family framework. Even so, the Church needs to look outside itself.
- These questions must ultimately be answered *for* oneself but not *by* oneself. The questions must be part of a bigger conversation.

*All participants returned to their three small groups, in which they responded to the pre-circulated questions in dialogue*

**Group A      Facilitator: Person A**

*What are the three cornerstone practices that should define the Church as we emerge from Covid?*

Person A      We must first ask what we mean by ‘practice’. Alasdair McIntyre defines a practice as group activities aimed at a set of goods – e.g. agriculture or laboratory experiments. A practice has predecessors but is always open to something new. ***We should ask what goods we want to promote? E.g. what practice would promote the good of hearing the unheard?***

Person D      Hospitality is a central practice in a listening Church.

Person B      The Church should hold events, as non-Catholic Churches do.

Person A      But the Church is not a hospitality industry. More content needs to be given to the idea of hospitality.

Person B      We need a Church that welcomes people and asks after them. Events would help people get to know each other and feel part of the community. At present, the Church does not hear people who do not feel understood. People’s problems should be acknowledged, and they should be listened to through dialogue, with people sitting with each other. Once people – including the poor, disabled or LGBT people – are listened to, these events can be incorporated into parish life. They should be led at the grass roots, not by Rome.

Person A      But how can we get both the right culture and grassroots arrangements for this to happen?

Person J There should be more welcoming and listening. The marginalized need to be first welcomed, then acknowledged. Why not have LGBT groups meeting regularly, like Rosary groups? There should be 'bottom down' rather than 'top down' leadership. With the top-down model, people outside the traditional family setting cannot fit in or be included (e.g. divorced people) if those at the top say they are not welcome at communion.

Person A Would these groups be expressions of hospitality? Wouldn't it be better to have groups that are not based on these characteristics, because groups defined by specific characteristics don't function well in a Christian context or in society? Perhaps LGBT people (et al.) should not be welcomed *as* members of a group but should rather be embedded in fuller communities and groups within the parish.

Person J Both models are needed. There needs to be acknowledgement from the front of the Church that people from these groups are welcome. We do not want priests who say they accept gay people but think 'there aren't any gay people here.' Gay groups would give gay Catholics the chance to converse with each other.

Person D His Church has many homeless people nearby. He once saw a woman from his Church who approached a homeless woman, took her into the presbytery and talked to her over tea. This was an immensely powerful acknowledgement that went beyond anything other people did. It was moral leadership.

Person J Yes, this is better than telling homeless people not to ask for money but come to Church instead.

Person A This story illustrates brotherhood, solidarity and high-level attentiveness. It sees the human face in the other. It helps us see the elements of the practice of hospitality: hospitality without a basic recognition of everyone's humanity cannot be an acceptable practice.

*What other practices come to mind?*

Person B Christians should embrace and accept everyone. This can be done without doctrinal baggage. For example, even if gay couples cannot receive communion, there can still be someone who supports them in the Church. Jesus would be in favour of listening and supporting. To say this is not to say that doctrine isn't important.

Person J Her Non-Catholic friends ask her how she can be both gay and a Catholic. She used to say she could be, but in the light of the CDF declaration, she is asking whether she really can be both. She feels she may be propping up an institution which is part of her oppression. She had thought Pope Francis was about to support LGBT people but was distressed that he had released the document. Can she participate in Mass if it is part of a wider system of oppression?

Person A Most of us have similar problems. Person B is talking about a pastoral practice. With respect to dilemmas about (e.g.) divorce and remarriage, individual conscience is the final judge – the Church can never replace someone’s conscience. Perhaps the pastoral approach allows us to exercise flexibility.

Person D ‘Nurturing’ comes to mind. He knows Muslims who don’t think of themselves as ‘going to the Mosque’ – they are simply seeing their friends. There is no separation of the Mosque and the rest of their lives. If the Mosque is integral to the community, then young people will want to go there because they meet their friends there. Within Islam there is a sense of hospitality and nurturing that we don’t have.

