Synodal Way – The Future Church

First phase feedback from The Sheringham and Cromer congregation

The process so far

A group of more than 10 from the parish have been involved in helping develop feedback for the Synodal Way, and we have based it around 4 key questions which have helped develop some flow to our thinking:

1. *What are the issues in our world and in God's creation, today and future, that present challenges for our Global Society and therefore the Church?*
2. *What do we believe should be / could be the church's role in these issues, how and where can it lead?*
3. *How capable is the church to contribute positively in that role now and in the future?*
4. *What needs to be changed and developed in our Church to enable it to be that positive vehicle of positive change?*

After our first meeting we now have feedback from those who attended and discussed and debated these questions, and using feedback from those who couldn't attend but were able to send written thoughts and ideas for which we are grateful. We have also shared this outside of the parish to our fellow churches, as well as those from different faiths and those of non faith, and their valued input is reflected here also.

Output

We want to start by saying we recognise and acknowledge the Church's immense achievements and strengths. Religion and the Church have had - and continue to have - a vital role in holding and promoting the fundamental social principles and values that bind us together. Sometimes the Church may fall out of step with society, but for millennia it has held those values in a way no other institution could and can for the future.

Here is the summary of our parish and 'friends' output:

1. What are the issues in our world and in God's creation, today and future, that present challenges for our Global Society and therefore the Church?

Here are some 'external' issues affecting the church

- *Manmade climate change and its impact on humanity and creation, the degradation of ecology, especially felt in the southern hemisphere where we recognise there is the greatest vulnerability for humanity and nature. This includes the damage through plastics and chemicals often produced knowingly for profit and inflicted on the poor via pollution and loss of habitat.*
- *Global inequality of education, health, wealth, freedoms, and personal safety, equal access to resources including water, food, and medicine like vaccines and therefore quality of life, which drives poverty and hunger and leads onto migration both economic and as refugees.*

- *The growth of a global culture of 'greed and selfishness' and a lack of true 'care' leading to wilful damage to our environment and people, putting profits before peace, creation, and freedom.*
- *A lack of mainstream 'alternatives' to our present unsustainable way of life being promoted by politicians, institutions, corporations and governments around the globe leading to a loss of hope in people and a modern depression in one's self.*

For the Church we feel the following 'internal' issues affect our way forward:

- *A perception of the Church as part of 'The Establishment' and therefore part of 'The Problem'. The ties it has now and in the past with damaging and unfit corporations and governments through investments and direct engagement is seen as evidence of this.*
- *It lacks the trust of peoples because of past issues and faults, and instead of responding quickly and openly to address these honestly, has been seen to 'turn inwards' to protect itself, making it even less approachable and less appealing or relevant to many being in danger of becoming a holy relic in itself.*
- *The Church's perceived relevance to the modern world and even how focused it is to the teachings of Jesus, is challenged by its stance and sometimes theology, on historic issues such as; equality for Woman, Sexual Minorities, Disabled People, Divorced People, Birth Control, seems to enforce its perceived obsolescence or just makes it unappealing to many.*
- *We do feel people are searching for God with recent experiences of Covid, famine, war, etc., but the key question is do they find it in our Church. Presently too often the answer is no, as we as the Church are not truly and consistently welcoming, generous, caring, and as a people do not live the Gospel fully.*
- *The Church is not perceived as 'humble', but proud and protective, often seeing and pronouncing itself as 'The Only Truth'. It has not and does not seek God in different ways, faiths, or practices, but finds them 'heretic', rather than looking for God in them all and learning from better practice. This can alienate the Church from those with different views and a different path, but the same Love of God.*

2. What do we believe should be / could be the church's role in these issues, how and where can it lead?

- *Firstly, we believe the Church can lead on many of the issues faced by the world and become relevant as an agent for positive change, by example and not just words. It needs to act to address its position on a number of issues and its relationship with institutions as described above before it can assume a leadership position.*
- *We believe the Global Church should become a 'Poor Church' reflecting better the Word of God and finding a new balance between the provision of the sacraments, and serving the community. This we see as the role of all the Church.*

