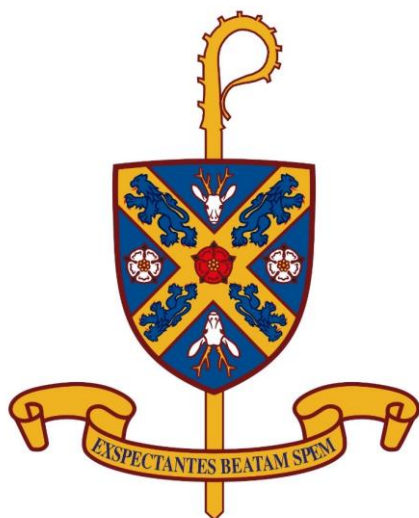


PARISH CONSULTATION

DIOCESAN SYNTHESIS



APRIL 2022



ROMAN CATHOLIC DIOCESE
OF
MIDDLESBROUGH



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DIOCESE OF MIDDLESBROUGH

Diocesan Synthesis

INTRODUCTION

Our Diocese has embarked on the Synodal journey some of us with initial anxiety but then with increasing hope and enthusiasm. However, there are some who have not yet engaged with it, perhaps because they doubt that the Church is really listening or open to change.

Bishop Terry appointed our Diocesan Contact Person and then gathered a small team for a first meeting online in July 2021. In a series of meetings, we gradually enlarged the team to include 2 members who work with people on the margins of society; 2 who work with students in schools; one young adult. By October we were a team of 10.

The Contact Team invited parish priests to appoint two Parish Co-ordinators for each parish and set up two training days: one (in October) for priests; the second (in early November) for Parish Co-ordinators together with the leaders of apostolic organisations. Both days included a time of prayer and Exposition as well as background information about the Synod. We adopted the method of Spiritual Conversation on the Jesuit model, showing a video of this at the training days and giving an opportunity to try it in small groups. Both training days had an encouraging sense of enthusiasm, even excitement, about the journey we were beginning.

Parishes were then left to set up Synod conversations in whatever way seemed best to them. We held a Zoom catch-up meeting in mid-January for Parish Co-ordinators and Parish priests and were encouraged by their continuing enthusiasm for the process and the progress made. There was a wide variety of approach.

Conversations were held in 2/3 of the parishes of the Diocese and in apostolic organisations, including the LGBT+ Ministry. A Synod Day was convened for religious, with 8 different orders represented. Some people from the margins in Middlesbrough were invited to give their contributions. Around 2/3 of the Catholic Schools in the Diocese held conversations between staff, students and/or parents. At least two parishes held a Synod conversation with local ecumenical leaders. Some parishes also used questionnaires in an effort to reach more people, and a few individuals submitted responses directly. We gave more weight to the fruits of group conversations, where people have listened to the Holy Spirit and to each other.

There is a great diversity of views: some favour the Tridentine Mass; some advocate the ordination of women. Most contributions seem mature and well balanced. There is some dissatisfaction with the Church as it is, but a hopeful and encouraging openness to change. A few however are fearful of change. Overall, the synodal journey is seen as an exciting opportunity. Many were surprised to discover the power and freedom of a spiritual

conversation. Listening and speaking to each other under the guidance of the Holy Spirit proved joyful, liberating, and encouraging.

Some priests have not responded to invitations to take part in the synodal process. This may be because they are tired and busy, although some priests (and some laity) are sceptical about being listened to or of anything changing. Some priests deliberately didn't take part in their parish conversations for fear their presence would influence people's freedom to speak out. Priests should be able to take part in conversations alongside their parishioners, but we appreciate that this could affect both the dynamic and the outcome.

Our synodal journey so far has taken place after two years of the coronavirus pandemic. Covid has brought obvious sadness and suffering, with many people losing family or friends and some unable to visit the dying or attend funerals. Many have missed seeing family members and mixing with friends, and there are some who have been, and still are, isolating. The residents of care homes have suffered particularly from the prohibition of visitors. However, there were some surprising benefits: the live streaming of Masses; the intimacy of online media for social contact and for prayer; it showed people what's important in their lives; it enabled at least the Stewards in parishes to get to know people by name and so give a better welcome; an increased willingness and ability to meet by video conference.

