

## Parish response to the Synod

### The process

- A small subcommittee of the Pastoral Council has met at weekly intervals since January to plan the response to the invitation from Pope Francis.
- The entire parish has been informed that the Synod is taking place and its purpose since last October by:
  - Initial introductory statement in the weekly newsletter
  - The Synod prayer which has been printed in the newsletter and has been prayed aloud at every weekend Mass since October. This practice will continue until the completion of the Synod in 2023 to keep the parish alive to its being a long term process which still needs much prayer.
  - Addresses on the Synod at the end of all weekend Masses for the previous four weeks, the first one explaining the background and the three subsequent weeks focusing on each of the Synod themes of Communion, Participation and Mission.
  - The insertion of two pages about the Synod into the newsletter for four weeks. These provided further information about the Synod and invited parishioners to make their own responses to a range of printed questions. Postcards, post it notes and printed sheets were provided, encouragement was given to chat over coffee after Mass and comment boxes were provided in the churches and church halls.
  - Display boards publicising the Synod in the entrance to each church.
- On the weekend of 26/27 February every member of the congregation was given a postcard with one of the following two questions (from the Bishops Conference of England and Wales) printed on each side:
  - *What changes need to be made in our **parish** for us to share fully in the mission given to us by Jesus Christ, to make it more vibrant and effective in the world today?*
  - *What changes need to be made in the **Church at large** for it to share fully in the mission given it by Jesus Christ, to make it more vibrant and effective in the world today?*
- In lieu of a homily parishioners were invited to write their response to each question. The postcards were collected after Mass and the results collated.
- Questions provided in the preceding four weeks were derived from the ten thematic nuclei of the Preparatory Document and were not all that easy to answer. As we believed that the final invitation to a response should be inclusive of all parishioners the questions asked of them needed to be understood by all hence the comparative simplicity of the two questions above.
- We believed the two questions would enable a response by all to Pope Francis invitation to all to
  - *'journey together', 'to pray and reflect and to be inspired to dream about the church we are called to be in this millennium, to imagine a different future for the church in keeping the mission she has recd, to listen to the Holy Spirit'.*

### The numbers involved in the consultation

- The average Mass attendance according to the parish return of October 2022 is 246.
- All the Synod information, including the questions and the invitation to respond, was put on the parish website
- 204 written responses were returned to the parish.
- Some parishioners did not return a written response as they said they had written directly to the Bishop.
- The average attendance at Mass includes a number of young children who did not make a written response.
- Virtually the entire parish of practicing Catholics was involved in the praying and listening exercise.
- A big majority of practicing Catholics accepted the invitation to take part in discernment and response.

## **The result**

### **Over view**

- The tone of the written responses was supportive. Many/most were written with a sense of great affection for the church and commitment to it. The majority were thoughtful, reflective and positive. Criticism was essentially constructive and indicated that it was being made ‘more in sorrow than in anger’. Several wrote that there was nothing wrong with the church.
- Likewise the response to the need for changes in the parish. There was a solid sense of personal commitment to the parish. The fact that two parishes have recently merged was inevitably referred to but although some were critical of/disbelieving of its success, for most no reference was made to this. A number of parishioners saw no need for change in the parish.
- Regardless of which questions were asked the same responses were made. Identical major themes emerged in response to questions which were directly linked to the three themes of Communion, Participation and Mission, and to those which came from last week’s two direct questions.
- Reporting the overall outcome inevitably loses the power and authority of some of the written responses but samples of these could easily be provided.

### **Main themes**

- **Inclusion**

This was the major single theme – that the church should not reject people but welcome anyone in good faith, in particular those who identify as LGBT and those who have divorced and remarried. 87 of 204 respondents wrote of this – 43% of respondents or 35% of the parish.

- **The role of women in the church**

The second major theme. 11% of parishioners believe the role of women in the church should be addressed and a further 13% believed they should be ordained as deacons or priests.

- **Attend particularly to young people**

The importance of listening to and attracting young people was very important at parish and overall church level. Proposed by 13.8%

- **A married priesthood**

This was as important as attending to young people - proposed by 13.4%

### **Detailed results**

- The main findings are tabulated on the next sheets below. The original cards and sheets have been retained in church so that we can respond to the suggested changes to be made to the parish. The results were tabulated by the parish secretary and the chair of the Pastoral Council and reported to and discussed by the Pastoral Council.
- Suggested changes under the heading of ‘changes to the parish’ that were relevant to the whole church have been included in the list below.
- Suggested changes that were very specific to the situation in our own parish have not been detailed below but they are being collated so that the parish can respond to the suggestions made.
- The percentages given are percentages in relation to the parish population and not in relation to the number of responses.

