

Archdiocese of Birmingham involvement in The Synod 2022-23

THE FEEDBACK SHEET: ST. PETER'S. EYNHAM. OXFORDSHIRE

1. WALKING TOGETHER

***"The Holy Spirit spoke to me and said
I was not alone!"***

***"We are the people who have stayed in the
church, but I'm struck now by how out of
touch the hierarchy of the church is!"***

- St Peter's Eynsham is a small parish, with perhaps 100-120 really active parishioners. An introductory meeting was held by our Parish Priest to present the Synod objectives, process and timescale. This then introduced a general discussion of both the Synod process, and some issues pertinent to future Synod discussion and feedback.
- Following the introductory meeting, four Synodal Pathway groups were formed with appointed convenors to address the areas of Formation, Liturgy & Worship, Social Outreach and Evangelisation. The group meetings were publicised, and members of the parish were invited to participate or to submit a written response into the process.
- Each of the pathway groups met two or three times before collating the points raised by their group. This feedback has then been collated and summarised in this sheet.
- Altogether 9 group meetings were held, with attendances of between 6 and 26 members, with a handful of email responses also being received. Some attendees also shared discussions they had had with friends and family, or with people who no longer attend Mass, especially younger people, or with members of other Christian denominations. Therefore, as far as we were able, the views of those outside the regular congregation were taken into account.
- The suggested questions in the Synodal Journey Handbook were a starting point for the group convenors, but the questions and discussions were not limited to these. Details of the specific questions considered, and the related feedback, can be found in the summaries produced for each of the Synodal Pathway groups, which are attached as Annex to this overall feedback sheet.
- The report and Annexes also include quotes from the discussions to communicate the depth of feelings.

2. PARTICIPATION

Everyone who participated spoke openly about their hopes, concerns and feelings.

“The Church needs to bottle what it is that makes our Parish work!”

- Once it became clear that ***everyone’s voice mattered***, and that our mission was to encounter, listen and discern, the process really took on its own life.
- Thoughts and feelings were shared in ***an environment of openness***, and there was a perceptible reverence for some of the personal experiences being shared – often for the first time.
- Many of us had the experience of ***discovering that other members*** of the parish shared feelings, concerns, criticisms and hopes that we had thought were ours alone.
- The groups were ***open, honest, and often emotional and moving***. When the parish priest, who was supportive throughout, joined us part-way through the process, this open atmosphere did not change but was in fact reinforced.
- The process revealed ***a broad spectrum of views***, and there were some recurring themes between the groups, reflecting the inter-dependent nature of the subject matter being discussed.
- The discussion of ideas in the pathway groups also ***provoked deeper thought*** and generally led to those participating ***feeling that they had progressed personally*** on their faith journey.
- ***Participation is a two-way conversation***. Until now the Synodal process has been one-way. We therefore look forward to the publication of the final document but feel the process of Walking Together should not close at this stage and look forward to the Bishop reaching out to continue the process of engagement with the laity, as requested by the Holy Father.

3. ENRICHMENT

This Synodal sharing illuminated the desire for people to discuss their Faith, to be listened to and to be validated. There was a real sense of hope that the Pope and Bishops genuinely want to hear us and address our concerns.

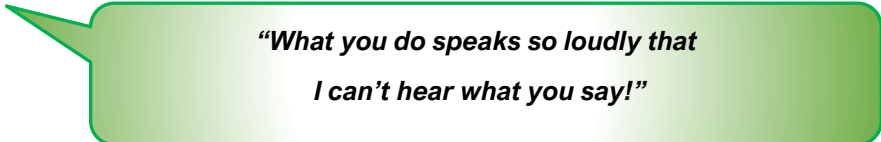
“The Synod must be the start of a new era of listening that must be embedded in the DNA of the Church!”

