



THE CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF
ARUNDEL & BRIGHTON

SYNOD OF BISHOPS 2023

FOR A SYNODAL CHURCH: COMMUNION, PARTICIPATION,
AND MISSION

Synthesis of Responses from the Diocese of Arundel & Brighton

1. Introduction: Re-reading of the Synodal Experience
 - 1.1 The time of preparation for the Synod conversations was marked by the gathering of a small team, representing different aspects of Diocesan life and Mission, clergy and lay faithful, composed of the Bishop, Vicar General, Episcopal Vicar for Surrey, Spirituality and Mission Advisor (Permanent Deacon), a layman from a Sussex Parish, Advisor for Youth Ministry, Director of Education, Head of Communications, Diocesan Trustee (all four women).
 - 1.2 In addition, the Bishop engaged the Council of Priests and the Deans of the Diocese in discussion about the preparation for the Synod conversations.
 - 1.3 Over the course of three meetings, they worked through the Vade Mecum for the Synod and a small team prepared Diocesan resources focused on the following themes:
 - Journeying Companions
 - Listening
 - Speaking Out
 - Celebrating
 - Co-responsibility in Mission
 - Dialogue in Church & Society
 - Other Christian Denominations
 - Authority & Participation
 - Discerning and Deciding
 - Forming Ourselves in Synodality

- 1.4 It was determined that, in addition to conversations taking place in the communities of the Diocese (parishes, schools, prisons, religious houses), there should be an opportunity for people to respond on-line, using "Survey Monkey." This was thought especially important in the light of the Covid pandemic, enabling those who might feel nervous about face-to-face gatherings to contribute. It was also thought that this means of participation might prove attractive to younger people in the Diocese. It should be noted that a number of parish groups used this means to feed back the fruits of their meetings.
- 1.5 In total, **676 responses were received, with 25%** of these coming from groups. It is thought that this reflects participation of approximately **3,000** people.
- 1.6 The responses were collated and every written response read. The fruits of this were shared with the Diocese by means of a Webinar offered by the Bishop, chaired by a Religious Sister and with the assistance of the layman who had been involved in the initial meetings and who had undertaken much of the work of collation.
- 1.7 Some **400** people took part in the webinar. The presentation was then made available on the Diocesan Website. The webinar was well-received. In addition, it is intended that this report also be placed on the Diocesan Website.
- 1.8 It was recognised by the group engaged in preparatory work (and by both Deans and the Council of Priests) that the time available for the discussions was short. The Bishop (and perhaps others) had some anxieties about the level of engagement in the Synod Path. In the event, the level of engagement was very encouraging indeed.
- 1.9 The breadth of view expressed in the responses was noticeable. Some welcomed wholeheartedly the opportunity to engage in the conversations; others expressed the view that the process was either 'window dressing' or that their views and concerns would not be heard. This latter view was echoed by those who recognised the scale of the journey to the Synod of Bishops, with responses being 'lost' in the later stages of the process.
- 1.10 The Synod conversations at Diocesan level raised some issues that are often expressed regarding:
- lay leadership in the Church
 - ordination of married men
 - ordination of women
 - the place of the divorced and remarried
 - the place of the LGBTQ+ community
 - concerns that the provision of Mass according to the 1962 Missal would be lost

1.11 As part of the ‘Survey Monkey’ on-line engagement, respondents were asked the degree to which **the Church is good at:**

- Accompanying people on their journey in faith 37%
- Heart-to-heart listening 34%
- Communication 38%
- Celebrating the depth and breadth of our faith 54%
- Empowering a sense of mission 40%
- Dialogue with the wider community 36%
- Building relationships with other denominations 42%
- Empowering participation 37%
- Discerning and deciding 37%
- Being synodal 33%

2. Discernment of the collected contributions

2.1 Welcome & Evangelisation

2.1.i The need to teach out to those who feel themselves at the margins of the Church’s life is a very clear priority. While parishes are, in themselves, welcoming communities, they are not always perceived as such by those outside, or at the edges of them.

