



the DIOCESE of
EAST ANGLIA

***Synthesis of Responses to
Questions on the Synodal
Way in the Diocese of East
Anglia***

April 2022

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Introduction

Process and Experience

The Catechesis Commission of the Diocese was asked to take the lead on the Synodal Way in the Diocese of East Anglia and met on 14th October 2021 to put the process into effect and a small facilitating group of three was established (one priest, one deacon, and one lay catechist). The Synodal Way was launched on 17th October at the Cathedral in Norwich

A great deal of information was provided to be digested and disseminated in a short period of time and in such a manner as to encourage as many of the People of God to respond.

An offer had been made at this early stage by CathCom Ltd to facilitate the survey and the responses via an online service. This was agreed to be a suitable methodology while recognising that many will not have access to online systems and would necessarily have to submit their responses on paper or indirectly. Such responses could be uploaded by others with access to the facilities. The On-line survey was made 'live' on 28th November, 2021. The survey was set up to cater for Adults (over 18 years old), as well as for young people (under 18 years old), and links to the survey were also made available for Catholic schools, both primary and secondary, to use with appropriate questions. The response from young people below the age of 18 was disappointingly small. The questions (Appendix A) were made available to be used as paper copies and as an online e-survey. For adult users the questionnaire was also available in a variety of languages. Efforts were made to reach out to the marginalised through Caritas East Anglia (Appendix B) and in prisons to ensure that the voices of individuals were heard as well as the voices of parishes and groups.

Parishes were asked to identify co-ordinators who would provide contact at a parish level. Some questioned the basis for choosing these 'representatives': it was most expedient/practical to seek volunteers, often approached by parish clergy, since people do not, as a rule, step forwards to offer their services. Guidelines were established to help the parish co-ordinators and the Parish Priests in implementing the process and sent out (Appendix C) and setting the discernment of the Holy Spirit at the heart of the work.

The initial date set for submissions was January 22nd 2022 but this was extended to March 8th 2022, the feast day of St Felix, Secondary Patron of the Diocese, in the light of the extension granted from the Synod Office in the Vatican.

The timeline was recognised to be short and some concern was expressed at this from parishes and was discussed by facilitators at a national level. It was noted that in establishing the Synodal Way the process was as much part of the outcome as the responses and that the challenge of the short time frame arose out of necessity.

The responses were all collated and a team of first readers and second readers was established to read EVERY response. Each response was read **at least** twice and the readers were asked to provide a synthesis of the material for use in preparing this summary document.

In all 1031 responses were received via the online returns. This included responses uploaded on behalf of people who were unable to access the e-survey system. As a percentage of Mass goers, this represents approximately 11% of those attending, within the Diocese of East Anglia, in 2020, although it should be noted that the survey was open to all comers, not just those attending Mass. In addition, 24 parishes, 46% of parishes within the diocese, submitted 'whole parish' summaries following meetings within the parishes, reports were received from Caritas and other groups such as Justice and Peace Cambridge, and a number of 'hard-copy' individual responses were submitted to the diocesan offices via the postal service. Young people, as noted earlier, did not respond in significant numbers but have relatively recently met in a synodal form: the key findings are attached (Appendix D).

The People of God are being encouraged to embed the Synodal Way on the local Church so that it will help the Church to grow and spread the Good News. It is hoped that Synodality is here to stay and that the initial methodology will act as a stepping stone, which can be improved upon, and will help us to grow, together, on Communion, Participation and Mission.

Q1: How welcoming is the Church?

Preliminary:

We note that the responses we have to summarise have significant limitations. The total number of responses (1039) is a small proportion of the 7550 mass attenders (Pastoral Statistics 2020, excluding special communities) or the 17,600 identified pre-Covid. The questionnaire was intended also for non-churchgoers, and some responded, so this is a small proportion of our Catholic population. The written comments are a smaller subset of all respondents – little over 500. We noted that the number of responses from younger parishioners (especially those under 18 were very few. So this is not really a report on opinion, but an identification of issues which need more attention than others.

1.1 Communion

Only just over 50% of respondents considered the church to be welcoming. This is a matter for concern. Written comments focused on welcome at mass. Very many considered there was a warm welcome to mass. They agreed that welcome was the role of the whole parish, not just clergy or welcomers. But some wondered how far this extended into helping people to feel integrated into a parish.

The fairly consistently identified best practice included meeting and greeting people at the door, all parishioners noticing and specifically welcoming newcomers, having a welcome pack, greeting by clergy at the end of mass. In addition, having social time after mass and at other times and support for the sick extend the welcome.

Where criticisms were detailed, most identified as marginalised groups

- divorced and remarried couples
- LGBT individuals
- Singles

Welcome also relates to the design of church buildings and how easily disabled and other individuals can use them.

1.2 Participation

Suggestions for improved participation included training for welcomers and attention to including non-British ethnic individuals among those exercising ministry. Age-appropriate liturgy for children and space for parents with young children would make them more welcomed at mass.

There were diverging views about livestreamed masses going forward. Some saw this as outreach to those who could not come to church, others felt it damaged the sense of community. Where it is done, the viewer needs to be a participant, not just an observer.

A number of responses considered the roles permitted to women alienated them from the church.

1.3 Evangelisation

Some comments considered that the church does not reach out well to the lapsed. Indeed, some respondents admitted that they were not confident in how they should approach the lapsed. Most of these considered that the reasons for lapsing are varied, and that the church needs to do more to reach out and listen sympathetically to their concerns.

Parish websites and recent events magazines have a special place in reaching those who feel on the margins of the church. They do not require a person to come into the church, but they present a picture of the life of the parish which may encourage a person to take tentative steps back. Parish websites need to give prominence to what life as a Catholic is like – what the people are like and how they live their lives.

A few responses suggested that holding social events at non-church locations might provide a gentler introduction to the church.

1.4 Catechesis

Some comments suggested young people (16-35) would be more attracted by opportunities to explore belief and question it.

1.5 Ecumenism

Welcome for non-Catholic spouses attending mass was a concern of a few comments. Engagement in social action (foodbanks, environmental action, helping refugees, etc) are often undertaken with other churches or with secular organisations, both to be more effective, but also to show the place of faith outside 'going to church'.

