

REPORT

ON THE SYNODAL JOURNEY

THE DIOCESE OF LANCASTER

OCTOBER 2021 – FEBRUARY 2022



INTRODUCTION

The Lancaster Diocese is situated in the Northwest of England – all of Cumbria and Lancashire north of the River Ribble. It has six Deaneries in an ecclesiastical territory containing within it a social and economic spectrum from bustling Preston, to the grace and dignity of the ancient country town of Lancaster, to the post-industrial grit and courage of Barrow and the West Cumbrian coastal towns to the peace and beauty of the Lakeland villages and the grave remoteness of Wastwater and Eskdale.

As in most parts of England and Wales the Diocese of Lancaster has suffered quite severely as a result of the Covid-19 Pandemic and is still in a process of recovery in terms of Mass attendance and social activity. It has to be said that this has had a significant impact on our ability to engage with the Synod process. After the opening of the process in October 2021 the country started to experience the effects and threats of the omicron variant of the Covid-19 virus. This made the organising of Synodal gatherings practically impossible at times and caused significant delays. This coupled with the usual distractions that occur during the Advent and Christmas seasons meant that we were not realistically able to begin the process of gathering until the New Year.

Anticipating the delays referred to above, it was decided that the best approach for gathering feedback from around the diocese would be to first launch the process online. For this we employed the service of a company which has experience in Catholic communications with several dioceses in the UK. They had already, at this stage, designed software for the Synod that could be embedded on our websites for access via computer, tablet or mobile phone. This could be tailored to fit in with our requirements and it had the advantage of getting the message out to as many people as quickly as possible given the time limits. We refer to this as the 'Survey'. This was not just a survey but also included provision for people to express their thoughts and concerns at length.

Before the Survey was launched on 15th December 2021 the software was sent out to every parish, college, and school in our diocese (80 parishes and 84 colleges/schools). The Survey for colleges and schools was tailored to make it age appropriate. The Survey was also embedded on our Diocesan website with guidelines on how to use it. It remained open until 28th February.

We were concerned that the Survey on its own was not enough. Conscious of the need for mutual listening and sharing to take place we were careful to send out supporting material that facilitated gatherings and encouraged prayerful and reflective dialogue. The people were encouraged to pray the Adsumus prayer and also reflect on a Gospel passage before starting their conversations.

The reflection questions to be considered were based on the ten nuclei proposed by the Synod Office and these questions were grouped into three suggested gatherings on Communion, Participation, and Mission. Accompanying each reflection was a statement that required a quantitative answer (i.e. disagree, not sure, agree etc.) thus allowing us to gather both statistical and qualitative feedback.

The ten questions were:

Communion

- 01 Who are we on the journey with and what persons or groups are marginalised and why?
- 02 How might our local Church community listen better?
- 03 How can everybody be encouraged to communicate properly?

Participation

- 04 How might Mass or other ceremonies help us to participate at a deeper level?
- 05 How well do we collaborate with the priests and others in the Church?
- 06 How might we improve our conversations within our faith community and also outside it?
- 07 How might we improve our relationships with our non-Catholic Christian brothers and sisters?

Mission

- 08 How might we develop teamwork and a sense of co-responsibility in our local Church?
- 09 How might we improve the process of decision-making in our local Church, so that we truly listen and recognise that the Holy Spirit can speak through each one of us?
- 10 What training, habits and awareness are necessary with the local Church if we are to become better at listening to one another and sharing our insights with one another?

The ten corresponding statements for our statistics were:

- 01 We feel connected to the Church community
- 02 We feel the Church community listens to us
- 03 We feel able to speak our minds confidently to other Church members.

- 04 The Mass/Worship helps us in our Christian lives
- 05 We want to be able to share our faith with others in our community
- 06 We often have conversations with others who have differing beliefs
- 07 We get on well with non-Catholic Christians

- 08 We have some responsibilities in our parish
- 09 Our local parish makes decisions after listening and prayer
- 10 We are willing to listen to people even if they have different opinions to us.

These 10 corresponding questions and statements were used in the online Survey. Thus, the opportunity was provided for people to respond via paper, email and the online survey as individuals, groups, or families.

We did not always receive a full set of responses to each statement. The maximum number for one statement was 524. Written responses were not quantified.

Although one of the aims of the Synod is “to approach with confidence other Christians and those of other faiths, and those of no faith, so their voice can be heard on that journey”, we simply have not had the resources nor the opportunity to do this effectively at this time. We feel that more time would be needed in the future to do this.