Person A This is about communal attunement, a way of being. In Islam you are attuned because this is part of your world. We should agree on communal attunement as a central practice – a bonding closeness to the other, who may be very different. It is about really appreciating the other.

*Do any other practices come to mind?*

Person J ‘Bottom down’ leadership: the Church of the people can diverge from what the Pope says from the top. Each Church in each parish should listen to its members and Church values should not lag behind those of its congregations.

Person D Subsidiarity. Local Churches should be given the power to determine what they need. Adopt the Rosminian idea that the laity should have a voice in the appointment of bishops.

Person A In fact, this was the practice in the early Church and it is part of our tradition.

*What are the three values that should be at the centre of Church actions, relationships and worship as we emerge from Covid?*

Person J Faith, hope and love.

Person D Transparency and humility.

Person B Charity and hospitality. They inform relationships and actions and are about seeing God in others.

Person A Inclusivity, innovation and transformation.

*Present a picture of what the emerging Church might look like in terms of relationships and values. This can be answered by using an image.*

Person B The Church's condition can be illuminated by the parable of the Prodigal Son. The pre-Covid Church is like the elder son: 'We do things right!'. This image can be contrasted with the father who embraces the prodigal son, whatever his past. Maybe the post-Covid Church can be more like the father.

Person A But could things be the other way round? The father is the Church, and the son represents the lost people. What if people on the fringes are like the father, and the magisterium/admin of the Church is like the returning son?

Person D The Pope is the Pontifex, which means bridge builder. The Church could be the bridge builder between different interests within the Church, and with the secular world.

Person J The image of the post-Covid Church should be a cathedral built in the round, where all are equally around the altar and priests do not face the congregation. This would capture the optimism post Vatican II.

Person A        Also, in the Church we go round in a circle, including in the liturgical year. This can be a circle of growth.

*How would this renewed image of the Church contrast with the Church in the pre-Covid world?*

Person B        The new image is of a progressive Church, wanting to improve and build bridges, unlike the pre-Covid Church, which was isolated, doing its own thing and ticking boxes like Mass attendance and so on.

Person A        So we are talking about a dynamic and diverse Church.

Person D        The renewed Church would be less defensive and more confident in its capacity for change. It would have a renewed place in the wider society, be less attuned to Tradition and less stuck.

Person A        Talk of tradition is misleading, because tradition is already diverse.

Person J        Yes, we need a Church that keeps tradition but is also new and dynamic.

Person A        In other words, both faithful and progressive.

**Group B        Facilitator: Person N**

*What are the most important practices and values that should define the Church as we emerge from Covid?*

Person H        Listening is important, but the most important practice is accompaniment – walking with, empathizing and understanding. We need a different quality of listening. Catholic charities like CAFOD would accompany local charities. We accompany best by sharing stories and experiences.

- Person N            Listening can be strengthened by a listening campaign, holding one to one conversation and building a relational culture in the Church. We should also work with other agencies, but in a smaller way within ourselves.
- Person S            The house has been turned upside down. There is much trauma – people are astonished and shell-shocked at what Covid has wrought. Most people know someone who has died of Covid. People are desperate for reassurance and the presence of Christ among us.
- Person N                       Where does healing come from, if not from being able to grieve?
- Person H            Where is love and meaning, in the light of our recent experience?
- Person M            Nevertheless, how many of these terrible things have been caused by Covid itself, rather than the lock down?
- Person G            We have to accept that Covid will remain with us. But it has provided us with an opportunity to put aside the things that make people feel excluded. It is especially important to maintain accountability, transparency and acknowledgement.
- Person H            Much kindness that was dormant has come to the surface. How can we name and foster the good things like kindness and helpfulness that emerged from the crisis? Maybe we could commission someone in the community to promote community action. This needs imagination and the gifts for doing this do not lie only in the ordained ministry.
- Person N            Yes, there are great riches in non-ordained congregations. But we won't discover them unless we talk to the people who can offer them.
- Person H            We need to stress the need for accountability, transparency, compassion and mercy. We need to be ready to start again and forgive.
- Person N                       It would also be good to see joy again!
- Person G                       Communities can be ecumenical, to serve as fora for discussions of trauma and grief.