1.6 Other issues

A number of comments welcomed the availability of traditional Latin liturgy and teaching.

Q2: How good are we at listening?

2.1 Communion

A very high proportion of responses felt that the Church had shown little previous interest in listening to the voice of the laity and its concerns about several issues including relationships, liturgy (including choice of music), the role of women and the use of Latin and Traditional Mass. There was a sense of many not feeling at one with the Church.

Whilst most felt they were listened and supported by their parish priests, with some exceptional priests noted, a number felt unheard, ignored, or blocked.

There were very strong feelings about the voices of women not being heard by the Church.

More attention to the voices of young people, the housebound and Catholics who no longer attend Mass was highlighted.

In the Church's liturgical life, many valued opportunities for Adoration and the Sacrament of Confession.

Opportunities at Mass for quiet reflection were particularly appreciated.

2.2 Participation

There was a diversity of ways for engaging in listening to each other in some parishes, including prayer groups, communion groups, cell groups. The effect of COVID lockdown restrictions curtailed many parish activities and many felt the need to re-energise such parish opportunities.

By contrast, a number felt that there were no effective forums for dialogue in their own parish including Parish Councils and that both formal and informal opportunities to listen and share faith should be a feature of parish life.

There was a strong sense that the Church needs to listen to those who feel excluded and feel they are unable to participate fully in the life of the Church, some leaving completely. This includes, young people, divorced, LGBT community, and the housebound.

2.3 Mission

Many felt that the Church's commitment to peace and social justice was not listened to by the world and its credibility had been damaged by sexual abuse and subsequent cover ups, misogyny, and lack of inclusiveness.

The Church needs attend to those on the margins of society in their own communities, engaging more robustly with the problems of the world which need our hope and compassion.

Opportunities for parishes to come together to discuss their role in their future mission of the Church were valued building upon the synodal process, and the Alive in Faith campaign.

2.4 Evangelisation

Many Catholics do not feel they can share their faith with others, inside and outside, which is to the detriment of the Church.

Strong feeling that the Church was ignored or derided for its teachings and that these were often misunderstood in the wider world.

The need to reach out to other faiths whilst not compromising our own faith was seen as important.

2.5 Catechesis

Many felt that support was needed in helping them to listen to God particularly in prayer and would welcome teaching and guidance from the Church.

The need for regular courses educating people about their Catholic faith, prayer traditions and Bible study was highlighted.

Many had valued the opportunity to attend retreats and missions and hoped that they would once again become a feature of Parish life.

2.6 Ecumenism

The need for humility in listening to what other Christian religious traditions might offer would help to find out what binds not separates us. Attending 'Churches Together' and other ecumenical events were examples of working together with other denominations. Practical engagement in food banks and other social programmes gave opportunities to work alongside and listen to other faith traditions.

Q3: How good are we at communicating?

3.1 Communion

Many share freely within parish friendships but find it difficult in wider groups or outside the parish, often for fear of criticism. There was appreciation for sharing groups within the parish and desire for more. There were pleas for love, listening, and respect: not the 'wagging finger'.

With many only attending Sunday Mass, there is little opportunity to build the trust required for good communication ('we are strangers to each other so don't feel able to share openly').

Many expressed a sense of alienation, even bitterness from not being listened to by 'Church', hierarchy, clergy. This was ascribed to marginal views (traditional or liberal); to youth, being a woman, and to race; to irregular circumstances (e.g. gay family members). There were complaints of weakness in regard to Church teaching (e.g. recommendation for 'more steadfast beliefs, not trying to accommodate sinners (homosexuality)', as well as lament for 'no room for dissenting views (LGBT)'; of being talked to but not listened to, especially by hierarchy above parish level (e.g. 'Church always imposing, rules, telling what to do'). And many expressed shame because of scandals within Church, Church practice or doctrine. Such disappointment/complaint was the most common theme in the answers.

3.2 Participation

Many feel free to share openly with their priest but a number feel that he is too busy. None said they felt free to speak truth in love to their priest. Some felt this Synod was a step towards being listened to.

There is widespread desire for more opportunities to participate in small faith groups and for opportunities for more adult formation and catechesis/apologetics; but a few voices warn that cliques restrict dialogue, and also that there are too many dissenting voices in the laity.

Some lament little communication from Bishop and Rome to ordinary Catholics - synodal meetings have helped and several hope they can continue.

Poorly updated parish websites and poor use of social media resources are significant obstacles to communication and participation.

The young share openly with friends but are cautious of sharing faith on social media.

3.3 Mission

A number use social media to speak truth and/or urged greater use of it by the Church, both in outreach and for communication within parishes, but Church voices on social media need to be well-formed. Similarly, there is regret that 'the Catholic Church does not make her beautiful teaching known in the public square'; and a sense that Catholic teaching should be promulgated more vigorously, especially by leaders speaking truth to government.

There is little sense of outreach as communities – throughout the focus of replies is within the parish.

3.4 Evangelisation

Most do not share their faith, afraid of prejudice, of causing offence, and of being wrong in doctrine; and of meeting disapproval within the Church.

Most do not use social media, fearful of the polarisation and radicalisation rife there.

3.5 Catechesis

There is a widespread sense of being poorly equipped to communicate or defend church doctrine, and a common desire for more adult formation and training, as well as learning resources on social media. This is the second most common theme in the answers.

3.6 Ecumenism

A few seek communication with other Christians, several say that Catholic parishes have little tradition of 'fellowship' and praise it in other denominations.

Q4: How well does the Church's liturgy inspire a deeper encounter with the Risen Lord?

The responses to the survey questions on the liturgy are overwhelmingly positive. Overall, 69% of respondents describe their experience of the Sunday liturgy as a positive one, 24% as a negative one, and 9% neutral.

Of those who give detailed answers to the questions, many respond positively to the word 'closer'. 'Closeness to God' is a recurrent theme, and clearly a valued consequence of the Sunday liturgy. That closeness is often described as being especially facilitated by the reverence with which the liturgy is celebrated. There are a significant number of appreciative comments on the reverence of priests, and a few complaints about lack of reverence. Alongside reverence there is also a desire for more silence in the liturgy: people describe themselves as being nourished by silence, which offers opportunities for deep and valued contemplation in the midst of the liturgy. Several respondents also speak of an anxiety about being distracted during the liturgy, and this anxiety seems to reflect or perhaps mirror the desire for silence and contemplation.