2.1.ii This theme of welcome figured significantly in the responses both with regard to the experience in Church and to the mission of evangelisation, through which people are welcomed and sustained in their relationship with Christ as members of the Church. Schools have a very significant role in this regard.

2.1.iii Communications have improved in the Diocese in a number of ways. There is still work to be done in the area of outreach and to provision of materials in a wide range of languages.

2.2 Leadership & Authority

2.2.i For the majority of people, leadership in the Church is experienced through the Parish Priest. Diocesan structures – Deanery structures even more so – have little impact in people’s lives.

2.2.ii Many clergy are tired, with a rather high average age. They often experience administration as a burden, calling them away from the core of their ministry.

2.2.iii There is a need to examine the exercise of leadership, enabling all to respond to their baptismal vocation and the exercise of their gifts and talents in the service of the Church. It is recognised that, in different ways, widening leadership will require acceptance and a certain ‘letting go’ on the part of the clergy, together with an acceptance by a number of lay faithful too.

2.3 Listening

- 2.3.i The Synodal Journey is a valued experience of listening in the Church and has highlighted the desirability for better means for listening in parishes and in the Diocese. Many have felt greatly encouraged by the opportunity to speak, although there is a certain lack of confidence in the hierarchy, due in significant measure to the Abuse Crisis.
- 2.3.ii Reference is made below to intended outcomes for the Diocese as a result of the Synodal Conversations.

2.4 Celebration and Liturgical Life

- 2.4.i The place of the Eucharist and of personal prayer (with thanksgiving and intercession as key elements) is clearly central to the lives of many. The liturgical life of the parish is a place of encounter with the person of Christ – although some do not find the Church's liturgy to be a positive experience. The homily is the key point of formation for a great number in our communities, demanding careful preparation and sound teaching.
- 2.4.ii The sense of the Sunday Obligation has been weakened – a phenomenon hastened by the Covid Pandemic, to which further reference is made below.

2.5 Education and Formation

- 2.5.i The thirst for formation in faith was a very clear message of the Synod Conversations, along with a call for a greater openness to the gifts and talents present in every person in the community. These two elements, effectively lived out, would have a profound effect on personal relationships with Christ, and on the life and Mission of the Church.
- 2.5.ii Much good work is going on in the Diocese, including a renewal of catechetical programmes, evangelisation and formation with those preparing for marriage, accompaniment for the bereaved, CCRS courses, on-line mission experiences and opportunities for deeper explorations of faith at all ages.
- 2.5.iii Reference has been made above to schools, these being communities that have a particular place in Catholic education in support of parents.

2.6 Dialogue in Church and Society

- 2.6.i Engagement in wider society demands a fidelity to the Gospel message and to the Church's Teaching, rather than an attempt to seem 'relevant.' This impacts on the need for formation, to facilitate appropriate engagements.

- 2.6.ii The very experience of Synod conversations has clearly contributed to openness – especially in those parishes where more time has been given to opportunities for conversations.

2.7 Other Christian Denominations

- 2.7.i Engagement with other Christian communities is marked by local circumstance and experience, with co-operation in social outreach being a point of particular strength.
- 2.7.ii In terms of the ‘conversation’ with other Christian communities, the points of strength were sharing in the Scriptures – with other communities benefitting the Catholic Church – and our Catholic heritage as an important contribution for others.
- 2.7.iii A number of responses reflected the areas that made listening between Christian communities difficult: Intercommunion, the role of women, the status of Anglican Orders, the Sacrament of Penance, Our Lady and the Saints and our Catholic theology of the Eucharist all being mentioned.