Person H It is also important to use the expertise that is out there.

Person S There is a problem of inertia. People do not always use time productively. We are a bit stunned at the moment.

Person H Some people will be reassured by the old ways once we return to normal. Others will be impatient for change.

Person G Grief is something we all share. We now have a reservoir of common experience. We are all in trauma and the Church can no longer simply offer a service – it needs properly to hear others' experiences.

*How should we paint a picture of what an emerging Church might look like? (q. 3 on document)*

Person H An image of a *round* table comes to mind. We need to ask how we would extend the table to people who wouldn't normally come to it?

Person N In terms of action, we must not just sit around a table but must also do outreach.

Person H We need to be eco-aware global citizens. We are all interconnected globally, in respect of trade, poverty et al. The action needed requires recognizing relationships within a global community sharing the same earth and living that witness in action.

*What would worship look like in the emerging Church?*

Person S People have suddenly been able to connect to other countries in online liturgies. We must accept this change. This brings a problem for hearing confessions, but we should also celebrate what is good in what has developed.

Person H Many lay people have taken on creative responsibilities for worship and looking at local needs, helping refugees and taking action on climate. Some Catholics do not turn to the Church, so perhaps leaflets could be delivered to them.

- Person N      People have been getting together, for example to start a rosary group. People are encouraged to pause and light a candle at 10 am every day. Still, many people still feel that prayer must be clergy-led.
- Person G      What will emerge is an unknown quantity. We don't know how much physical distancing there will be in Churches. When it comes to collective liturgy, the differences between the pre- and post-Covid periods will be more obvious than in any other area.
- Person H      We may become more tolerant of different kinds of music at funeral services, with less insistence on sacred music. The existing rules might deny someone their favourite music at their funeral.
- Person S                         Yes, it is unfortunate when people fall out over things like that.
- Person N      There has been a general expectation of having a Requiem Mass, but when this has not been possible people have been able to appreciate other forms of funeral.
- Person G      We now have a chance to be a humbler, more person-centred Church, with deeper questions to answer.

**Group C      Facilitator: Person F**

*The purpose of this session is to paint a picture of the Church, with respect to worship, relationships and action, drawing a contrast with the pre-Covid Church. What should our practices and values be, given where we have been?*

*What are our cornerstone practices?*

Person P      Welcoming people within the community and listening to their stories; accompaniment; outreach.

Person K      Acknowledging that we need to be for something; involvement; creativity; looking again at relationships.

Person R      Hospitality; listening; accompaniment; mutuality in relationships – there will always be a hierarchy in the Church but there is a need to treat each other as if no one is set apart. We need a word for this.

Person Q      This is a difficult question. Even if we change, we shall still slip back. We are still only scratching the surface of what needs to change. In spite of a decades long decline in numbers we are not aware enough of the problems. We need to ‘hit rock bottom’ before we can change. Our essence is the gospel message of good news, but we cannot preach it unless it is in our hearts. There is a danger of more cliques forming, and that would mean we would not be inclusive. But if we have the gospel in our hearts, we will be naturally inclusive.

Person P      Covid is obviously not the first crisis the Church has faced. How much did the Church change after the Spanish flu epidemic?

*What are the values that are essential for us as we emerge from Covid? What are the three values that should be at the centre of Church actions, relationships and worship as we emerge from Covid?*

Person R      The Church would be better if it were smaller. At present, it is not fit for purpose. It needs to be re-founded and it now has an opportunity for change. Is the Church no

longer in the *Imago Dei*? Restoring the Church is not about getting more people in but getting our house in order.

Person F At present there is a gap between the Gospel imaginary and the way the Church is. The ecclesial community is starting to collapse significantly because of this. Does his shows the Spirit acting?