The question regarding 'thanks to God' also prompted many responses. The Mass itself is seen as an important occasion for thanksgiving; and that often begins with thanks for the liturgy itself and thanks that it is possible to attend Mass at all. Other common expressions of thanksgiving made in and through the Mass are for family, and for God's blessings generally.

The liturgy is also seen as the locus for intercessory prayer; often, again, for family, but also for the Church and for the wider world. Respondents particularly speak of asking in the Sunday Mass for strength and guidance for the week ahead. The liturgy is not insulated from the rest of the week, but is seen as a vital preparation for all that happens in the days following.

The liturgy also has an important role to play in personal conversion. Many speak of the Eucharist helping them to become better people: to become more faithful, more loving, more hopeful.

A common theme in responses is the importance of Sacred Scripture in the liturgy. A number of respondents speak of the value of reflecting on the Scripture readings both before and after the Mass. Many respondents also value homilies that open up the Word of God for the people. The homily itself is seen as a very significant element of the liturgy. Respondents particularly value homilies that both explain Sacred Scripture, and that relate to the reality of everyday life for the congregation.

Several respondents recognise a relationship between the Sunday liturgy and their wider prayer life. Personal prayer habits developed outside Mass are seen as making a positive contribution to the experience of the Sunday liturgy: the better we pray outside the Mass, the better we pray inside the Mass. In this respect there are particularly favourable mentions of prayer traditions such as the Benedictine, the Carmelite and the Ignatian, as well as the Daily Office, all of which are seen as having a beneficial impact on the Sunday liturgy. Many correspondents also recognise a positive role for parish devotional groups in supporting the liturgy: for example Bible Study groups, prayer groups, Lectio Divina. These are seen as nourishing the liturgy, and making parishioners' experience of the liturgy more fruitful.

Above all, the responses speak of the inestimable importance of the Mass to the faithful, and of its centrality to their lives.

Q5: Taking responsibility together

5.1 Communion

There is a deep desire for communion: many respondents stated that the formation of small groups would support their participation and personal faith. Respondents who do not fit into any of the groups which already commonly exist in parishes feel unsupported, such as unmarried people over the age of 35. There is a separation in many responses between parish and diocese, with most expressing a connection to their parish only.

5.2 Participation

The question itself led many to reflect on their own participation in the life of the Church and declare a desire to do more. The hierarchical structure of the Church is mentioned as an obstacle to participation, with a perception of the parish priest as the gatekeeper. Opportunities for mission are dictated by the needs of the community and what the parish priest is prepared to delegate, rather than the gifts or needs of the individual. There is a divided view on whether one should offer to serve/participate or wait to be asked. Further obstacles include age, disability, geography, personality and liturgical preference. Many women stated explicitly that they feel excluded from participation, as do divorced Catholics. Timing of activities is often cited as problematic by different groups. The pandemic is a significant factor in reducing participation, with many ministries not having restarted.

5.3 Mission

Respondents give examples of how they participate in the Church's mission: contributing to the liturgy, cleaning, safeguarding, participating in the parish council and financially contributing to the Church or Catholic charities. Engagement with the secular world is mentioned in terms of charitable works or writing to MPs. Personal prayer is sometimes identified as contributing to the Church's mission. However, many respondents state that they do not know how to participate in the Church's mission, or even what it is. Respondents with children feel their focus is upon raising children in the faith as their participation in the mission of the Church.

5.4 Evangelisation

Many respondents state that they do not deliberately evangelise, whilst giving clear examples of active evangelisation in their personal and professional lives. Respondents struggle with the fact the starting point for speaking about faith is often an attack on the Church or her teachings which limits conversational possibilities. Concern is expressed that speaking about faith in the workplace is challenging.

5.5 Catechesis

Catechesis and formation for adults, both to support participation in the Church's mission and growth in personal faith, is requested. Many respondents state that they do not know how to speak about faith or controversial topics. Spiritual direction and support for personal prayer are also mentioned as areas where the Church needs to provide more resources.

5.6 Other issues

Scandal and wrongdoing in the Church causes deep wounds, from child abuse to localised incidents, and there is concern about the impact this has on the faith of the community as well as on the public perception of the Church. Some people mention feeling ashamed to be Catholic and reluctant to invite others to participate because of this. There is a desire for the Church to accept responsibility and apologise. Rejection of offers of service is hurtful and makes respondents less willing to offer again. The treatment of women, LGBTQ+ individuals and relationships, and teaching on marriage are described as undefendable and cited as reasons for leaving the Church, notably for the children of practising Catholics.

Q7: How good is our relationship with other Christian traditions?

7.1 Ecumenism

In the nature of this question the responses fit under this heading.

There is a wide variation across the diocese in the views expressed. Some say the relationship with other denominations is improving with time, others say it is getting worse. Still others said there was no interaction or that it depended greatly on the views expressed by those who lead in a parish.

Some felt that they could not comment.

Within our own Church, there is a lack of understanding of what is meant by, or even which churches are, 'in communion' with the Holy See and what this means in practice. Even groupings within the RC church are seen by some as separate denominations and that we may learn from their experience of Christianity in a beneficial way such as the Transcendence of Liturgy from the Latin Mass Society, the shared traditions of the Ordinariate of Our Lady of Walsingham, the mysticism of the Eastern Orthodox Church, open floor and non-scripted praying in charismatic renewal. It seems that the Universal nature of the Church is not recognised.

Some concern was also expressed that RC groups from other countries worship separately and we also need to link with them.

There is a feeling that some other denominations have a better knowledge of scripture and that we can learn from love of Bible by Protestants: Bible study should be promoted.

A need for greater effort in apologetics was expressed and that we need to be seen as Catholic Christians by other Christian groups. We should behave in a way that [others] seek to learn from us.

The majority of responses support an ecumenical approach but there is a frequent suggestion that we could do better and that this work has a low priority and was further affected by the coronavirus pandemic.

There are also negative sentiments expressed with a view from some that the lead of the parish priest can influence the parish in its support or otherwise of ecumenical activities.

Those who are not in favour say that we are the One True Church and should not bring 'their' religion into ours.