## Responses to Synod Question:

*What changes need to be made in the Church at large for it to share fully in the mission given it by Jesus Christ, to make it more vibrant and effective in the world today?*

**204 responses received overall.** Based on the Annual Return for 2021 which gave an average weekly attendance at mass as 246, the response rate represents **a return of 82.9% of active parishioners.**

Responses are ranked in order of priority. The top six priority areas may be combined as they relate to overall inclusivity and diversity in the Church. Taken in this manner 81.9% of responses relate to the desire to see improvements in these areas.

Priority	Issue	Responses	% Responses
1.	Make the church more inclusive by welcoming people who identify as LGBT. (Also, people of no faith, sex workers, those who have had abortions.)	63	25.6%
2.	Listen to/attract young people/young families. Aim messages at them. More "modern" inclusive services.	34	13.82%
3.	Ordain married men/married priests.	33	13.4%
4	Ordain women as priest/deacons.	31	12.6%
5	The general role of women in the church	27	10.9%
6	Make the church more inclusive by welcoming remarried/divorced people and allow them to receive Communion and remarry in church.	24	9.7%
7.	Acknowledge sex abuse scandal and other corruption in the Church.	17	6.9%
8.	Improve relationship with/attitude to other Christian churches	16	6.5%
9.	Allow non-Catholics to receive Communion	12	4.8%
10.	Improve relationship with/attitude to non-Christian religions	11	4.4%
11.	Drop opposition to artificial contraception	7	2.8%
12.	Allow general absolution instead of /as well as individual confession.	5	2%

## Other comments/categories of response

<b>Communication</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More effective use of social media (5)</li> <li>• Improved /simpler communications from the Bishop (2)</li> <li>• Listen to the laity (2)</li> <li>• Counter misinformation in the media (1)</li> <li>• Relate to the congregation instead of constantly telling us we are sinners (1)</li> <li>• More communication of faith from Bishops – we need inspiring and to be encouraged (1)</li> <li>• Church in the press is often very negative (1)</li> </ul>
<b>Leadership</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Greater leadership from English Bishops, throughout Covid and social justice issues (1)</li> </ul>
<b>Faith teaching / training more people active in the Church</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Radical approach to teaching faith/improve teaching in Catholic schools (3)</li> <li>• Priests and Catholic teachers should be giving “the same teaching/s” (1)</li> <li>• Training groups/ for those who want to help in church activities etc (1)</li> <li>• Allow abortion in certain circumstances (1)</li> <li>• ‘Don’t move closer to the world – be the light on the hill, the voice in the wilderness’ (1)</li> <li>• Explain clearly, firmly, dispassionately church view on homosexuality, abortion, euthanasia (1)</li> <li>• Be more outspoken about traditional values on abortion and euthanasia (1)</li> </ul>
<b>Modernisation v revisionism</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• People should never be denied sacraments (1)</li> <li>• Tackle revisionism - rejection by clergy of Vatican II principles/precepts (1)</li> <li>• Change the thinking “As we have done it this way for centuries it must be correct” (1)</li> <li>• Ask what Jesus would do if he was here today (1)</li> <li>• Make annulments more affordable (1)</li> <li>• Reinstate Latin Mass, even if only once a month (1)</li> <li>• Revert to the 1962 Roman Missal (1)</li> <li>• Half hour weekly adoration service (1)</li> </ul>
<b>Role in the world: Social justice, poverty climate change, conflict resolution</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Be more engaged in real world issues – poverty, conflict, social justice, climate changes at all levels of the hierarchy not just Pope Francis (4)</li> <li>• Be more courageous in preaching truth in world political and social context (3)</li> <li>• Speak out against corruption in the governments of the world and address international issues (1)</li> <li>• Support to Ukraine</li> <li>• Increase involvement in environmental issues</li> </ul>
<b>Sale of assets</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sell off Church assets to support the poor (4)</li> <li>• Use funds for housing the homeless in the UK as well as in Third World (2)</li> <li>• Sell expensive artworks (2)</li> </ul>