- *There is a need for greater transparency and honesty, being open and approachable to all.*
- *The nature and culture of the Global Church needs to become 'enabling' and 'encouraging' with priests and bishops encouraging more local activity led by laity and promoting clarity on who does what and managing best practice in the church to a defined strategy of service and community as the early Church was.*
- *As an Example, we could explore how to free up some of our assets and use the monies to address key issues like Migration, Poverty, and Climate Change, thus showing leadership and reflecting the new way.*
- *The Church needs to become the 'voice in the wilderness' for the poor and disenfranchised but support that with actions globally and locally to be seen to act decisively and consistently in favour of the needy and poor.*
- *By offering all people the opportunity to contribute as well as worship the Church will increase its relevance to sections of society such as the young, those who seek, the rich wanting to give, those moved by the spirit, and those non-spiritual as place to 'do good' and be seen as a community of love supporting people on their life's journey toward God.*
- *The Church can lead in uniting other denominations and practices as 'One Church' in action, and recognise the value of different styles of worship encouraging co-working and co-worship therefore leading in showing Christian fellowship and activating the goodwill in others. Being a beacon of love as a Christian fellowship will see us as one church, just of many flavours.*
- *Celebrate God's creation by actively contributing to the wellbeing of nature and the environment, engaging the innate passion of people of all ages for their world.*
- *Think about where our Church members are – from babies, school children through all stages of life to the elderly in care or own homes – how do they feel they belong at all stages?*

3. How Capable is the Church to contribute positively in that role now and in the future?

- *We recognise the Church has huge assets and capabilities in the laity as well the clergy and other religious such as Monasteries which have increasing relevance in a society looking for new ways of living. However, these are generally not 'activated' or used. This is due we feel to the structure and nature of today's Church which is clergy dependent and not as yet 'enabling' allowing growth and mission via the laity.*
- *It is mostly male, white, and aging and needs to better reflect the global balance of humanity and creation.*
- *An audit of skills and capability will allow us to fully understand what is available to the church locally and globally. This may even include financial capability to support the right causes via the Church. This requires clarity on Mission and Strategy and in then first place choosing some projects which can deliver focus and establish credibility and learning.*

- *We need to recognise the spirit moves in many people and not just those invested into the Church i.e. the ordained who can on occasion become bottlenecks of energy.*
- *With a church denomination split on ideology and doctrine, we need to put these aside and find a focus which unites and gives purpose, whilst respecting viewpoints.*
- *The Church is perceived as 'rigid' and requires some attitudinal change to become the 'Enabling Church' it needs to be to ignite the people and their capability and focus and apply these in service to the needs of creation and our brothers and sisters wherever need is.*

4. What needs to be changed and developed in our Church to enable it to be that positive vehicle of positive change?

- *Empower the laity and manage and focus efforts in a global project of change, and the hierarchy and clergy recognise their role is enabling and guiding, not being restricting and dogmatic, finding the right balance between delivering sacraments which are supportive of our path to God and service which is our command from God. This includes giving more voice to all the minorities already mentioned and particularly, but not limited to, using the emotional intelligence of womankind.*
- *Become the 'Poor Church' and the true Church of the poor through organised action and service of these groups. This to involve freeing up assets both financial and capabilities to make impact in present global issues and needs*
- *Re-structure the roles and training of clergy in the Church to allow better 'activation' of laity, with more encouragement and vision, and allowing initiative in both worship and service.*
- *Become the humble welcoming church for all*
- *Look to other Churches / Religions for help, partnership, and prayer in our shared mission*
- *Reduce rigidity and dogma and focus on the issues that matter to a creation in crisis*
- *Increases coordination and communication to ensure the perception of the Church is improved via presenting the Good News and putting the true word of the Gospel into action.*
- *Stop being judgemental and become loving and welcoming through the whole Church as was Jesus as the perfect example.*
- *Be happy with our daily bread and at all levels of the Church throw off excess and embrace sustainable living as clergy and laity therefore becoming the examples we are meant to be in the world.*