Catholic truths are watered down by strong evangelical/pentecostal preaching and protestants spread mistruths: we should encourage them to become Catholics and abandon heresy.

A couple of respondents said that they can't tolerate CofE views on homosexuality and same sex marriage and that problems of the CofE arise because it conforms to societal expectations re gender, sexuality etc.

Several respondents say that there is historic wariness of Catholics in UK/ England and that there is still underlying anti-Catholic sentiment. Some converts to RC expressed strong views against ecumenism having moved away from other traditions.

Those in favour reported a lack of support from the RC community with only the 'same old faces' participating: RC can be insular and defensive. We should have a meeting of hearts with mutual respect, as we agree on much, so that we can focus on the common good. There is much we can learn from each other and many positive examples of inter-denominational actions were given.

It was noted that non-Catholic partners are excluded from communion but that we could benefit from their knowledge of other traditions.

Q8: How is leadership exercised and experienced in our parish?

8.1 Communion

The ecclesial theme of communion featured in some responses, and one comment reflected the centrality of the eucharist. In general, other concepts featured more, such as community spirit and a sense of unity resulting in fellowship when there is collaboration between groups in a parish and with the parish priest.

8.2 Participation

The commonest approach of the respondents was to describe the ways in which they could participate by joining one of many teams for tasks such as: cleaning, gardening, choir, finance, fabric, readers, money counters, social events group, stewarding, altar serving. In some parishes parishioners are encouraged to sign-up to join any of the rotas of helpers. The covid episode with the need for track and trace brought about more stewarding and cleaning roles.

Many were grateful for all that was done and some with younger family commitments regretted that they were not able to help more.

The tasks in a parish may be performed by a rather small group of parishioners, a group which can become a clique, unwelcoming to newcomers, and unwilling to accept new offers of help.

As regards a parish council, many parishes had them. Some parishioners would like to know more about who the members are and what their remit is. The extent to which parishioners felt that they had any opportunity to contribute their ideas ranged from considerable to negligible. There was praise for priests who are particularly good at collaborating with their parishioners, and relief that particularly unhelpful priests had moved on. There was understanding of the difficulties that elderly priests and aged parishioners had.

8.3 Mission

The salvation of souls rarely features in the responses. One respondent noted the inability to look toward outward mission without the priest playing a key role in enabling collaboration. Many respondents noted the difficulties faced by

the church in priest shortages, change of parish priests and the lack of younger volunteers. It was acknowledged that such difficulties in parish life impede the turn to outward mission by the laity.

Catechesis, online Masses, sharing faith and history as well as the organisation of special Masses for the elderly and the infirm were suggested as ways in which to participate in the mission of the church.

8.4 Evangelisation

Evangelisation as a theme didn't feature significantly; some people reflected on the gifts of the laity and ability of priests to harness these talents. Parish events, retreats, social gatherings but most especially work in schools with the youth were suggested as ways of evangelisation.

One response was that participation in the life and mission of the church was achieved simply by being the church and the fruits of that are salvation and reflecting the light of Jesus to the world.

8.5 Catechesis

First holy communion preparations were mentioned. A priest was criticised for requiring the children to attend classes very early in the morning and another for having too strict a compliance requirement for child and parent. In some parishes there are teams of catechists who do great work.

One response was for a need to keep learning, and another mentioned the fact that taking on a role as catechist enabled them to grow in the knowledge of their faith. However, one comment suggested that the church hierarchy tainted by scandal lack the credibility to be able to teach.

Overall, catechesis and formation were rarely mentioned.

8.6 Ecumenism

The Church of England was mentioned in the context of the way that their parishes are managed. Their requirement to have a PPC ensures that parish leadership is never a one-man band and there is some continuity as clergy are replaced. This takes some of the pressure off the clergy. It was noted that while a PPC can be very effective, it can also be obstructive. There was one other mention in passing of Churches Together, but no explanation of how effective this was.

8.7 Other issues

A few responses put forward the possibility of the church having priestesses and deaconesses and the possibility of women taking on less menial roles in the church. Permission of priests to marry was suggested as a solution to alleviate the burdens of priesthood.

'Clericalism' was mentioned by a few respondents and the self-effacing manner of a priest celebrating according to the 1962 use was also mentioned as an antidote to arrogance.

Overall, there were many responses highlighting the priest as the leader and shepherd of his flock and a call for the faithful to pray for their priests, to be humble on matters of leadership and to be obedient to God.

Several respondents reflected on their own age and that of priests and longed to see more young people playing active roles in parishes.

Q9: Are we open to the will of God and the guidance of the Holy Spirit?

9.1 Communion

How do we discern the direction of the Holy Spirit?

There was a strong response among many that in order to discern the direction of the Holy Spirit, we need regular opportunities for private prayer and meditation. This is at parish, Diocesan, and wider church levels. It was thought that being open to the guidance of the Holy Spirit is challenging for the Church, but efforts must be made to make this a regular practice between the hierarchy and God's people.

9.2 Participation

Is there freedom to exercise our particular gifts in the service of the Church?

Many respondents are able to exercise their gifts, but some felt their parish priest was not supportive, and cited examples of 'closed shops'. Appreciation of peoples' contributions by the parish priest is important; it gives encouragement that parishioner's gifts and talents are welcome. A significant proportion of respondents thought invitations to contribute to parish life should be made openly to all to avoid excluding anyone. Some noted that priests needed more support from the laity.

The issue of transparency and accountability varied. Some were very satisfied that their parish is open and accountable and gave examples of total support for the parish priest in reaching decisions. Others were not enthusiastic about the integrity of the decision-making processes. Several replies were critical of the accountability at Diocesan level and thought bishops are too remote. Synodal-style forums were suggested to assist with wider decision-making, so everyone

can express their views as a listening exercise. There was a strong sense that Vatican II was an inspired and inspirational attempt to enable the Church to engage with the world at many levels: ritual, language, governance and ecumenism to name a few, but that this promise and process has not been fulfilled.