FEEDBACK FROM THE CONSULTATION

1. Who are we on the journey with and what persons or groups are marginalised and why?

This was one of the most answered questions in our consultations. The answers were many and varied but the following groups, in no particular order, were consistently identified as being considered to be marginalised:

- The poor, the homeless, the unemployed, those with addictions, those in prison or who have been in prison – of any faith or none who look to the Church for help
- Those suffering with mental health issues, dementia families, those with autism – who feel that the liturgy needs to be simplified and shorter for their needs,
- The disabled, including the deaf and the hard of hearing. Has the CBCEW stopped offering any nation-wide support and undercut former pastoral services to deaf & hard of hearing Catholics?
- The elderly and housebound (especially since the pandemic), including retired clergy. Those without transport (especially in rural areas or where churches are far away. The restructuring of whole areas into one ‘super parish’ has alienated parishioners leaving them feeling that they no longer belong.
- Carers who cannot leave their dependants.
- Those who are forced to work on Sunday, who cannot attend Church.
- Immigrants, ethnic minorities (Syro-Malabar, Polish), those with language problems, asylum seekers.
- Those who have suffered or know someone who has suffered abuse from within the Church and have been left feeling disillusioned by the Church response.
- Women who feel like second-class members of a Church which in its very structure, makeup (male celibates) and language (non-inclusive) marginalises them.
- Those in ‘irregular’ marriages or relationships and those with gender issues.
- Young people who feel that the Church’s worship is irrelevant and are drawn to other forms of worship elsewhere or not at all.
- Young families who stopped attending worship during the pandemic and who have not returned who may now feel disconnected and lack confidence to resume.
- Those who describe themselves as traditionalists who desire to worship in the Extraordinary Form feel marginalised by the Church hierarchy (as if not tolerated by Rome) and even some of the clergy in the diocese. Some feel that the Holy Father is moving to eliminate the traditional rite of Mass and this leaves them feeling profoundly alienated.
- Those who feel they have been marginalised by the traditionalist Church.
- The faithful who continue to practice their faith feel that they are being marginalised by the world and by those who no longer can be bothered to practice their faith.
- One case of the whole parish feeling marginalised by the priest.
- Those who have struggled with same-sex attraction, gender issues, or irregular situations yet have heroically persevered in the faith may now feel marginalised when they hear talk which makes light of their sacrifices.
- Single people who have no families.
- Some felt that even terms like ‘non-Catholic’ were unhelpful and off-putting to anyone not baptised Catholic - making them feel excluded.

In terms of the journey, there were mixed answers based on the interpretation of the question. Some saw themselves as journeying with the Catholic community of believers, as members of Christ's Body in need of one another. Others saw a wider community which included other Christian denominations and other faiths and people of good will. It has been pointed out by several people that they felt that the Church does reach out to the marginalised but should not compromise her teaching to do so. Some may feel marginalised because they have chosen a life-style which is not compatible with the teaching of Christ.

In a good number of responses the language of "us and them" was used whenever people felt at odds with the Church – a language which expressed alienation.

Whilst it was recognised that there is marginalisation of all kinds there were also comments that expressed the need to adhere to Catholic teaching which is, after all, the teaching of Christ. The pastoral dilemma that this can present was acknowledged and no easy solution was offered. The innocent children of loving parents who are in irregular situations presents a very difficult pastoral problem. Reference has been made to the huge exodus from the Church over the last 70 years of so many lay, religious and clergy who no longer walk with us – seen as caused by a disastrous collapse of the teaching and practice of the Faith.

There are many reasons why people are no longer 'walking' with us and it is difficult to identify the causes. In the absence of formal records of participation in Church activities (the use of which may not be acceptable to parishioners) it would be difficult to formally identify the reasons of those not walking with us.

For questions 2 to 10 we list here a summary of the most frequently made points that stood out in the survey responses returned. These views and statements may not always be factually accurate but they are, nevertheless, the genuine and perceived views typical of the responses read.

Q2. How might our local Church community listen better?