- It was a ***humbling, enlightening and enriching*** experience. It felt as if life was being breathed back into the church, guided by the Holy Spirit, who gave people the courage to be honest and risk becoming vulnerable.
- It gave us the ***opportunity to talk about our faith***. It brought members of the parish, convenors and our Parish Priest closer together as a faith community, identifying our commonalities and accepting our differences.
- We were ***able to talk openly and without judgement about our pain***, worries and concerns for the church, and also express our hopes and dreams for her.
- It made us aware of the ***power and healing there is in having a voice*** and being listened to.
- It was a surprise how ***many people chose to be involved*** and the high level of enthusiasm for the discussion groups – many attending sessions for multiple groups.
- The ***biggest surprise*** was how energised and hopeful this process has made us. It has begun a movement of lay renewal in our parish of which we hope this is only the beginning.
- The benefit of the Synodal process will ***be enriched by a wider engagement with other denominations*** – as illustrated by one participant - *“It was an Anglican woman priest who brought me back to the Church.”*

4. RESPONSES

The Synodal process has resulted in three distinct stages of engagement:

- Initial opportunity to **share deep feelings** about why the Church needs to be open to change – including feelings of anger, rejection, despair and disenchantment. As a corollary there were **deep concerns** that the voices of the laity, especially women, and parish priests are just not being heard;
- Then, a shift to **sharing of faith** in Christ, trust in the Pope's genuine desire to hear us and a love of our Church, its people and charism; and
- Finally, and coming together to **express our deep worry** that if we are not heard the Church will not thrive and the hurt and injustices will continue and grow until it reaches a breaking point.



***“What you do speaks so loudly that
I can’t hear what you say!”***

These range of responses have been combined and output from all of the discussions are grouped below under six main headings:

1. Church Traditions
2. Communication
3. Integrity
4. Inclusiveness
5. Enrichment
6. Engagement

1. Church Traditions

Church Traditions can make the practice of our Faith difficult for many.

"We do not want the 'rule book' thrown out but the Church has to change – it has in the past and can do so again!"

"I was taught that missing Mass was a mortal sin – the Church doesn't seem to have moved on from this!"

- The Catholic church has a rich history and tradition, but this has in some cases **led to people being excluded**, marginalised and burdened with guilt.
- **Many have suffered greatly** especially those who have felt excluded by its negative attitudes to their life situations and their self-worth – especially divorced, separated people and the LGBTQ+.
- For centuries women have lived under **a yoke of paternalism** and have been positioned in secondary and supportive roles. The **call for women's ministry at all levels of the church**, including the priesthood, was a regularly recurring theme.
- The Catholic Church has a tradition of rules and obligations. This may yield important discipline but **not necessarily a vibrant faith**.
- Although the doctrines of the Church are axioms that guide us, the interpretation of these **axioms of the Church need to be refreshed** (not necessarily changed) and need to be seen to be relevant to today's world **and not bogged down in legalistic spirituality**.
- Catholics have a **reputation for separateness** and are often reluctant to discuss their faith.
- The **liturgy is not easy for non-Catholics** to understand/connect with, and in places its wording needs to be more positive and uplifting.
- The Church should be **built on the pillars of love, compassion, forgiveness and justice** - and no longer on the fear of sin and judgement.
- The Church needs to take more account of the generational shifts in life expectancy, which have changed the context for relationships.

2. Communication

Communication – the language of the hierarchy does not relate to the way people think and talk about their religion, and is opaque to seekers, enquirers and indeed Catholic returners - if the Pope and Hierarchy '*will the ends*' they must '*will the means*'.

"Give us the tools and we will do the job!"

- The hierarchy must learn to speak in **accessible and meaningful language**.
- **Better digital & social media** tools needed to facilitate communication and community.
- The **women, laity and parish priests must be part of the governance** of the church. We need this Synodal engagement to continue and become the norm.
- Laity and Priests need **training for ministry in a Synodal Church**

3. Integrity

Integrity – if the church does not reform it will not thrive.

