

What was the process you used to help discern your responses to the Synod questions?

Our Synod process was lay led by Mr Charles Whitehead. In early January 2022 Canon John Udris came to our parish to outline the synod process to our team of listeners. Two priests and twelve lay people attended.

We then held three sessions on Saturday mornings after Mass, each lasting 90 mins. These were attended and enjoyed by 30-35 people each week.

Parish groups and families were also encouraged to discuss the questions. We also created our own "Junior Synod questions" which were discussed during Children's Liturgy sessions and with one of our First Communion groups.

We received a total of 44 submissions:-

- 10 - Saturday groups – approximately 30-35 people in total
- 7 online submissions to the Diocese and shared with the parish
- 18 families/individuals or parish groups, this includes 5 First Holy Communion Families.
- 9 Junior Synod submissions

Throughout the process the most frequently recurring themes were:-

- The importance of evangelisation and the need to become missionary disciples.
- Appreciation for the richness of our liturgies and sacraments
- The importance of belonging to a caring community
- A wish to be more ecumenical, working together with other Christians,
- A need for more support for our young people
- That married people may be ordained as priests.
- Recognition for the role of women in the church and ordination as deacons/priests
- A desire to more inclusive regardless of age, race, sexual orientation, or marital status
- The poor handling of the abuse situation by the Catholic Church

Question 1 - What does it mean to you to be Catholic?

- a. Our Catholic Faith gives us a strong identity and a good moral compass to guide us through life. People appreciate the well-established traditions of the Catholic Church, its liturgies, the sacraments its prayers and devotions. There was a real sense of gratitude for the many sacrifices that had been made, particularly by the English and Welsh Martyrs to keep the Catholic faith alive during times of persecution.

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- b. There was a strong sense of belonging and the importance of being a member of a loving, caring and supportive community.
- c. People appreciated the universality of the Catholic Faith. The Catholic Church is one; it extends beyond national boundaries and the presence of God can be felt in His Church.
"There is something beautiful about a Catholic Church where you walk into Mass in a different country, a different language but you still know the Mass, you celebrate with others as one with God. I also really love when you walk into an empty church, light a candle for the departed and sit in silence and feel the presence of God with you."
- d. Many people saw themselves as Christians who follow the Catholic traditions."
- e. Since Vatican II there is greater participation in the Church.

Question 2 - What are some of your Experiences of the Church doing something well?

- a. Our parish is welcoming. There is a strong sense of belonging to a good community which cares for its people.
- b. The liturgies of the Catholic Church are rich in symbolism and when celebrated well they are beautiful. The sacraments are life-giving moments which feed us, give us hope and we receive the mercy and forgiveness of God. People appreciate that receiving the sacraments marks significant stages in our lives.. A number of people commented on the very positive experiences they had had when attending the funerals of family members or Baptisms. Priests had been welcoming and inclusive of everyone and had shown compassion. Families and their visitors had found comfort and peace in the funeral liturgies.
- c. Catholic education is important to us.
- d. Catechetical formation is well run and fruitful preparing families for Marriage, Baptism, First Holy Communion and Confirmation.
- e. Our parish is good at reaching out to its neighbours, to those on the margins through organisations such as St Vincent de Paul Society, the London and Slough Run for the homeless. The furniture market provides many families with essential furniture at reasonable cost whilst simultaneously raising funds for our parish and local charities.
- f. The missionary work of the Catholic Church in the world is excellent. The Catholic Church also responds quickly and generously to assist wherever disasters occur in other countries.
- g. *"Our church provides for families. It inspires the children and introduces them to the church in a kind, relatable way"*
- h. The anulment system is rejuvenating.
- i. *"Under the current strong leadership of Our Holy Father Pope Francis, we are seeing some contrition for some of our past failings, more transparency and openness in the ways the Church teaches and practices the Catholic faith in accordance to God's Laws, first and foremost, and not by following Man's Laws to the detriment of our beliefs. The introduction of "Virtus" and this opportunity for the lay people in the Church to voice their opinion and address their concerns openly to our clerics, religious leaders and our Christian community."*

Junior Synod Responses - What do you like about Church?

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- a. I enjoy learning new things
- b. Many of our children said they enjoyed the choir and singing hymns. They also like saying prayers and enjoy lighting candles after Mass-- *"I like that we pray to God and light candles for the ones we have lost"*
- c. There is a lot of things to take part in.
- d. I like the parish community which is welcoming and kind.
- e. We all enjoy the Children's Liturgy.
- f. I enjoy being together at coffee after Mass.
- g. I like it when our priests visit the school.
- h. The people who work here and who volunteer are very kind.

Question 3 - What are some of your experiences of when things have not gone so well?

- a. The Catholic Church is too hierarchical and male-dominated..
- b. The role of women in the church is not recognised. They are not allowed to fulfill their full potential or to be ordained as deacons or priests.
- c. The Church is not good at retaining its members following sacramental preparation.
- d. The Catholic Church is not good at owning up to its mistakes. In particular there was grave concern over the way the abuse of minors had been handled.