- Only by standing firm in the truth of Church teaching and apostolic tradition can we engage fruitfully in worldly dialogue with others.
- Through much better adult education. Many mature Catholics feel inadequately equipped to engage in listening or dialogue with others of faith or no faith.
- Catholic Schools should play a major role in recognising and communicating Catholic behaviour and values.
- By developing our prayer life first. Without a life rooted in prayer we are in danger of poor discernment of the Spirit.
- Covid-19 has had a massive impact on our outreach in the parish and society.
- By having more opportunity to meet with our priests.
- By breaking the mould of the past where the laity was positively discouraged from expressing their opinions.
- The Church is priest-obsessed, and does not listen to the laity nor allow them to use their gifts.
- Providing spaces for support groups in the local community is a sign that we are listening to the needs of those around us.
- Listening has to be on both sides. The clergy need to listen more to the laity.

- Make more efficient use of existing structures, such as Pastoral Councils.
- The Church needs to be seen as a safe place, a charitable place and somewhere people can just come in to, to sit and talk to God in their own way.
- By placing a suggestion box in church.
- The only way to have a voice is to get involved. I would advise anyone who feels voiceless to get involved.
- Clear and systematic re-evangelisation is needed, for a flock, which have had little sound teaching for decades.
- By inviting diverse groups, traditions, and organisations to come and speak to us about how it feels from their standpoint what it feels like to be marginalised.
- Perhaps physical and temporal space needs to be built into Sunday so that having just worshipped together as a community and shared in the Eucharist people would be freshly inspired to meet and listen and follow up on what may have been touched upon in Mass. This could then be fed into Leadership groups in the parish.

Q3. How can everybody be encouraged to communicate properly?

- By having informal discussions between priests and parishioners.
- There seems to still be need to communicate to people why changes in the parishes are made, and acknowledging that changes are often required. A general feeling was that sharing the faith is a co-operation between clergy and people.
- Could we make more use of questionnaires?
- People need to be invited to speak, especially as it can take courage to share one's ideas and thoughts.
- There can be a problem when there are several Masses every weekend in that each Mass has its own community. Because of this some parishioners never get to meet.
- We must communicate at an appropriate level as a lay person, it is not for us to question or propose changes to the teaching of Christ passed down to us.
- A far superior social media presence at all levels is needed.
- Regular open meetings. Access to learning, prayer and scripture study, where people participate and are not just talked at.
- It is difficult for everyone to have their say as everyone has a different opinion. But the Church is not in existence to please everyone. It exists for the worship of God, preaching of the Gospel and administration of the sacraments.
- Establish the proper parameters of what can be discussed and if that can truly lead to change according to the Christ given Church, (this could be a teaching moment) rather than allowing expectations to build up about a possible change which can't happen because of the nature of the Church.
- We need to listen to the less articulate with empathy. We have a tendency to dismiss the uneducated and quiet people who can surprise us with their wisdom.
- More inclusive language would help in prayers rather than masculine pronouns.

Q4. How might Mass or other ceremonies help us participate at a deeper level?

- We are blessed to be able to celebrate Mass in the traditional manner but we are very concerned at the prospect that this right will be eventually denied us.

- It enables our participation in the mission of the church.
- The sermon is important. Sloppy liturgy seems to be off putting to regulars and unattractive to those on the edges of our community.
- It is important to have church buildings open for private prayer, and for chance encounters with those who pass our churches.
- Catechesis and ongoing formation, including for the sacraments and instruction on the Church's liturgy, are vital for full and active participation.
- The loss of the sense of the sacred is particularly evident. Priests should be encouraged to take a greater pride in what they do, recognising the sacredness of their vocation. The reverence of the Priest at the altar is really important.
- Some feel that the Mass has become more wordy, pompous and clumsy. It used to be simpler and more dignified.
- By teaching more explicitly about the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist.
- By linking the theme of the Mass with modern day problems, activities.
- By more preaching about the meaning of the Mass.
- Making the mass and other ceremonies more inclusive and up to date.
- The closing of churches during lockdown has taught us how precious the gift of the Eucharist is.

Q5. How well do we collaborate with the priests and others in the Church?

- Parishioners should take responsibility for practical issues like assisting people to get to Mass and visiting and reassuring people. Parish groups and organisations could also support the priests more, for example pro-life and other charitable work.
- The timing of the restructuring of some parishes during the COVID pandemic, made collaborating much harder.
- Most Catholics find it difficult to know how to be missionary. Formation is needed to help with this.
- I recognise the supreme dignity of the priest and I do not believe he should put his popularity above his sacred duties.
- The Church's formal communication can be full of clerical jargon. It is a barrier to us, never mind non-Catholics.
- The priest's role is spread too thinly and he needs to return to doing what is his key purpose - the salvation of souls. I believe that the pressure put on priests to be involved in so many areas of parish life has taken away the laity's reverence for the priest. Allow our priests to be priests.
- It is simply not possible for priests to know their parishioners in the way that was possible in the past. This will become more marked as parishes merge and increasing numbers find they have no resident priest. I think it will be important to rethink what we ask of priests and what we ask of other members of the community.
- Moving priests around all the time just means that I don't know my priest and I don't feel connected to the local church.
- It's not clear what the role of a priest should be...perhaps he needs more professionally organised help to free him to know the people better.
- There is plenty of material made available in our churches for people to get involved but many simply ignore it.