"As a Christian I can't stand back & not speak out on issues of morality. Speaking the truth is evangelism!"

"We are all tainted by the scandal of clerical abuse!"

"A full, frank and unequivocal public apology is still needed."

- The church should **reflect God's glory and beauty, renewing our broken world**.
- The church and its members should **engage with contemporary society**, speaking out for truth and justice
- The church needs to **develop its ethics and theology in relation to a changing world** – in terms of the scientific, intellectual and cultural context around it.
- We all need to be **more confident and dynamic**, with a willingness to change and develop as the Holy Spirit leads us.

4. Inclusiveness

Inclusiveness – Jesus wanted his apostles and disciples to be fishers of all men and all women, and not just those who followed the rules.

“If Jesus came today, He would be thrown out of the ‘synagogue’ & excluded from His own Church!”

- **Endemic clericalism and unquestioning deference are systemic barriers** to the Pope’s ambitions to embrace all.
- The church should **celebrate diversity** in its worship, spirituality and outreach.
- The church should **embrace everybody regardless** of gender, race or sexual orientation.
- **How can an inclusive church continue without women priests and married priests?**
- The **language of the liturgy should be updated** to be more inclusive.

5. Enrichment

Enrichment - making more opportunities for sharing experience, encouraging each other, and discussing our faith in the real world, for example by:

“Covid has changed the way we think about how we practice our religion and attend Mass!”

- Nurturing a vibrant faith in members of the church will **set the example that attracts** others through living our daily lives in a faithful, dynamic and relevant way.
- **Promoting parish spiritual experiences**, to invigorate the faith of our congregations e.g. retreats, meditation/reflection opportunities.
- **Deepening the faith of our Parishes** through opportunities to engage with the scriptures: bible study, contribution to diversity in music, time for reflection/meditation.
- **Drawing on experiences** of other Dioceses where inter-parish sharing has drawn communities together e.g as in the Diocese of Northampton.

5. Enrichment (continued)

"The Church Liturgy book for children has not been updated since 1995!"

- **Nurturing our young people** in the faith through improved resources for Children's Liturgy and youth involvement.
- **Supporting young parents and families** in their role as the primary teachers of the faith with access to online resources, including children's liturgy that can be shared at home, these could include material used in our Catholic schools.

6. Engagement

Engagement – the language of the hierarchy does not relate to the way people think and talk about their religion, whilst it has been reported that there is a low level of engagement in the Synodal process.

"The work of God is out there, not locked in churches on Sundays!"

"We need change. Without change the Catholic Church in this country will die. The situation is critical!"

- Catholics need help to become **more confident and willing to talk to others** about their faith and its significance to them. We must be willing to listen to people, whatever their views.
- **Provide a Christian witness in our communities** by contributing to local information platforms, expressing a Christian voice on issues concerning the future of the local community, and increasing awareness of local environmental issues by becoming actively involved.
- **Work ecumenically wherever possible** to provide pastoral support to our communities and provide a united witness to the love of Christ – it should not be just an add-on but an essential of parish life.
- There was concern expressed that there is only limited participation in the synodal process in the UK. If these fears are proven correct it would be an alarm bell about the state of the Church and the disengagement of the laity.

7. DREAMS

"I feel I have been coming to the wrong Church for many years!"

"The status of women in the Church is a throbbing global issue, & is at a point where it can be ignored no longer!"

"The clergy yearn for openness!"

"Be Spirit-filled, be bold, be Catholic!"

Our dream is :

- A church that is ***led by the Holy Spirit***, reflecting God's glory through its vibrant, confident and dynamic ministry.
- A church that recognises and ***nurtures the God given potential of everybody***, encouraging them as they live out God's purpose for their lives.
- A church that ***welcomes all to participate*** regardless of gender, race, social standing, marital status or sexual orientation.
- A church where the current ***Synodal process is sustained*** and enhanced, becoming embedded in the life of the Church, and there is continued dialogue and comprehensive lay engagement.
- A church that has ***compassion for all and speaks out for truth and justice*** through both its words and its example, engaging with the cultural, political and intellectual developments of today's world.