9.3 Mission and Evangelisation

Views were expressed that the Church has moved to the periphery of society. To bring Christ to the wider world, it needs to engage in open, fearless, unprejudiced dialogue. There was a strong sense of the need to unite our collective gifts to reach out and share God's love. The need to come together to help the priests in their duties was evident. This would enable them to focus on teaching and shepherding the flock, instead of being burdened with administrative duties. It was stated many times that outreach to the young should become a much higher priority and that the Church needs to understand how to engage and communicate with younger people.

9.4 Catechesis

Several respondents thought members of the Catholic Church in England have little or no experience in the practice of "discernment", and that we could learn from other denominations in how to go about this.

Some suggested that supporting the parish priest in his role as a catechist can become an important part of our own faith journeys. As well as effective catechesis of the young, there also needs to be more ongoing catechesis for adults, with opportunities to learn and share to empower individuals. The Sunday homily was appreciated as useful but that more needs to be offered.

9.5 Ecumenism

It was thought that there is a huge wealth of prayer resource in Catholic spirituality which is often used by other Christian denominations, and that it would be good to promote this more within parishes.

Several people stated that we should listen to and share with our non-Catholic Christian brothers and sisters from time to time because we have become 'far too entrenched'.

9.6 Other issues

Many expressed the need to consider allowing married priests, the need for open and transparent discussion about the role and equality of women, divorce, contraception, and LGBTQ issues. Concern was expressed that these issues would be dismissed as 'private agendas'.

A significant number of respondents commented on the lack of humility shown by the Church in the paedophile crisis and on the outdated approach to women's roles. This makes many feel that the Church is not listening to the Holy Spirit.

Some noted that we have a Pope who is a wonderful example of a spiritual leader, but the hierarchy is rigidly bound to man-made traditions, rules and interpretations rather than Jesus' example and teaching. Responses indicate that we need to see a major shift in attitude and behaviour by the hierarchy.

Q10: Are we effective in sharing and passing on the faith as individuals, as parishes and as a Diocese?

10.1 Communion

People describe the central place of prayer and worship and ask for more opportunities for prayer. Different styles of worship are suggested as ways to bring people to faith. Respondents gave examples of their own experiences through participating in many different types of liturgy.

10.2 Participation

Many people wanted **better participation in Church life**. Better decision-making processes; Stronger parish councils; Some people were grateful for the opportunity to participate in the Synod. Acknowledgement that consensus is difficult. Some respondents worried that, through the synodal process, the hierarchy would either give up their responsibility for leadership or suppress the views of participants.

People ask for **better communication and collaboration at all levels**. Fear that synodal decision making will 'be a large group of old white celibate men in a small room, each trying to prevent anyone else from saying anything that might rock the boat'.

10.3 Mission

There needs to be **better engagement with families; more support for parents; better adult catechesis and an intentional mission to young adult Catholics from 17 years who are seen by many respondents as at risk of leaving the Church**.

Obstacles:

- i. The **child abuse scandal** has led people away and has made it difficult for Catholics to share their faith confidently.
- ii. The **lack of a leadership role for women** is difficult to explain and denies the Church of their talents. 'We need the wisdom and sensitivity of women in roles of leadership for a more complete and compassionate Church.'
- iii. **Church doctrine** Either because the Church is too restrictive in today's world or because it is not courageous enough in upholding its teaching. Marriage and sexual ethics were examples. 'My son is gay and married to his husband who is also Catholic. They feel excluded from the church.'
- iv. **The secular world's powerful influence on the beliefs of Catholics and non-Catholics.**
- v. **Church hierarchical structures** are too rigid; 'It seems more concerned with preserving the status quo than with genuinely addressing issues.'

10.4 Evangelisation

A few people say they are aware of their **personal responsibility** to hand on the faith. They are cautious and struggle with this. They say they need support from the Church to know how to answer people's questions about faith. Many people do not believe they have been invited to participate in this work.

Some people say that handing on the faith is not the role of the laity but of priests. Some look to the bishops for leadership and teaching.

People gave **personal stories of their sorrow and frustration** when family members especially children and grandchildren left the faith. 'Whilst the church may not understand/or agree with what they stand for, they are still children of God.'

'Children need to be surrounded by faith and shown it by a crowd of witnesses.'

10.5 Catechesis

Many people agree that **Church teachings are not taught well.**

People are either critical of schools' ability to hand on the faith or have had experience of school being an important place for catechesis. Many people say that school should be the primary source of information about the faith.

10.6 Ecumenism

Only two responses:

'As an interdenominational family we have found it difficult to pass on our faith because of our divided practice.'

Another wrote, 'Vatican II raised great ecumenical hopes. They have been sadly disappointed.'

11. Synthesis of Responses from Young People

11.1 Communion

The experience of young people in our catholic schools was very positive, feeling welcome and part of a community. In parishes it varied but young people often felt they were not as much part of the parish as older people.

11.2 Participation

They didn't generally feel listened to. There were opportunities for involvement such as altar serving but not much in positions of responsibility.

11.3 Mission

There is a sense of mission expressed in terms of raising money for Catholic charities and engagement in projects for those in need.

11.4 Evangelisation

They appeared more comfortable talking about their faith than older people. Catholic schools provide a good environment for talking about faith with people who aren't Catholic.

11.5 Catechesis

They recognised that they are taught about the faith in Catholic schools. Little reference was made to learning about their faith in the parish context.

11.6 Ecumenism

They just 'get on with it', working alongside people of other Christian denominations in fundraising projects etc., chatting with each other with respect and without seeing the differences.

11.7 Other issues

There were not many responses categorised as from those under 18 (28). However, it is quite possible that their views were included in many parish responses. In fact, some parish responses explicitly referred to young people's contribution. However, it is disappointing that it would appear most schools didn't facilitate responses.

It should also be noted that the 'Youth Synod' a few years ago successfully collected the views of young people.

Summary

It is not possible to estimate how widely the survey was offered within the Diocese of East Anglia and, undoubtedly, this could be improved upon, given further time and resources. The process is, it is hoped, here to stay, and will grow, improve, and establish as a means for the People of God, in Synod, to discern the way of the Church. in East Anglia

The responses fed back to the diocesan team will be used to inform the Diocese at all levels in its work of spreading the gospel and catechising the faithful as well as those making enquiries about the faith. The work of the Synod is ongoing and its fruits are yet to be realised.