MAIN THEMES

Welcome and Community

Many parishes are friendly, welcoming communities, though some say they would like to know more people's names. The pandemic brought together those who were able to come to Mass, giving a sense of camaraderie. Because we had to keep a list of attendees at Mass, the Stewards got to know and welcome people by name. There is sadness that some haven't yet felt able to return to Mass, and concern to find ways to include them fully in the Parish.

Many parishes mention a determination to be ever more welcoming and inclusive. They express concern for groups of people who may have experienced exclusion, such as those who are disabled, divorced and re-married, LGBT+, and those who suffer mental health problems or homelessness.

Relationships within parishes are nurtured by a variety of spiritual and social events, many of which are just starting up again after the pandemic. We also get to know each other when working together, even on something as mundane as cleaning the church. A desire is expressed for new groups and different events to build the community.

Communication

There are calls for improved communication within parishes and in the Diocese, and indeed throughout the Church. People want to know how and why decisions are made and where their money is going. This would help them to feel involved in the community and enable all the baptised to share in responsibility for the Church.

Children and young people

There is widespread concern at the lack of children and young people at Mass in our parishes. The busy lives of parents with young children, often with both parents working, make it difficult for families to take a full part in the parish community. There is a proliferation of sports and other activities for children taking place on Sunday mornings. Improving the links between school and parish are suggested, both inviting schools to participate in a Parish Mass and by priests and parishioners going into schools. Parishes struggle to hang on to young people after their Confirmation. We hope to use their strong sense of social justice to engage them in social action through their parishes.

Formation needs

A widespread desire is expressed for more formation, both spiritual and cognitive. Parishes express a need for input on prayer and scripture, as well as Church teaching. There are suggestions for more small groups to meet to share scripture and prayer. Formation and training will be needed for lay people so they can take on some of the responsibilities currently born by priests.

Through Synod conversations people are discovering the benefits of listening to each other in small groups and communicating on a deeper level than in normal social interactions. Some would like help to develop their listening skills.

Parish Priests and lay responsibility

There is great appreciation for our priests and for the increasingly complex job they do. Many of them are ageing while also taking on extra responsibilities as their numbers reduce. Parishioners express a willingness to take on more responsibility for the running of parishes. They would love their gifts to be used and valued. Appropriate training will be needed for many roles. We expect those who have taken the online Certificate in Pastoral Ministry will be able to contribute greatly in their parishes.

The role of women in the Church

Women's voices should be heard more in the Church and women's gifts appreciated and used to enrich the Church. In society outside the Church, including business, politics, and law, it is

widely recognised that organisations benefit when leadership is shared between men and women. One of our women religious pointed out that at present the Church is losing out on the gifts of women by not including them in leadership. Even when women are in roles of responsibility and leadership there is often a lack of visibility. At the time of writing Pope Francis has just announced a change in the organisation of the Roman Curia, so that women can hold positions of high leadership, and this is welcomed.

Reaching out to the margins

Many parishes express a desire to go to the margins of the Church and of society, as advocated by Pope Francis. However, they frequently say they don't know where to start. The Diocese has produced a set of simple suggestions for parishes, to encourage this reaching out as one form of evangelisation. It puts a big emphasis on making everyone feel welcome.

Two members of the Contact Team have considerable experience of working with people on the margins of society: users of foodbanks, refugees and asylum seekers, people living with addiction and homelessness. Some of the ideas of these people are included.

There is a monthly Mass in York at which explicit welcome is made to the LGBT+ community, their friends, and supporters. This attracts both Catholics and non-Catholic Christians, some coming from as far away as Manchester and Newcastle. The results of their Synod conversations are included. Many in the community have known the experience of judgment and exclusion, which gives them a strong desire for social justice. They ask the Church to look again at its teachings on sexuality, gender, and homosexuality in the light of modern scientific understanding. They see doctrine as dynamic rather than static. Some have lived through the Aids crisis of the last century and are familiar with the fear and loss a pandemic can bring.

Pope Francis wants us to serve those most in need, like a 'field hospital that takes in the weakest people and the infirm. Jesus calls us to look after these wounded people, to support them and to heal them'. To do this we must become genuinely more welcoming and inclusive, listening with compassion, giving our full attention, particularly to those who feel marginalised and excluded for any reason. This can be a moving and healing experience for all concerned.