Annex to Feedback Form from St Peter's, Eynsham

Four Synodal Pathway groups were formed with appointed convenors to address the following areas:

1. Formation
2. Liturgy & Worship
3. Social Outreach; and
4. Evangelisation.

The group meetings were publicised, and members of the parish were invited to participate or to submit a written response into the process.

Each of the pathway groups met two or three times before collating the points raised by their group. This feedback has been collated in official Feedback Form supplied by the Archdiocese.

This Annex summarises the feedback from each of the Synodal Groups. It is hoped that this will assist the Archbishop and his team who are collating the responses, to understand better the context of the feedback and the depth of discussions that took place.

These notes include a range of quotes (*in blue italics*) of contributions made in the groups to give a sense of the depth of feelings that were expressed.

1. NOTES FROM FORMATION GROUP MEETINGS

The meetings were held as part of the Synodal Process in St Peter's Parish, Eynsham in the Archdiocese of Birmingham throughout the months of January and February 2022 with 26 attendees and 51 attendances.

Summary of Context and Conclusions

- We need change. Without change the Catholic Church in this country will die. The situation is critical.
- The hierarchy need to engage with this critical situation.
- We, the laity with our parish priests want and need to play an active no longer a passive role in the church and its governance.
- We want and need the synodal engagement to continue and become the norm.

OUR DREAM: WE HAVE A VISION OF AN INCLUSIVE CHURCH

- Which is built on the foundation of love, and no longer on the fear of sin
- which has women priests; essential for an inclusive church and a matter of human rights
- which has married priests
- in which the laity are fully part of the governance of the church
- in which women are included at all levels and able to make a full contribution to the female character of the Church
- in which sexual orientation is no barrier to full participation
- which truly believes in the teaching of Jesus
- which is made up of people meeting regularly for worship, prayer and every kind of formation in their parish and community
- which locates itself in contemporary society
- which learns from the wisdom of the Holy Spirit at work in the world
- which reaches out to 'others'
- which celebrates diversity in worship, spirituality and outreach
- which holds a mirror to itself
- which has a will to change and develop
- which speaks truth in accessible and meaningful language
- which changes the world
- which is united across denominational boundaries
- which is a place of glory and beauty
- which is confident and dynamic
- which treasures its priests free from clericalism, authoritarianism and deference
- in which parish priests can share their charisms throughout the locality
- which selects and trains its priests for ministry in a synodal Church
- which develops its ethics and theology in relation to the developing scientific, intellectual and cultural context in which the church is set.

2. NOTES FROM LITURGY & WORSHIP GROUP MEETINGS

A. Main Themes Identified

- * Communication and Consultation at all levels in the Church
- * Inclusivity of language and participation in the Liturgy
- * Resources for the Children's Liturgy
- * Engaging with the scriptures through varied activities
- * Diversity of worship events in addition to the Mass
- * Role of the laity

B. Liturgy and Worship Group Overview

There is a very strong need for the female 51% of the population to be fully represented in the language of the Mass and other devotions.

The liturgy should be less bland, with a mixture of music styles, and not too much Latin which can exclude people especially in the younger age group.

Discussion about the change of translation for the Lectionary from the current New Jerusalem version to the English Standard Version which was decided by the Bishops with little or no communication or consultation. Why? Pope Francis is urging us to help the poor and needy, and tackle issues such as clerical child abuse, and instead the Bishops feel the need for scholarly precision, which will impose a financial burden on parishes paying for new Lectionaries. There will always be mixed feelings about the scriptures. People need to feel involved in how and why these changes have been made.