- There is continuous tension between tradition and progress yet these two things are not opposed to each other.
- Collaborating with our priests is not all about what we do in church. The workplace is also a place where God's work can be done.

Q6. How might we improve our conversations within our faith community and also outside of it?

- The twin foundations of dialogue: genuine listening, and honest truth telling
- By a complete overhaul of Catholic education which has failed, over several decades, to teach the truths of the Faith. Some ideas being promoted today, even by priests, religious and bishops are contrary to Divine Law and Church teaching.
- There is a need to re-catechise the faithful. They feel at a disadvantage when engaging with interfaith groups. Many Catholics need to learn the art of apologetics.
- Having various parish groups of association is required. Also desired are days of recollection, retreats, pilgrimages and socials.
- It is often difficult in a work situation but speaking about faith is often easier on a one-to-one basis. The best way is to communicate through actions and behaviour. This plays a vital role in the relationship of the Church with society.
- Through the use of online communications and social media.
- By seeking unity within our own Church especially between traditional and modern Catholics. The Church herself seems to be increasingly polarised. This makes it difficult to speak with one voice in a world where Christianity itself is marginalised.
- The Church should be more outward- looking and be at the service of everyone in the local community. To work with others on projects that unambiguously involve doing good it should be possible, without proselytising, to get across the idea that the Catholic faith is inspiring people to do good.
- There are now more 'mixed' families that are non-traditional in their makeup – not all sharing the one faith. We need to be aware of this.

Q7. How might we improve our relationships with our non-Catholic Christian brothers and sisters?

- We sometimes learn from the example of heroic holiness of individuals who are not members of the Church.
- The equivocation of Church leaders about the unique claims of the Catholic Church actually does not help but hinders our dialogue.
- There needs to be a change in attitude from some clergy who, in the past, have discouraged contact with non-Catholic churches.
- We have a lot to learn, especially from our fellow Christians, and should seek to identify the common ground. We should look for what unites rather than what divides us. We need to work with them on social issues in our area. Relationships can only be nurtured when time is spent together; encounter is paramount.
- Being more welcoming to the Christian partner in mixed marriages.

- By having in each community a person or preferably a group who are responsible for the ecumenical aspect of parish life. This person/group to be familiar with the Church's Ecumenical Directory and with the Church's Ecumenical Vademecum of 2020.
- Showing personal holiness and integrity which is so attractive.
- By praying together.

Q8. How might we develop teamwork and a sense of co-responsibility in our local Church?

- There needs to be a sharing of responsibility and yet a recognition of the proper role of the priest as shepherd in the parish.
- Declining numbers of active parishioners, priests and other religious, whilst presenting significant challenges will also present an opportunity and need for greater involvement of the laity and listening by the Church hierarchy to the views of the laity.
- Priests and laity have a collective duty of obedience to the teaching of Christ. Adherence to this will help everyone to work together in a spirit of cooperation. There is a need for on-going formation to form a laity who can faithfully collaborate.
- For priests there is a tension between preserving all that is non-negotiable within the life of the Church and the need to share responsibility and delegate. The priest also has an important role in maintaining unity. He could be wary of letting go of some aspects of his authority out of a genuine desire to faithfully preserve and nurture what is vital to Catholic faith.
- Teamwork can extend to neighbouring parishes, particularly through groups such as the SVP, Knights of St Columba, Women Together, Catenians.
- People have to feel a sense of belonging to a given place. This is much harder if the area covered is too large, or contains an excessive number of churches.
- Groups should practise "succession planning". Over reliance on a key individual can lead to the end of an activity when that person steps down.
- By encouraging members of the congregation to come forward as volunteers helps to encourage teamwork and ensures that everything does not fall on the Parish Priest and/or one or two members of the Parish community.
- People need to know that if they volunteer they will be valued not only by the current priest but by any successor. This will be helped by designating roles as an established part of church organisation, rather than them being at the whim of the priest.
- Teamwork should not be seen as the laity taking over what the priest does but freeing him up by participating in the many apostolic roles there are outside of the liturgy – in society and at work.

