



For a synodal Church
communion | participation | mission



DIOCESE OF SALFORD

Universal Synod Responses - A Summary

‘Give us, O Lord, a listening ear’

(taken from a submission received)

Our first word is a heartfelt ‘**Thank You**’ to all who engaged in the process of gathering diocesan responses to help Pope Francis and the Synod of Bishops in reflecting on the Church as Communion, Participation and Mission. Over 1500 individuals took part, and group submissions were received from families, organisations and parishes. Not all of these were Catholics who attend church regularly.

You can read the full response at www.dioceseofsalford.org.uk/faith/synod

What follows does not replace the main submission but is a summary of the main points expressed, to aid reflection and prayer.

The Hope

By praying for guidance that we may be open to the way Our Lord wants us to progress. By praying that Our Lord gives us a listening heart, open to the needs of others, and by bearing in mind that Our Lord may use others to speak to us.

The Pandemic and the response to it in parishes

Responses were fairly evenly divided between those who felt parishes had handled matters well and those who felt strongly otherwise. Much appreciation was given to parish priests and volunteers. A similar number of people expressed disappointment in how their parish had handled covid. Some felt that access to the sacraments was more important than following government rules. There was also concern about those digitally excluded.

What lessons have we learned from the pandemic?

What did/didn't we get right?

What do we need to start/stop/continue doing?

Personal Faith and lives of prayer

Respondents placed prayer at the heart of their lives of faith. One said, “teach us how to pray”; another said: “they were hanging on to their Catholicism, only their own prayer life kept them going”; several said more help is needed to deepen lives of prayer. Three individuals and one group response centred on a Church focused on mysticism, feelings of being loved by God give life meaning.

How might we provide and take up opportunities to really grow in a living exciting relationship with God?

Young People

This was a major concern from both the adults who responded and the young people themselves. The need to truly reach out to and listen to young people and to give them chance to lead was strongly stated. Some felt the Church needed to modernize and update some of its teaching and be more inclusive. Another common thread was the need for stronger links between Catholic schools and faith. Some expressed the need to support young people with prayer.

How can we listen to young people and give them the chance to lead?

Women

The marginalisation and under-appreciation of what women have to offer the Church was a common theme. Every response, from both men and women, strongly expressed that that the Church is not adequately listening to the voices of women. Many felt the Holy Spirit is leading us towards the ordination of women and married clergy. Some were unhappy with the male gender-biased language still present in liturgy. *“Women are generally ignored or pilloried when they speak out. This discrimination has to be ended by the Church as it cannot listen carefully when so many voices are ignored.”*

How can women play a greater part in the life of the Church at every level?

Listening/Communication/Collaboration (Synodality)

A majority of respondents felt that, although they were cared about and cared for, they were not listened to. This lack of listening, it was suggested, is found on all levels of Church life. The majority of people who filled out this survey were over 65, and almost all were over 40. This begs the question: *“if elderly, white parishioners don’t feel listened to, how must more marginalized groups feel?”* A continued sense of dialogue within the Church has to be promoted and encouraged. Discernment has to become an ongoing process of the Church if we are to remain attentive to the spontaneous Spirit of God and where it is leading us.

How can we become a Church in dialogue within our community and beyond it?

Hierarchy/Clergy/Church Structures

A popular topic was a sadness at the 'inaction' of the implementation of Vatican II and the unfolding of its treasures. Concern was also expressed about the 'new clericalism'. The work-life balance and support for the health of the clergy, mental and physical, needs addressing. Priests talked of being overwhelmed by administration and premises issues, rather than free to do what they were ordained to do. *"We are the Joy of the Gospel....? we need to radiate joy in our calling."* Many believed that laypeople should have more say and authority in the running of their parish and more say at Diocesan level. The point is frequently made that the acts of abuse and the Church authorities' responses to them (or lack of responses) have deeply scarred the Church and wounded its ability to minister.

How can we support our priests and minister alongside them, exercising out baptismal priesthood?

Marginalisation

Some people expressed a need for practical support from the Church. Many respondents felt the following are especially marginalised and their voices need to be heard: women; youth; LGBTQIA+, migrants and refugees; divorced people. Others expressed the need for us *"To look at better ways of hearing from the poor, the disaffected, the doubters..."* Some felt marginalised for being a Catholic living in this country and expressed that the Church is marginalised in a secular society.

How can we be the Church on the margins and with the marginalised?

Liturgy and Worship

Prayer and Mass are great sources of nourishment, wisdom, courage and formation. There was a sense from people attending Latin Mass, that they are being marginalised. A plea to simplify the Mass to appeal to the young people, lapsed Catholics and other denominations. There has to be a way of celebrating prayerful liturgies that offer a real sense of encountering the Real Presence of Jesus and inclusive of all. The Deaf Community asked seminarians and clergy and parishioners to learn basic sign language, understanding of the Deaf Culture and make good use of Media.

How can we celebrate the Liturgy of the Church in such a way that people experience a true encounter with the Risen Jesus?

What do I discern the Holy Spirit is asking of the Church?

"I believe that the Holy Spirit is calling us to greater maturity in the faith. We need to start again by moving the emphasis from child faith learning to adult faith learning. The whole renewal of the Church must begin with prayer. That is how we fall in love with God, and all else follows: catechesis, parish community building, service of the wider world etc. It is those in whom the fire of the Holy Spirit has been enkindled who will renew the face of the earth. Living in a synodal way - being open with one another, not being afraid of different opinions or perspectives, because the Holy Spirit is the glue between us."

Several respondents expressed a real concern that this process might lead to the Church changing or ‘watering-down’ some of its teachings.

How do we commit to listening to the voice of the Spirit in the Scriptures, the Tradition of the Church, in prayer and at work in our lives and the lives of others?

Faith In Action

Being active witnesses within our local communities is important to many. Responding to Catholic Social Teaching was frequently raised as a driver for connecting faith with parishes reaching out to the local community. Some saw charitable works as secondary to the spiritual and sacramental mission of the Church; others wanted to make stronger the link between faith and action at parish level. *“There is scope for many of our parishes to become more of a voice and focal point for social action and justice in their locality.”* There was little mention of climate change and the environment, with split opinions from those who did mention it, about whether or not the Church should make a stand.

How can we take practical steps to express our faith in social action and in care for creation?

Working with other denominations.

The vast majority of people agreed that it was good to reach out to other faiths. Getting involved does not water down who we are. Regret also expressed that Catholic enthusiasm for ecumenical activity had dipped and opportunities lost. Some asked for greater generosity in allowing other Christian denominations to receive Communion at Mass.

How can we give practical expression to the need to work with Christians of other traditions and people of other faiths for the Common Good?

What’s Next

Those responding to the Synod suggested many different, and sometimes polarized, ways the Church should move forward. The responses from our Diocese will join those from the other Dioceses in England and Wales, Europe and the rest of the World. These will be discerned by the Synod of Bishops who will gather in Rome in 2023. We pray the Holy Spirit will be at the centre of this discernment and will show a clear way forward for the Church. Pope Francis is clear that ‘Synodality is what God expects of the Church in the third millennium’. A Diocesan Synod will allow us to listen more deeply to more people over a longer period of time as together we discern what God is asking of His Church in our Diocese.

‘Stay with us Lord on our Journey’



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