A need for positive wording in the liturgy and uplifting sermons, not psychological turn-offs like "not worthy", "confess your sins". In addition, the inability to attend Sunday Mass being considered a grave sin as opposed to personal responsibility for one's Catholic faith.

The role of the laity is crucial to the future of the Church. More Eucharistic ministers; the serious need for Deacons – male and female – to assist priests in their duties; and, more controversially, to consider a future Catholic Church with married clergy and women priests.

C. Action points

- Communication and Consultation at all levels of the Church - the Diocese, the clergy and the laity – to encourage a feeling of involvement.
- Language of the liturgy to reflect the balance of women and men in the population.
- More positive wording in the Liturgy and during Worship – uplifting messages in prayers and sermons. We are not "sinners" - we are human beings, with imperfections and flaws, but we have a love of God which should be encouraged and supported.
- Establish opportunities for engaging with the scriptures: bible study, contribution to diversity in music, time for reflection/meditation. All these helps to better prepare us for worship, especially at Mass by giving context to the readings.
- Request that resources for the Children's Liturgy are improved.
- Establish parish spiritual experiences, e.g. retreats, meditation/reflection opportunities.
- Involve the laity in worship at all levels. This Synodal Pathway experience is the perfect opportunity now for the laity to speak out and be heard.
- Encourage people to be confident and willing to talk to others outside the Church about their Catholic faith and what it means to them to be a Catholic. But we must be willing to listen to people, whatever their views.

3. NOTES FROM SOCIAL OUTREACH GROUP MEETINGS

A. Overarching Messages

- Listen to us
- Include us
- Involve us
- Empower us

B. The Challenges for the Church

Paternalism is a system that has become institutionalised into our Catholic traditions. Over the centuries it has been based on the traditional pillars of moral growth; sin, shame, guilt and punishment. As a result, there is an enormous amount of pain in our church today and it is here that Christ will be found, not in the struggle to maintain an unjust system. Pope Francis himself describes it as a system that strips individuals of their agency.

“We need to have a voice we need to be listened to”

“The laity should be involved at every level of the church’s governance”

“Some of our rules and regulations do little to remove the burdens that many people have to bear, in many cases they appear to add to them”

“..... the Catholic Church needs to demonstrate clearly and openly that members of the LGBTQ+ community are welcome at church. The Jesuits have started a series of meetings to reach out to the LGBTQ+ community. There must be other initiatives too but if they are not known about and publicised the appearance will be that the Church still ostracises the LGBT community “

Many Catholics have suffered greatly especially those who have felt excluded by its negative attitudes to their life situations.

“ I support the church in many ways, but I am excluded. So, under current conditions I am destined to remain an outsider even though I have served ... for the past ten years. It leaves me saddened to think that the only way to join the church is by.... living a lie.”

Jesus’s choice of crucifixion rather than domination must always guide the church’s history.

For centuries women have lived under this yoke of paternalism and have been positioned in secondary and supportive roles. Their ideas and contributions assimilated by the hierarchy in a form of tokenism or simply disregarded. This is wrong.

“The status of women in the church is a throbbing global issue, at the point where we can’t ignore it any longer. The Curia run the Vatican. If you reflect on that its very worrying. A recent extensive study has shown how this body has responsibility for running the institution, meaning that a Pope has little opportunity to effect change. The Curia resists change by appointing priests who identify with its opinions.”

The modern age has allowed us to question and challenge unjust practices, driven by the desire for equality, acceptance of the dignity of all human beings and the protection of the vulnerable. As Jesus did.

“How can you invite young people, especially women, to join the church when you know they will not have an effective voice in its governance. It’s not what young people want in this day and age. They see it as oppressive. They need to be empowered not disempowered.”

If the Church is to thrive, she must make herself available in the service of growth and development built on the moral pillars of love, compassion forgiveness and justice. These must be her guiding principles and the ones upon which positive attitudes are developed. She must inculcate them into her system. She must empower us. She must nurture our growth in our relationship with God. She must become Christ like, placing love at the centre and core of her existence with the rules and regulations acting only as guidelines and support. She must lead by example.

