



SYNOD RESOURCES - 6

Feeding back

Introduction

The Synodal Process we are undertaking is guided by a fundamental question:

How does 'journeying together' take place today on different levels (from the local level to the universal one), allowing the Church to proclaim the Gospel? And, what steps is the Spirit inviting us to take in order to grow as a synodal Church? (PD 2)

As everyone journeys together, listening first to the Lord in their heart and then speaking openly and listening with each other, we learn to hear the voice of the Lord speaking to us.

In our Archdiocese, Archbishop John is inviting everyone to respond to the invitation of Pope Francis and take part in the initial diocesan listening phase of the Synod. Each local parish is asked to host a meeting, or series of meetings, where conversations about the Church's mission in the life of the parish and the diocese can be prayerfully examined; and where the will of the Lord can be discerned, as we seek to grow in faith and number.

This document offers a simple template for recording the parish listening meetings which can also be used in schools with older children and teachers, as well as in other settings. It is intended to be used with the other Synod resources (prayer, questions and group facilitation) available on the diocesan Synod page.

Please remember that each one of us is encouraged to share with honesty and openness about our real-life experiences, and to reflect on what the Holy Spirit might be saying to the Church at this time.

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Scriptural Reflection

Which passage of Scripture was used to guide and inspire the meeting?

Mark 10: 35-45

What were some of the key phrases, thoughts and comments shared? Was there a thread in what was shared?

The meeting agreed that we are all called to serve God. We need to recognize that we can all make mistakes. We need to correct them or live with them.

As Christians, we should embrace all Christians (as well as people of other faiths and none). We need to foster mutual understanding and communion. Our churches should be kept open more often so that we can be more welcoming. To this end, we should learn from other churches in Kingston, revive parish organisations and become more aware of the needs in our wider community.

Twenty-eight parishioners replied to a written survey. Seven parishioners attended a meeting with the parish delegates and the parish clergy.

Communion

Please list which questions were used. If you reflected on questions other than those offered on the diocesan website, please provide them here as well.

What are the ways in which your parish most successfully brings people together?

In which areas of parish life does your parish feel and act as one?

Christ is reflected as the head united to His body. How is this reflected in your parish life?

How can you help to build up communion effectively and authentically in the coming months / years?

How do you relate to members of the Church who have drifted away from practice?

What were some of the key phrases, thoughts and comments shared? Was there a thread or consensus in what was shared?

Almost all of the respondents focused on the mass as the main unifying force. There were a few references to the Rosary and other liturgical events. There was a widespread longing for additional spiritual events, especially during Advent and Lent. These might include retreats, healing services, pilgrimages, Alpha and Life in the Spirit. One respondent asked for a greater variety of masses, including youth masses and masses in Latin. Respondents were divided about music in the parish. Some wanted more (and more modern) music because this plays a major role in making the liturgy more attractive; one respondent, however, wanted less music.

The meeting called for the reintroduction of missions to the parish. Those during Holy Week had been particularly inspiring. There was also a call for weekend retreats.

There was also a widespread longing for the resumption of social events, including tea and coffee after mass, Lenten suppers, meals for seniors and celebrations of particular feasts and anniversaries.

In the written responses there were a number of calls for more charitable work and social giving, both to the local homeless and through the SVP and HCPT.

Many of the respondents criticized the deterioration of the links with the school. These needed to be restored and enhanced. The school represented an important resource.

No practical suggestions were put forward for reaching out to those who have drifted away apart from friendliness and prayer.

Participation

Please list which questions were used. If you reflected on questions other than those offered on the diocesan website, please provide them here as well.

How has participation been affected by the pandemic? Were those issues there before?

How can participation be strengthened moving forward into the future?

Which groups and individuals are least included in your parish?

How can we better enable full participation and co-responsibility at the parish and diocesan level?

How can we broaden the way we include people while keeping true to the Gospel / our core Christian identity?

What were some of the key phrases, thoughts and comments shared? Was there a thread or consensus in what was shared?

Many of the answers overlapped with those under the previous heading. There was a general feeling that attendances are picking up after the Covid lockdown. But over 40% of the respondents commented on the negative effects of the recent disruption and called for greater stability in the parish. There were widespread calls for greater communication to parishioners, for a better relationship between the clergy and the laity and for the clergy to encourage and support initiatives in the parish. The role of the clergy was widely seen as crucial.

A number of respondents called (variously) for better teaching, for an emphasis on the Church's doctrine and for the encouragement of Bible study and study groups. Others commented that the institutional Church and the hierarchy were too conservative and out of touch.

There was widespread concern about the loss of teenagers and young people. Respondents stressed the need to provide / reintroduce activities and facilities for these groups. There were specific references to the need to reactivate the youth club and a proper children's liturgy, as well as other non-liturgical spiritual activities.

Concerns were also voiced about the exclusion of the elderly, the disabled, divorcees, gay people and, in some respects, ethnic minorities.

The meeting was conscious that the parish census and the campaign to foster greater giving had both been deferred because of Covid. It was agreed that a parish mailing list should be created so that news could be communicated by email.

Mission

Please list which questions were used. If you reflected on questions other than those offered on the diocesan website, please provide them here as well.

What is the Church's mission?

Is the parish looking inwards or outwards? Can we do both effectively?

How would you characterize the local situation and local needs in the parish / community?

How does the life of the parish aid in the formation of parishioners as missionary disciples?

How can the call to holiness and mission be reflected in different aspects of parish life?

What were some of the key phrases, thoughts and comments shared? Was there a thread or consensus in what was shared?

There was clear split in the responses about the mission of the Church. About 40% focused on the proclamation of the Good News, another 40% on the creation of community. The remainder emphasized the setting of standards, loving and serving and being honest about its problems.

Almost every response stated that the parish is looking inwards. One or two mentioned the need to look outwards but said that it is not happening at the moment. Only one indicated that the two approaches are compatible.

The responses to the third question were generally very negative. A few positive suggestions mentioned the need for healing services and talks open to outsiders, and to the desirability of training parishioners to go out to others. There was one mention of the homeless.

On the fourth question, many of the responses were internally focused and referred back to the past. Some spoke of the need for personal development through the readings and the homilies. One respondent referred to the Bible in a Year podcast. There were only a few generalized suggestions, for instance a call for better homilies.

One response referred to links with the hospital and the school; two mentioned ecumenism. Other suggestions from 3 parishioners dealt with support for the elderly and visiting care homes, links with university, sponsoring a refugee family, supporting the food bank, welcoming new parishioners and the need for an SVP.

In addition to the items mentioned above, the meeting agreed that the parish should celebrate the Queen's Jubilee in June.

Submitting contributions

Parish delegates will be invited to one of three diocesan gatherings with Archbishop John, the Synod contacts and other parish delegates and clergy. These gatherings will provide a further opportunity for prayerful reflection on what the Holy Spirit might be saying to the Church at this time.

What is shared at these gatherings will form the basis for the diocesan submission. We also, however, would welcome all notes recorded at the listening sessions undertaken in the parish (and elsewhere, such as school and university chaplaincies). These can be photocopied and posted to the address below or emailed to synod@rcaos.org.uk as supportive documentation.

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Resources from the Synod Office in Rome are available in different languages at www.synod.va/en.html

Resources from the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales is available at www.cbcew.org.uk/synodal-church/