THE TEN QUESTIONS TO BE CONSIDERED BY THE PARISHES AS THE DIOCESE EMBARKS ON THE SYNODAL PATHWAY

1. How welcoming is our parish?

How do we embrace and reach out as a parish, and as individuals to the community with us each Sunday – in person or via live-stream - as well as those who are still anxious about returning, those who seem to have fallen away, and those enquiring and coming to us as newcomers?

How welcoming do people find us?

2. How good are we at listening?

Our world is full of noise and opinion; full of people making their voices heard, and those who feel that they go unnoticed. Are we good listeners?

Do we feel listened to?

How do we learn to listen well – to each other, to the wider world, to God himself?

3. How good are we at communicating?

Do we feel able to share our thoughts and ideas openly with each other?

Are we living out our baptismal vocation, ready to speak the truth, in love, when necessary?

Does this include social media?

4. How well does the Church's liturgy inspire a deeper encounter with the Risen Lord?

Does the Sunday Mass bring me closer to God, and enable me to be fed by Him?

When I leave the Mass, what do I take out to the wider world?

Does my personal prayer life bring me closer to God and connect me with the Church?

When I pray, for what do I give thanks to God? – and what do I ask of Him?

5. How well do I understand and participate in the mission of the Church?

Do I feel that I am playing my part, and pulling my weight, in the life and mission of my parish, the diocese, and the universal Church? Or is that somebody else's job?

How do I respond to the Lord's call to witness to the Gospel?

Do I keep my life of faith to myself, or do I share it with others in word or deed? What would help me to do that better?

6. How well do we engage with the wider world?

Do we engage with those around us: with our local community, with the life of our country, and our world?

Do we believe that the Church truly has something to offer the world at large? Or are we too focussed on ourselves?

7. How good is our relationship with other Christian traditions?

What is our relationship like with our brothers and sisters in other Christian traditions?

Do we listen to each other?

What can we learn from them? – and what can they learn from us?

8. How well do we work as a team in our parish?

How is leadership exercised and experienced in our parish?

Are there positive ways in which we help to participate in the life and mission of the Church?

What are the fruits of this collaboration?

What are the obstacles and challenges?

9. How open are we to the will of God and the guidance of the Holy Spirit?

How do we discern the direction in which the Holy Spirit is leading us rather than just following our own private enthusiasms or agendas?

Is there freedom to exercise our particular gifts in the service of the Church?

Is my local community accountable and transparent when it comes to making decisions and, if not, what would help to remedy this?

Do I support the bishops and priests in arriving at their decisions?

10. How well do we hand on the faith?

Are we effective in sharing and passing on the faith as individuals, as parishes, and as a diocese?

What would help us to do this better?

Can we see ways in which we might continue to work in a 'synodal' way – praying, discussing, and discerning together, not reliant on majority votes, but on a genuine consensus – a coming together of hearts and minds under the guidance of the Holy Spirit?



The Caritas Development Worker, Jacinta Welch, organised two online events in February 2022 to support the Diocese of East Anglia Synodal Team and parishes, in reaching those on the margins of the Church and hearing their voices in the Synodal Pathway.

This, loosely organised into the framework of the ten questions, is a set of notes on what the participants felt moved to share with others:

1 How welcoming is our parish?

- There is scope for the parish being warmer and more welcoming since it is too much like a club.
- A parish needs to offer opportunities to participate spiritually other than liturgically and thereby experience discipleship and mission.
- Visiting other parishes has been to be inspired by how well Mass is said elsewhere.
- Parish for most people is central to their experience of church.
- We need to reach outside of the church and to welcome in those who have left and those who have never joined.
- A very positive experience of moving to a new parish during the covid restrictions and receiving a welcoming and supportive response to her disability which demonstrated the attentiveness of parishioners to the needs of others.
- Parish should be more welcoming and inviting to those who are not part of the parish already. It acts more like a club and needs to reach outside itself more.

2 How good are we at listening?

- This listening had come at the right time. Many think that there are too many rules and regulations in the Church and an insufficient listening to God.
- Listening and participation are very important
- There needs to be structures for listening, including – most importantly - for the clergy to learn how to listen to and engage the laity.
- There is a need for a bigger space for dialogue.
- We need to facilitate better listening. Some are good listeners, some try to help, others need to listen better.
- Personal contact is very important

3 How good are we at communicating?

- There is a need to come together and to pray and discuss – there has been no synodal meetings in some parishes
- Love is not being perceived either by those outside or indeed those within. It is an inhibition to the participation of the young.
- There is a richness in unity - bridge the gap across generations
- There are not many opportunities to share our opinions. The structures are not there for doing so.
- With patience all is possible - take time to make the effort
- Light touch is more effective.

4 How well does the Church's liturgy inspire a deeper encounter with the Risen Lord?

- Living streaming and/or the pandemic restrictions have changed the perspective on who and what is my parish and on the perception of love thy neighbour.
- Participation in Mass through the internet can reach others outside of the church. It's good to be able to attend Mass at other parishes and can be a source of inspiration.
- Our prayer and spiritual life need to be developed by the teachers of the faith, which is then fed by the holy sacraments.
- A welcome outcome of Vatican II was the invitation to participate, particularly in the liturgy. More recent experiences of opportunities to participate have been limited not only by one parish priest with his own problems being followed by another but also by the successor not having a parish council. Knowing fellow parishioners by their names, was better done in other Christian churches as was reaching out to the wider local community.
- Attendance at church out of fear needs to be dispelled

5 How well do I understand and participate in the mission of the Church?

- As disciples and missionaries, we should develop a relationship with Jesus.

6 How well do we engage with the wider world?

- Unclear what actions were implied by reaching out to the marginalised and the poor.
- For everyone, but especially for those who feel that compared to their neighbours they have an abundance of gifts, there is a yearning for guidance on how to discern how much of and how to share one's own gifts and resources beyond your family.
- No one is an island; we need to come together for the common good. Love should go past the rules. There is too much worrying about the rules. We are called to be open to each other.

7 How good is our relationship with other Christian traditions?

- By looking at other Christians we can learn and love from each other. Outside "the church" is where we should be since outside "the church" and family is the hard part of loving others.
- Ecumenical gatherings have gone into abeyance since lockdown began.