2.8 Discerning and Deciding

- 2.8.i Discernment in the life of the Church requires the exercise of the gifts that we have received from God. While many feel that they are free to exercise their gifts, the Synod Conversations indicated that a greater number felt themselves with limited or unable to use their gifts at the service of the Gospel.
- 2.8.ii Experience of a lack of accountability and transparency in the life of the Church are stumbling blocks to people’s involvement and commitment.
- 2.8.iii The Synod Path is seen as a positive way forward, opening new doors for people to express their hopes and fears – a moment when the Holy Spirit could be heard afresh and a way to greater authenticity in the mission of the Church.

2.9 Forming ourselves in Synodality

- 2.9.i Reflections on this theme arising from the Synod Conversations were less well defined. This is not surprising. Synodality is new concept to many in the Latin Church. Some found the experience of the conversations gave them a sense of joy and purpose; for others, the concept of Synodality was unhelpful and alienating.
- 2.9.ii The effectiveness of the community has been questioned in the Synod Conversations. However, it is the case that engagement in the conversation strengthens community and this has rendered the Synod Conversations beneficial in themselves.

3. Conclusions: next steps

- 3.i Synodal conversations across the Diocese have engaged many people in a way that is new. Although it was pointed out that the process that led to the publication of

the Diocesan Pastoral Plan had elements of Synodality about them, this recent experience has taken place a deeper level. Some issues raised are beyond the scope of Diocesan life, but the conversations have thrown up a number of issues that will be important to our mission in the future.

- 3.ii The need for formation came through clearly in responses. This, along with Prayer and Mission, is one the three themes of the Diocesan Pastoral Plan, *The Word Who is Life*. Through all coming together in prayer and formation, coming ever closer to the person of Christ, so many fruits will emerge through discernment: greater understanding of one another, better communications with the openness that comes with it, deeper prayer and more effective mission.
- 3.iii Essential to this future effectiveness of the mission of the Diocese will be the discernment on the part of every person of the gifts and talents with which they have been blessed and with all are called to bring to the service of the Gospel. This discernment is a necessary aspect of the journey of formation that begins at Baptism and must be a continuous journey to the moment of death. This will require much endeavour, for the good of the Mission that we have received.
- 3.iv The need for an effective means for the Bishop to listen to the lay faithful is needed. Previous models for this proved not to be very effective, but the Synod conversations have opened the way to the establishment of effective means of listening and conversation at this level. Work will now take place to bring this into being. Guided by the Holy Spirit, all in the Diocese must discern together.
- 3.v There are challenges ahead– there have always been challenges and there always will be. The Synodal Path is not about making things easier, but it is a discernment towards the very best way to proclaim the Gospel Message – a message that is unchanging and to which we must always be faithful – in the context of an ever-changing world.
- 3.vi There was a clear call for the parishes to have parish councils. While Parish Finance Councils are mandated, Parish Councils are advised. The call from the Synod Conversations for Parish Councils – or groups similar to them – is supported by the Bishop and the establishment if such groups will be a very effective way for the responsibilities and direction of the parish to be shared. They can be a source of wisdom and discernment and a tremendous support to a Parish Priest, enabling the exercise of authority at parish level – something the responses showed to be significant – in the most effective way for the mission of the Church.
- 3.vii While these steps may be few in number, they are far-reaching. In many senses they are not ‘new’ steps, but express new purpose on the journey. They are supported and further explored in the Diocesan Pastoral Plan. This plan has been reworked, in the light of the Covid pandemic and the Synod Conversations across the Diocese, and will be published shortly.

Appendix 1: A brief overview of the Diocese

The Diocese of Arundel & Brighton was formed in 1965, the territory having been previously a part of the Diocese of Southwark. The Diocese is composed of 85 parishes, divided into 11 Deaneries. There are 81 schools in the Diocese (11 Secondary and 53 Primary and 17 independent). Within the Diocese are situated 6 prisons and 5 universities.

Average Mass Attendance in 2019 (pre-pandemic):	34,291
Average Mass Attendance in 2021 (post-pandemic):	12,683

Baptisms in 2019 (pre-pandemic):	1,934
Baptisms in 2021 (post-pandemic):	905

Marriages in 2019 (pre-pandemic):	291
Marriages in 2021 (post-pandemic):	135

There are 107 Priests in the Diocese, of whom 28 Are retired.

