

## **Open Table Celebrations during Covid 19 - a 'new' way of being church!**

I joined "We are Church, Ireland" a lay organisation of committed Catholics who are passionate about a) the need for church reform in theology and practice and b) lay participation and consultation in decision-making.

During "lockdown" most of us have experienced Mass in the empty church with just the priest. WAC decided to celebrate in a more participatory manner. What a difference! This 'new' way of being church is so much more inclusive. Offertory now meant availing of the gifts and talents of those present, Eucharist was a more real sharing.

Often my thought went to "why hasn't the church been more creative at this time, why not take advantage of what can be done on zoom – more participation, even breakout rooms reflections?"

Is this a missed opportunity? I think so.

'We are Church' faced the situation. It became innovative, creative, and inclusive of all who joined.

It felt like being 'in' the Acts of the Apostles early church of the first centuries.

So, do I feel about this 'new way' of being church?

Definitely, a strong sense from lay people wanting to grow in their faith, looking to the support and solidarity of the group for spiritual holistic growth. And this was very much in evidence.

Sunday by Sunday numbers grew. Time was given for sharing on the Word of God; reflecting on the message; listening deeply to one another; sharing actions, however limited or small, that could be taken by way of living the gospel.

I found there was an immense joy that was infectious, emanating from the whole experience. I never felt the time passing and I came away energised.

I witnessed the tangible growth of many in faith and confidence to speak. Perhaps I'm not the only Brigidine with this experience of 'Open Table Celebrations'

Now that we're back to 'traditional' Mass in the church, the WAC group feel this is no longer life-giving for them. They wish to continue with open-table celebrations.

Might the church 'model' something similar? I sincerely hope so!

Here in Ireland, we are preparing for a National Synodal church within the next 5 years. Every church, every community, every diocese is mandated to hold meetings, voice ideas, proposals, and listen to what 'the Spirit is saying' to us at this time. Here is an excellent opportunity to be creative and inclusive. I shall certainly share on 'a new way of being church' - my Covid experience.

Perhaps there will be more Brigidines to join me!

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