

A POST-CLERICAL SYNODAL, CONTEMPLATIVE PARISH

Pope Francis often calls 'clericalism' a cancer affecting the Church. What does that mean and how would it look if clericalism had given way to a missionary, synodal and contemplative Church? How would such a parish community tackle problems if a local Church had begun the move to a healthier, more consensual, synodal, contemplatively model, dedicated to mission?

THE DREAM Slowly both priests and people had become aware that they were bound within a two-tier clericalist consciousness and system, by virtue of formation in synodal values with its reaffirmation of the primacy of the sacrament of baptism, rather than the pre-eminence of a sacrament of orders confined to a male, celibate minority. Nobody had been at fault; no blame was to be attached to any individual priest or parishioner. The system had worked well for its times but those times were long gone and new wine required new wine-skins.

A HYPOTHETICAL PROBLEM AND ITS SOLUTION. A good elderly parish priest realised he was facing burn-out and turned to the parish for support. The remodelled parish pastoral council, tutored by now in synodal and contemplative ways which had at their centre the method of 'listening and conversations in the Spirit' as the outcome of the practice of contemplative prayer – devoted their cycle of regular meetings to discerning the mind of the Spirit as to the ways forward. They used the 'conversations in the spirit' model but made efforts to anchor this in the regular practice, individually and communally, of forms of contemplative prayer.

It seemed practical to seek and then implement ways forward for the community under three headings:

1. WORSHIP / LITURGY. The pattern of Eucharistic and other liturgical celebrations would be maintained. The parish, priest and people, had begun to identify, support and nominate for the programmes of diocesan formation those with the baptismal charisms of presiding at the Eucharist, preaching, catechising, and all other ministries surrounding community sacramental worship. All practical arrangements, lists of personnel, timetables etc were drafted and submitted to the emerging Parish Forum (open to all) for approval and implementation.. A synodally-minded Bishop approved.

2. COMMUNITY BUILDING. A similar method was used to continue, within the developing synodal/contemplative model, the process of identifying, nurturing and mandating those with the required baptismal charisms to undertake and develop the building up of the 'loving community of the parish'. It built on existing organisations and groups designed to empower: young people, families, those 'growing old gracefully'; women's groups; those injured by previous systems of abuse; the marginalised, those with dementia and the sick and housebound generally. It linked with the SVP to bring practical help to those affected by energy and other forms of poverty, the 'Minnie Vinnies' in Schools, Catholic Care, Caritas etc. Parish lunch clubs, Craft group and all others continued as before.

3. MISSION. Awareness that all the baptised shared in the array of different charisms of a missionary Church had been underway for some time. It was recognised that conscientisation and implementation of mission defined as 'the loving service of all that exists' should continue and be linked into the work of J&P, CAFOD, Laudato Si groups, help for local food banks; debt aid; lobbying of politicians and action on J&P and Care for Creation issues. Missionary gifts differed but this diversity made up the Body of Christ in the community of a parish on the path to empowerment within a synodal and contemplative awareness and practice.

Clericalism was becoming a distant memory. The parish priest smiled a lot. As did the people, enthused by a faith which had acquired 'feet'. An example of a revitalised, restored and reinvigorated missionary Church was being born.