Person P The parish system is collapsing.

Person R This goes to show that we need to re-imagine something fit for us now.

Person F To re-imagine something new, we must ask what the essential scaffolding of the Church is. Listening and attentiveness are Gospel practices but not Church practices at present. What values and goods underpin these practices? They must embrace inclusion, which is the heart of the gospel. Why are we so poor at it?

Person R If every Church put up a notice saying its most important value was inclusivity, passers-by would laugh.

Person Q A key value is mutuality.

Person R Atonement is also essential [to Christianity?] but is this really a practice? It connects with the ability to ask for forgiveness. It requires humility and a recognition that there is something to lament.

Person Q These things [atonement, lamenting, forgiveness, humility] are hard because we are keener to talk about rights than responsibility. They involve a long process that seeks truth. Some people will apologise for past wrongs, but others will not. As a result, virtuous people will be hurt even more. However, the virtues that are always needed are confidence (as opposed to arrogance) and the willingness to listen.

Person R Perhaps there should be a year of lament, like the year of mercy.

Person Q There needs to be reconciliation, after listening, self-examination and lamenting.

*Where is this talk of seeking lament coming from?*

Person Q      it comes from personal conversations about the pain caused. It requires someone saying sorry on behalf of the Church, because of what priests did. This would mean a lot to people, because twenty years ago one never saw parishes apologizing for clerical abuse. One didn't see statements of solidarity with victims, comparable to the BLM or Me Too movements. Lay people often need references from priests, so they say 'Thank you Father!' rather than say what they really think. Parishioners have given priests power and don't join together in solidarity because they are worried about it rebounding on themselves.

Person K      We cannot give what we have not already practised. The most important thing is to value one another, however great or small. Sadly, people make the Sign of the Peace during services but don't even look at others on the same pew. We need a greater connectedness in order to look at ourselves from within. We need to listen to everything people say, but we need to listen to ourselves to know what and how to give – if we don't know who we are, then we can't give. If we manage this, we shall have something to fall on when we come to crisis. We also need to welcome and *enable* others, because as Catholics we can be babies for a long time. But too many people don't want to do this. After Covid, we don't know how many people will return to normal Mass. If we take things apart till we reach rock bottom, there may be nothing of us left. We cannot be all that confident, because we might go down.

Person Q      Successful listening depends on the value of what is in your heart. If we don't take part in listening initiatives ourselves, there is a risk that people will do these things, but not for the best reasons. There is also a risk that others will do them for the best reasons but will be ill-informed or lacking experience and end up copying the same unhelpful structures as before. The same thing happens with business that put in governance mechanisms and end up making problems worse. We need an inward transformation of the heart. There are some excellent leaders, priests among them, who don't get much limelight. We need to find such leaders among the laity. If they love God, they will love the people they serve.

Person R      As regards relationships, they should be adult, collegial, horizontal and respectful. She takes part in a discussion group consisting of clergy and people who have been sexually abused within the Church. Although the victims are angry, they are still highly deferential to priests. The relationship between clergy and laity needs to be reformed. Even when the clergy are kenotic, they are still deferred to.

Person Q People in power expect deference. There is the same problem in business. You cannot be heard unless you are deferential. Those in power do change a bit but victims still don't get much support. They end up being even more wounded rather than healing because they are constantly self-giving. This is wrong, because our real concern should be with victims. Relationships need to be adjusted.

*What would readjusted relationships look like, if we were a good and better Church?*

Person Q Parish priests should be appointed for a short term.

Person R Priests and bishops should be elected, with selection panels as in the Church of England. It should be easier to address the problem if an appointment is not working out.

Person F He tried to divest himself of 'power or privilege', but there are barriers to this, even though the pandemic has reduced deference and made competence more important for participation and leadership. More shared leadership and decision-making are needed. Those involved in these things need to be paid, recognised and valued.