8 How well do we work as a team in our parish?

- Enthusiastic about synodality but it needs to be geared towards listening to those who have left and are not coming back
- Priests do not tap into what skills/talents are available among their parishioners
- The leadership capacity/potential amongst the women is neglected.
- Children and young people, other than at their First Communion and Confirmations are invisible
- There needs to be more day-to-day activity such as reviving prayer groups
- Too many of these obstacles flow from the (lack of appropriate) training for/of priests.
- In the role as gate keepers priests determine the acceptability or otherwise of ideas when they are proposed.
- The wider demographic is not evident when elderly white men fill most leadership roles.
- The impact of covid has been a loss of participation by parishioners – why are they not coming back – why are they not being drawn back
- There is an absence of social events.
- People are becoming disillusioned.
- Training in people skills amongst clergy appears to be non-existent, yet what use is a priest who does not know how to engage with his parishioners, or – worse still - who believes that only he is capable of making decisions? Such arrogance stifles laity involvement and input and is a waste of talents.

9 How open are we to the will of God and the guidance of the Holy Spirit?

- Synodality is the real work of the Spirit and what the church needs.
- The Holy Spirit guides us into a relationship with the Church through the parish. It all depends on the parish and if it does not work well, it will not be a positive experience for many. Is religion more than parish life?
- We have not been brought up to believe that the Spirit is with us without qualification
- It is 60 years since Vatican II – a long time, too long to wait – like the turning of an ocean liner. Patience is good but impatience guided by the Holy Spirit is now required.

10 How well do we hand on the faith?

- Faith needs to be explored as a community. This is much better done in the evangelical churches who are adept at reaching out to the marginalised and the poor especially in their use of social media.
- As missionaries and disciples, we need to understand why people have moved away from the church and why they are staying away. When someone stops coming to Mass, no one ever asks them why that is. The opportunity has gone. They need to be contacted and valued. We take it for granted that they drop out, which is a sadness and a lacking on our part. We must understand the reasons and keep up the friendships.

General Points about the Synodal Process and/or the Church

- Thankful and hopeful that this is a first step towards our voices being listened to.
- There is a need to come together and to pray and discuss – there has been no synodal meetings in some parishes.
- A careful reading of the diocesan synodal questionnaire had not dispelled the feeling that the questions were nebulous. They were ones that had been both asked for a long time about actions that also been attempted in the past.
- Running across the boundaries of the questions was the need to reflect on how far the changes that Vatican II had heralded had been implemented and how can more be done to implement the others.
- Young people are said to be the **future** - however, they are the present, i.e. **now**; we cannot put them aside to an ill-defined future! - evangelisation needed. If the Synod continues plugging this angle, then they remain at risk of continuing to create a self-fulfilling prophesy. Young people are not hard to engage. You simply go see them and ask them. Or you digitally invite them and ask them. It's such a weak argument being perpetuated by a lot of people who have often greatly benefited from keeping us quiet.
- Younger adults 21-45 hardly represented at all in diocesan leadership roles / parish council roles OR diocesan media - despite repeatedly younger people raising concerns about this. Different political voting system needs to be considered to directly cause proportional representation.



Guidelines for Parish Priests for the Synodal Way process

The following set of guidelines are meant as a help to facilitate the Synodal Way process to begin in your Parish, but they are not prescriptive and you may deviate from them as you feel is necessary within your particular context.

1. Liaise with your co-ordinator for your Parish.
2. Introduce the co-ordinator to the Parish and let it be known that the process has now begun in our Diocese and encourage everyone to take part in the discussions, reflections and in reporting back to the Diocese directly through the online survey on the Parish website, Diocesan website or, where this is not possible, through arrangements directed by the co-ordinator.
3. There are a set of ten guiding questions prepared to help steer the discussions and these are available on the Diocesan website www.rcdea.org.uk and we hope that they will be available via parish websites.
4. There is a prayer card with the prayer *Adsumus Sancte Spiritus* to be made available. We ask that all use this prayer as they gather to discern their responses. A copy is given below.
5. Ideally, it is suggested that small groups of Parishioners should meet to discuss the questions together as a faith community. This could take place in person, or online, as is seen appropriate. Do consider how this will work in practice, whilst remaining Covid-safe.
6. If Parishioners feel unable to meet in groups, it is absolutely fine for individuals to make their own responses directly.
7. We would like to encourage as many people as possible to use the online surveys for their responses, as this will greatly minimise the amount of administrative work involved in gathering everyone's thoughts from the whole Diocese.
8. Where it is not possible for people to use the online surveys, we are suggesting that the Parish Co-ordinator distributes paper versions of the questions and arranges for them to be gathered back within a set time and the information uploaded to the online survey.
9. We leave the timing of the discussions to you, but responses must be returned to the Diocese by 22 January 2022. It is suggested that a note is kept of who the paper versions have been given to, so that they are not 'lost' in the system.
10. Each Parish is being asked to have completed this process of discussions by 22nd January 2022. It will not be possible to include responses submitted after this date.
11. Do keep a small section about the Synodal Way process reserved in your weekly newsletter and on your websites each week, as a reminder to everyone to take part. More information can be found on the Diocesan website www.rcdea.org.uk
12. It is important that those on the margins of society/Parish/those who have fallen away from regular practise of the faith and those who are curious about a life of faith, are positively encouraged to take part. It is up to you how to promote this in your area.

If you have any questions about this process, do contact the Diocesan Synodal Way Team at: synodalway@rcdea.org.uk

More information can be found on the Diocesan website www.rcdea.org.uk

Prayer for the Synod: *Adsumus Sancte Spiritus*

Every session of the Second Vatican Council began with the prayer *Adsumus Sancte Spiritus*, the first word of the original Latin, meaning, “We stand before You, Holy Spirit,” which has been historically used at Councils, Synods and other Church gatherings for hundreds of years, and is attributed to Saint Isidore of Seville (c. 560 - 4 April 636). As we embrace this Synodal Process, this prayer invites the Holy Spirit to be at work in us so that we may be a community and a people of grace. For the Synodal journey from 2021 to 2023, we propose to the following simplified version,¹ so that any group or liturgical assembly can pray it more easily.