There are 55 Permanent Deacons, of whom 9 Are retired.

Currently, the Diocese has 6 men in formation for the Priesthood and 4 men in formation for the Permanent Diaconate.

Appendix 2: Some Quotations from participants in the Synod Conversations

The quotations below, record the small selection chosen as representative from all those offered as part of the Synod conversations. All of them were used in the Webinar to the Diocese, noted above in the Introduction.

Journeying Companions

- “Leadership is our problem; we are led by a group of people from a small part of our society. We need to expand who we call to be our Church leaders.”
- “It is time to listen to people who feel disillusioned and have left the Church. This has not been my experience, but is something that, through the Synod, needs to be put right.”
- “After this pandemic, we feel quite disconnected from our parish.”

Listening

- “How is the lived experience of the faithful to be brought into meaningful dialogue with the official teaching of the Church?”
- “The Church is good at accompanying those who step forward. Not so good at reaching out beyond that.”

- “Seeing Christ, as we should, in all people, would make us much better listeners, open to what is really being said and what is beyond it.”

Speaking Out

- “If you take one thing from this consultation, reach out more to people, invite them in and ask for their views.”
- “Communication is good from the top down. But how do I talk to others in my parish?”
- “We are not able to say how we feel about the abuse of children.”

Celebrating

- “Our celebrations in Church do inspire a deeper encounter with the risen Lord.”
- “Mass is an ordeal; I am sorry to say.”
- “The Covid-19 pandemic has destroyed the habit of going to church for many. The motivation of ‘obligation’ no longer has any power.”

Co-responsibility in Mission

- “Do I understand the mission of the Church? Not really.”
- “We are reticent and have few outreach mechanisms in the Church.”
- “We need to call people into ministries, say to them ‘I see in you...’ and person by person discern with them their gifts.”
- “The Decree of the Apostolate of the Laity underlines how all levels in the Church must act together. It would be inspiring to discuss (and act on) the Church’s mission under this perspective.”

Dialogue in Church & Society

- “We have lost the moral high ground.”
- “Society is not open to dialogue and is not seeking spirituality or meaning in life.”
- “The Catholic Church has a duty and an increasing need to challenge post-Christian society.”
- “I found the experience [of the conversation in the parish] interesting and challenging. Really listening isn’t something we often do in the Church and hearing so many points of view and the range of opinions was a new experience.”

Other Christian Denominations

- “At local level, the bulk of the community is largely disinterested in having much of a relationship and it is a low priority for clergy too. I would describe it as occasional cooperation rather than a relationship.”
- “Our ecumenical dialogue locally has been very good. We need to build on it again.”

Authority & Participation

- “The average Catholic relates to the parish, to the Pope and to nothing in between.”
- “Clericalism is stifling the Catholic Church, which is more concerned with Church Law than with the teachings of the Gospel.”
- “Servant-leadership is what inspires participation, engagement, mission and growth.”
- “In a parish in particular, one-man exercises ‘power’ according to his inclinations, likes, preferences and constraints. This is seen particularly by women – as authoritarian.”

Discerning and Deciding

- “At the moment, there is no sense that the Bishops or Priests ‘hear’ anything that they do not want to. I’m really hoping that this process can be a Spirit-led beginning to change in this area.”
- “Our gifts can be used, but too often are not.”
- “This synodal survey is the first time I have felt that we can be heard and make a difference.”
- “Our parish priest is very open, collaborative and empowering, he encourages people to get involved in decision-making and leading locally.”

Forming Ourselves in Synodality

- “The question is utterly beyond me.”
- “To be a missionary disciple, I first need to be evangelised.”
- “The first reaction to this question was that we do not fully understand what it means.”
- “This synodal process is the first time, in my experience, that involvement of ordinary Catholics has been sought or even countenanced.”