"The Church had sought to save its own reputation and had failed."
- e. The Catholic Church is afraid to confront the controversial issues of the persecution of Christians, co-habiting, contraception, conversion therapy, LGBT+, homosexuality, abortion and euthanasia. The Church appears to fear criticism.
- f. *"The Human failings of parishioners and clergy - including bishops are:-*
 - i. *Too open to people exploiting others.*
 - ii. *Shying away from speaking outside the flock.*
 - iii. *Not being proactive in speaking out on political issues.*
 - iv. *Just giving money to resolve a problem.*
 - v. *Not being present at ecumenical celebrations.*
 - vi. *Not promoting the Church sufficiently.*
 - vii. *Not being inclusive as Jesus would want us to be.*
 - viii. *Fails to be relevant to the young, minorities and women*

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- ix. *Closed to those who don't tow the line, Jesus wants us to act with love which is more important than being brain washed.*"
- g. Some priests do not have empathy with children and young people.
 - h. Those who are divorced and remarried are unable to receive the Eucharist.
 - i. The way bishops are elected should involve wider consultation, including the laity, and where possible bishops should be elected from within a diocese.
 - j. The current training, support and development of priests is not fulfilling the needs of the Church.
 - k. We are Christian first and Catholic second.
 - l. Authorities within the Church are persecuting the Tridentine Rite of the Latin Mass and those who adhere to it.
 - m. Involvement of senior members of the Church in worship of a pagan idol - the Pachamama in the gardens of the Vatican in the presence of the Holy Father.
 - n. During the Covid19 Pandemic the Catholic Church closed down and failed to administer the Sacraments which are at the heart of its mission on earth. This was a grave error of judgment for which there should be repentance. It is now proving very difficult to regather our community as the Body of Christ.
 - o. The role of the Catholic Church does not include the promotion of a particular scientific view regarding anthropological climate change. In so doing it supports the political agendas associated with it (United Nations Agendas 2021, 2030 and 2050). Taking such a role is neither scriptural nor doctrinal and is in conflict with Our Lord's teaching that the world will pass away.

Junior Synod Responses - What don't you like about Church?

- a. Waking up early to go to Church
- b. That we have to stand and sit down again.
- c. The Church could do more to lecture Christian groups that use God's Word to spread hate and hurt throughout the world.
- d. That the Church can be judgmental.
- e. I don't like wine as the Blood of Christ.
- f. The benches are hard and uncomfortable.
- g. There is nothing I don't like.

Question 4 - What is your dream for the Church?

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- a. That we are more outreaching, invitational and welcoming..A place where people grow in their faith by supporting each other and sharing our faith together. People requested more house groups and prayer groups and opportunities for bible study. We should provide opportunities for people to "COME AND SEE". We may need to use different forms of liturgy so that everyone can participate fully.
- b. If we are truly Christian then nothing should divide us. We should celebrate together what unites us rather than focusing on what divides us. There is currently only one ecumenical group of local clergy meeting together for a monthly prayer meeting. We would like to see clergy and laity of all Christian faiths working and worshiping together.
- c. That every baptised Christian should recognise the vocation of their Baptism and their giftedness and ask NOT "What is the church doing for me" BUT "What can I do for the Church or how can I better be church with my fellow Christians."
- d. That our young people should feel valued and an important part of our Church and given more support post Confirmation, particularly meeting them where they are and providing opportunities to share faith, friendship, fun and food.
- e. Continue to engage with with young families after sacramental preparation.
- f. Extend the Women's World Day of Prayer to more than one occasion per annum.
- g. That we feel fed by the Word of God by receiving good homilies which focus on the weekly readings.
- h. That we have Catholic schools accessible to all children with free transport provided.
- i. We need more engaging Catechetical resources which reflect the culture of our own country.
- j. That all Christians, and those of any faith, be free to practise their faith without persecution and that we all be more compassionate and understanding of other faiths.
- k. That the church provides training for lay leaders to encourage the formation of Missionary Disciples.
- l. A church that is inclusive of all ages, races and genders.
- m. That we reintroduce the beautiful liturgies and prayers of the Church eg Benediction.
- n. That we use technology wisely and intelligently to engage with all ages and audiences.
- o. That every parish should have a parish leadership team, with our priests recognising the giftedness of the laity and encouraging them to use their skills to help run our parishes. Priests and laity should be able to work harmoniously together to develop a loving caring and vibrant community.
- p. That the Catholic Church resolves the issues around sexual and other abuse.
- q. Contraception should be condoned.

Junior Synod- What are your dreams for the future:-

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- a. To receive my First Holy Communion right now
- b. Focus on teaching the young people.
- c. I want to be a doctor and help others.
- d. To spread more love.
- e. I want to look after my Mum and Dad so they will live longer and happily in their lives.
- f. That the Church will expand and more people will come to it.
- g. That people will all have bibles and prayers books and that we have a colourful church
- h. More crucifixes to remind us that Jesus sacrificed himself for us.
- i. To have a prayer area to go to during the day.
- j. More activities together rather than being at Mass.

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