**We stand before You, Holy Spirit,
as we gather together in Your name.
With You alone to guide us,
make Yourself at home in our hearts;
Teach us the way we must go
and how we are to pursue it.
We are weak and sinful;
do not let us promote disorder.
Do not let ignorance lead us down the wrong path
nor partiality influence our actions.
Let us find in You our unity
so that we may journey together to eternal life
and not stray from the way of truth
and what is right.
All this we ask of You,
who are at work in every place and time,
in the communion of the Father and the Son,
forever and ever.
Amen.**

¹ The original version of the *Adsumus Sancte Spiritus* can be found on the Synod.va website.



Guidelines for Parish Co-ordinators for the Synodal Way process

Thank you very much for agreeing to become the Parish Co-ordinator for the Synodal Way process for our Diocese.

A response to the Bishops' Conference is required by 22nd February 2022. Each Parish is being asked to complete this process **by 22nd January 2022**.

The following set of guidelines are meant as a help to facilitate the Synodal Way process to begin in your Parish, but they are not prescriptive and you may deviate from them as you feel is necessary in within your particular context.

1. Make yourself known as the Parish Co-ordinator for this process.
2. Familiarise people with the Synodal prayer *Adsumus* which we would ask for people and groups to use before gathering their thoughts and responding.
3. Ten guiding questions are being distributed. The questions will be made available via parish websites and the diocesan website as well as in a pdf format for printing for those who cannot access the internet.
4. Encourage as many people as possible to participate in this exercise, including those at the margins of society/Parish/those who have fallen away from the faith and those who are curious about a life of faith.
5. Ideally, it would work best if people could gather in small groups to discuss the questions together as a faith community and submit responses directly.
6. We would like to encourage as many people as possible to use the online surveys to submit their responses, as this will greatly minimise the amount of administrative work involved in gathering everyone's thoughts from the whole Diocese.
7. Where it is not possible for people to use the online surveys, we are asking that the Parish Co-ordinator distributes paper versions of the questions and arranges for them to be collected back within a set time, and the information uploaded to the online survey. It is suggested that a note is kept of who the paper versions have been given to, so that they are not 'lost' in the system.
8. We leave the timings to you, but responses **must** be returned **to the Diocese by 22nd January 2022**. It will not be possible to include any responses received after this time.
9. Do keep a small section about the Synodal Way process reserved in your weekly newsletter and on your websites each week, as a reminder to everyone to take part. More information can be found on the Diocesan website (link here).

Further information about this important process is available on the Diocesan website www.rcdea.org.uk

If you have any questions about this process, do contact the Diocesan Synodal Way Team at: synodalway@rcdea.org.uk

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nor partiality influence our actions.
Let us find in You our unity
so that we may journey together to eternal life
and not stray from the way of truth
and what is right.
All this we ask of You,
who are at work in every place and time,
in the communion of the Father and the Son,
forever and ever.
Amen.**

¹ The original version of the *Adsumus Sancte Spiritus* can be found on the Synod.va website.

KEY RESEARCH FINDINGS IN SUMMARY

- Young Catholics typically divide into three groups related to their stance on the interaction between faith and society: ‘apologists’, ‘abstainers’ and ‘assimilators’.
- Young Catholics in 2017 are more likely than those in 2009 to view ‘helping others’ as a desirable aspiration, and more expect to help others in the future.
- Young Catholics in 2017 expressed stronger levels of concern about local and global issues than in 2009, particularly about terrorism.
- Female young Catholics say they have taken more action on social issues in the past year than their male counterparts; but they are also more likely to say that they have experienced stress and other negative emotions in the past week.
- Young Catholics in 2017 say that they attend Mass more regularly than their counterparts in 2009; males are more likely to say they attend Mass than females.
- Young Catholics might not always choose to describe themselves as such; those who do describe themselves as ‘Roman Catholic / Catholic’ may have a pick-and-mix approach to their Catholic identity.
- Young Catholics in 2017 express lower levels of agnosticism and atheism and higher levels of belief than their counterparts did in 2009; this is particularly striking amongst ‘Non Identifying Catholics’.

Appendix E

Synthesis of Parish Responses

Communion Taking 'Communion' in its broadest meaning, there was a sense of togetherness and welcome while acknowledging more could be done. People who go to different Masses (either times or Mass Centres) within the same parish do not necessarily know each other. There need to be opportunities for coming together and growing in faith outside of Mass such as bible study groups etc. There was particular concern that some groups such as divorced Catholics and people from the LGBT+ community may not feel as much part of the church as they should.

Participation There was always a core of people who participated in the life of the parish beyond Mass but a frequent comment was that it was a small group of people who 'did everything' and more needs to be done to involve more people. Parishes do not make use of all the skills and talents parishioners have. The pandemic has not helped with people participating, although it has meant many parishes set up streaming etc. so people could participate online. More social events may help and should not be regarded as an optional extra but a valuable part of community building and often as a pre-cursor to evangelisation.

Mission Parishes generally have a sense of mission in that they know they have a purpose and role in the wider world, rather than just a community for the sake of being a community. This is often expressed by parish organisations such as the SVP, supporting national Catholic charities, such as CAFOD and local initiatives such as food banks etc.

Evangelisation Most parishes recognised this was important but did not feel they 'handed on the faith' well. This was highlighted by the decline of Mass attendance of parishioner's children. There is a need to reach people who are outside the Church, to welcome in those who have left, and those who have never been a part of the Church. Many said they already did or would like to participate more in organised activities such as the procession of witness on Good Friday. On an individual level people would like more training on passing on how to evangelise in their daily lives.

Catechesis: Good for First Communion and Confirmation but it was felt, there was a need for catechesis in between these two sacraments and a need for ongoing adult catechesis and formation. Few parishes provided this..

Ecumenism Parishes were engaged in ecumenical activities such as food banks and activities organised by Churches Together such as Remembrance Sunday Services, but more usually it was a small number of individuals from each parish rather than the parish as a whole. Ecumenical initiatives have declined since the pandemic.

Other issues: It was noted that on a parish level of synodal discussion, women were heavily involved but doubted whether they would be as the responses were collated. Some felt that the whole process was a paper exercise and wouldn't really make any difference. Several responses felt the questions had been constructed to deliberately avoid controversial issues such as clergy abuse, women priests, divorced Catholics etc. These were felt to be important issues that also needed to be discussed.