Person Q It is a real problem for a parish if it has a bad priest – the parish is depleted quickly. Cliques have too much power and there is too much focus on ordination as opposed to baptism. HR support is needed. Dioceses won't help resolve the issue of problematic priests. Bishops side with priests, even if they don't like them. All the catechetical coordinators are worn down and they are not supported by priests.

*What defines the Church pre-Covid and the Church post-Covid in the light of the opportunities and challenges? What might be the main differentiating features?*

Person Q We need the right kind of leaders, who should include women.

Person K The Church should challenge itself to be more creative and even revolutionary, to a certain degree. God is a Creator.

- Person R      The Church needs to reorientate the relation between ordained and non-ordained Catholics.
- Person P      Agreed, but he fears there will not be much change. The hierarchy will retrench and keep things as they were. Prophetic voices are needed.
- Person R      Much change is needed, regardless of what bishops think [paraphrase].
- Person F      We are all the people of God, not only bishops. There needs to be a coming together of as many voices as possible, and all should be welcome. That set-up is the expression of Church discerning things,
- Person R      At present, bishops are out of touch. They do not hear the anger about abuse, the experience of women, and the rejection of gay people.
- Person Q      The next Cardinal should be elected.

*In plenary, each facilitator fed the key points that arose in each group back to all participants*

*All participants regathered in plenary*

Person F then offered some concluding remarks. He reflected that together, we have engaged in communal discernment and looked at the barriers and the catalysts to our becoming a good and better Church. We have reimagined our values, practices and relationships and acknowledged the need to hear neglected voices.

Three critical emergent themes were: the need to be attentive to people on the periphery, the significance of discernment as a practice to enable and facilitate such attentive listening, and the importance of attending to the significance of trauma and the underlying injustices it unveiled.

Person F will publish and circulate a full report on the seminar series, the fruits of which will chart the direction and focus of the work and research for the CEE. It is anticipated that we may reconvene for a follow-up seminar in the autumn to reflect upon our discernment six months hence. The Centre is also planning an inaugural 'Pope Francis lecture' in early advent, alongside an interdisciplinary seminar that will engage with the findings of our seminar series from a variety of academic perspectives.

Person F concluded by recalling that it was almost a year since Pope Francis stood alone in St. Peter's Square and called us to discernment and conversion, for each crisis has a lesson to teach us. We have been on a journey upon which we are trying to listen attentively to the Spirit.

*Finally, each participant was invited to name one thing they are grateful for and one thing they are hopeful for.*

Person H      Grateful for openness and genuine sharing and hopeful for authentic change.

Person G      Grateful for the wisdom of the group and hopeful of a commitment to change.

Person N      Grateful for the wisdom shared. Hopeful for a people-centred Church.

- Person J Grateful that everyone has been lovely. Although dissatisfied with the Church, hopeful that it can change.
- Person B Grateful that people said what they thought. Hopeful for a more sensitive Church.
- Person A Grateful for the richness and inspiration offered, and grateful to all participants, especially Person F and Person G. Hopeful for the wise taking of the next ecclesiastical steps.
- Person D Grateful for the ways people expressed their ideas. Now has greater confidence that the Church can change.
- Person S Amazed at the riches offered. Hopeful for blessings abounding for the world and the Church.
- Person R Grateful for respectful companions on the journey. Hopeful that the seminars can be a model for change.
- Person Q Grateful for others' experiences. Hopeful for a creative female leadership and more openness to prophetic voices.
- Person K Grateful for the spirit of honesty and seeing the Church family in all its diversity. Hopeful that the Church will emerge with a positive flair, care and broader outlook.
- Person P Grateful for the chance to listen. Hopeful for a less judgmental and more inclusive Church.

Person A concluded the proceedings with gratitude. Covid had changed the Centre's plan, and this was thanks to Person F, who had been very attentive to everything. Everyone was looking forward to the development of the Centre. There was now an opportunity to think about what the discipline of ecclesial ethics is, and how it fits into moral theology.

*Piers Benn (listener/observer)*

April 2021.