C. Social Outreach Parish Opportunities Post Covid

- By renewal of existing outreach for example:
 - Welcome rota
 - Sunday after Mass coffee
 - Social events
 - Bible study
 - Parish Directory
 - Eucharistic ministry
- By establishing:
 - Parish Council
 - Pastoral support team
 - (Supporting the elderly and housebound and those in need and maintaining personal contact with non-practicing members. Identifying and welcoming new members.)
 - Youth Ministry team (from toddler to teenager)
 - A user friendly and effective communication network to support all aspects of parish life.
 - A more user friendly and effective website.
 - A multi-cultural awareness of parishioner and local community needs.

D. Local Community Social Outreach Opportunities

- To develop a closer and more supportive relationship with the other Eynsham Churches
- To identify and support other social outreach ventures in Eynsham and the surrounding areas
- To be pro-active in contributing to local information platforms.
- To increase awareness and become actively involved in local environmental issues
- To have an active Christian voice on issues concerning the future of the local community.

4. NOTES FROM EVANGELISM GROUP MEETINGS

Encouraging others to know God's love for them

Key themes from the sessions

- Evangelism is showing God's love to people in our daily lives
- It is making a positive difference not just 'getting' others into church
- We attract people to our faith by making our faith attractive and relevant
- The Catholic Church has a history of rules and obligations. This may yield important discipline but not necessarily a vibrant faith.
"I was taught by nuns and being told that missing mass was a mortal sin – the church doesn't seem to have moved on from this"
- People's perception of the church can be a barrier
- Liturgy is not easy to understand/connect with as a newcomer, although familiar words/prayers can be helpful to established Catholics

Communicating our Message

- If we look at the life of Jesus, His primary message was one of love
"We need to present the reality of the Holy Spirit and presence of Christ with us, so people can experience God's love for them – in whatever form that may take"
- The church should speak out for truth and justice.
"What you might say to somebody depends on the context - it might be talking of Jesus, God, church, social justice or being silent".
"Evangelism can be being prepared to speak the truth in any situation we are in. As a Christian I can't stand back & not speak out on issues of morality. This is another element to evangelism - Speaking the truth is evangelism".
- It is hard to communicate God's love to people if you are not engaging with them. How do we engage more with our communities?

Vision for Evangelism

- Get involved with initiatives that already exist. Catholics have a reputation for separateness which we need to dispel.
 - How can we participate more in ecumenical activities?
 - How can we participate more in community activities?
- We need to consider what activities should be organised by the church and what should be supported and promoted by members of the church?
- How do we provide a Christian witness in our communities?
 - Witness events such as Good Friday walk of witness?
 - Discussions / Christian talks etc.?
 - Local news sheets etc.
- The church should be a place where we share experiences and outreach opportunities, as well as encouraging each other.

Reflections on Evangelism

- Evangelism is a word that tends to promote a negative reaction in most Catholics, who often feel uncomfortable about discussing their faith with others.
- Both inside and outside the Catholic Church there is an awareness that obligation has played a part in supporting mass attendance in the past, but this is largely rejected by current culture - as evidenced by the difficulty of keeping young people engaged in the church.
- The UK culture has a decreasing awareness of Christ and the Christian message and as a church we need to be aware of this. There is a strong case for Christian denominations to work together as much as possible to raise awareness of the gospel message through acts of witness, speaking out on social justice and social action.
- The most effective evangelism often takes place at the individual level when God's love is experienced by people. This can take many forms as God's love meets people's needs whatever their present situation. As Christians, we need to develop our sensitivity to people's needs and our awareness of how God wishes to use us in any situation. We are all on a journey, and evangelism is not about transporting others to a destination by imposing our opinions on them. Rather it is encouraging those around us to discover their own unique value as children of God.