Q9. How might we improve the process of decision-making in our local Church, so that we truly listen and recognise that the Holy Spirit can speak through each one of us?

- Through greater transparency. By ensuring that Parish meetings take place regularly and that the decisions and minutes are published for all to see. Greater clarity around how decisions are made could help people to feel part of the process and encourage more support for their bishops and priests.
- Inter-parish cooperation in discerning and deciding on local issues could be improved.

- Major decisions should be prayed about and the Priest in his office should be respected for his final authority and say on the matter. The Priest should not feel like he has to compromise or please everyone.
- It does concern me greatly that this synod includes not just Catholics but all non-practising Catholics and people of other and no faiths. Why should we be canvassing their opinions? Surely this is wrong!
- It is very easy to deceive oneself that one is listening to the Holy Spirit. Therefore I prescribe humility.
- This question greatly concerns me because, from my understanding, decision making has to be in harmony with what is revealed in Scripture, Tradition and Magisterium. This is how we discern the truth, and not by placing too much store on the world.
- People have to be prepared to go on Parish committees if they want to change things but once again people are not happy to give up their time.
- Of course, the Holy Spirit can speak through each one of us, but equally, Christ founded a teaching Church, with an Apostolic succession, a teaching Hierarchy, and a mandate to hold fast to that which is good.
- By not leaving it to the priest to make decisions on his own when appointing people to help. Supporting the priest in decision making with our suggestions.

Q10. What training, habits and awareness are necessary with the local Church if we are to become better at listening to one another and sharing our insights with one another?

- The top-down model of putting all the resources into the training of priests and providing much less for the laity has contributed to clericalism and the passivity of the people. We need a better and more balanced model.
- We should, as a Church, be aware of ill-informed and dissenting voices, giving them equal weight to the voices of those who adhere to Apostolic tradition and teaching. Not all opinions are of equal value.
- All dioceses need to produce, and communicate, a pastoral vision and plan. Ideally the Catholic Church in England and Wales should be supporting them all to do this.
- Many things suggested already exist but are perhaps not well publicised. We should not be afraid to boast about the good work we are already doing.
- Ongoing faith formation is essential. In addition to providing formation at a parish level, we could better highlight faith formation opportunities offered by others, both locally and online.
- We need to encourage our priests to take risks - to empower and trust parishioners, to try new things and to try real delegation.
- Perhaps this shortage of priests should be seen not as a disaster, but as an opportunity to redress the balance of rights and responsibilities of laity and clergy alike.
- We should stop sugar coating the message of Salvation and its reality. Young people want to hear it as it is. We must not be afraid to be authentic with young people.

APPENDIX

Below is a summary of the statistical information obtained from the 10 statements listed in the introduction:

RANGING FROM

VERY STRONGLY DISAGREE STRONGLY DISAGREE DISAGREE NOT SURE AGREE STRONGLY AGREE VERY STRONGLY AGREE

We feel connected to the Church community

VSD	SD	D	NS	A	SA	VSA
29	21	49	53	162	126	84

We feel the Church community listens to us

VSD	SD	D	NS	A	SA	VSA
21	21	58	77	118	42	20

We feel able to speak our minds confidently to other Church members.

VSD	SD	D	NS	A	SA	VSA
16	16	43	41	128	48	51

The Mass/Worship helps us in our Christian lives

VSD	SD	D	NS	A	SA	VSA
19	11	20	19	100	77	119

We want to be able to share our faith with others in our community

VSD	SD	D	NS	A	SA	VSA
13	4	12	44	118	66	84

We often have conversations with others who have differing beliefs

VSD	SD	D	NS	A	SA	VSA
11	10	58	36	128	68	49

We get on well with non-Catholic Christians

VSD	SD	D	NS	A	SA	VSA
2	2	4	19	116	103	111

We have some responsibilities in our parish

VSD	SD	D	NS	A	SA	VSA
27	11	42	33	120	66	49

Our local parish makes decisions after listening and prayer

VSD	SD	D	NS	A	SA	VSA
20	14	34	67	93	23	19

We are willing to listen to people even if they have different opinions to us.

VSD	SD	D	NS	A	SA	VSA
6	1	4	16	133	91	90