During the lockdowns, when our Church buildings were closed, we had to find new ways of 'being the Church', supporting our most vulnerable out in the communities. Now more of us want to learn to take our faith and our Gospel values out to wherever people are – to take the Church to the margins and not just wait for the marginalised to come to the Church buildings.

Continuing Synodal Process

There is an appreciation of the benefits and joy of listening to each other and a desire for the synodal journey to continue. The parishes and the Diocese will need to learn to work in a synodal way, with improved communications.

Calls for change in the wider Church

There is a desire to follow the example of Jesus in the inclusive welcome we give to people, not being over concerned about rules. One person said: *'The Church needs to lighten up, liven up and simplify'*. The handling of issues such as contraception, abortion, divorce and re-marriage, sexuality and gender, and ecumenical inter-communion are seen by many as damaging, both to the people concerned and to the credibility of the Church. We want to welcome people and accompany them with compassion.

There is a call for a clearer demonstration of hierarchy as service to all in the Church. Can we separate authority from ordination and from maleness? Can we have more lay leadership and responsibility, for both male and female? Can we have both married priests and women priests? These are controversial issues and there is a diversity of views.

The Eucharist is central to who we are as a Church, and there is a perceived need for more priests. Some suggest we have married priests and women priests; others disagree. Other suggestions are to allow a time-limited commitment to the priesthood; to shorten the training in seminaries; to broaden priestly formation to include more human sciences.

Strong feelings are expressed about the scandal of clerical sexual abuse, and the damage and pain inflicted on victims. Undoubtedly some people have left the Church because of this. And as a result, many feel the Church now lacks moral authority.

THE SYNOD PROCESS IN OUR SCHOOLS

Let the Children Come to Me

And they were bringing children to him that he might touch them, and the disciples rebuked them. But when Jesus saw it, he was indignant and said to them, "Let the children come to me; do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God. Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it." (Mk 10:11-13)

Context of Feedback

33 Schools (about 2/3) submitted synod feedback: all our secondary schools (8) and 25 Primary schools (9 in the northern area, 9 in the central area and 7 in the southern area of the Diocese).

Process

The process was conducted in a range of different ways – discussions, spiritual conversations, surveys and questionnaires. Some engaged large groups and some smaller groups. In most instances the contributions of parents, students and staff were collected. Parent engagement was generally not high.

The students who did participate were so keen to share their thoughts and the spiritual conversations were done with such integrity, I was delighted with the process and outcome. 16 students came forward in total, from both RC and C of E backgrounds, so we had two sessions of eight students. I was astounded by how respectful the students were and how well they embraced the spiritual conversation; they listened to one another so attentively and with such kindness. It was a wonderful thing to do, and I hope we can continue meeting like this upon occasion. (Secondary School).

The Voice of the Young People

What has the Pandemic highlighted for young people?

Responses include anxiety, confusion and a sense of loneliness or disconnection, particularly from friends and family. Death, loss and grief have become all too real to even very young children. In a few cases, there was happiness at spending more time as a family as parents worked from home. Many young people have missed out on opportunities through school and community. There is an added stress of feeling the pressure to catch up because they are behind academically.

Life as a young person

Children's experiences are generally positive. Especially in the younger age bracket, the word "fun" was often used. School was also described as a safe place. In some cases, their experience used words like awful or lonely. The online world is a big part of their lives and it is recognised that this has positive and negative elements. Looking to the future, young people have both a global and a personal outlook. Globally they desire an inclusive, welcoming society that seeks to tackle big problems like ecology and the pandemic. Personally, they hope for jobs and good relationships with friends and family. Thinking about the future also produces anxiety for many.

The Church – experiences and hopes for the future

Within the Church, children want to be listened to and to take part. Many, particularly at primary level, described a relationship with God and find that prayer helps them. Some used words like peace or community when thinking of Church and there were other positive comments.

Many young people do not feel part of the Church and describe a disassociation or a lack of connection. It is perhaps something they are familiar with in school but not in parish life. Some parts of Church feel inaccessible to them, like the relevance of some scripture or the rigid, formal nature of the liturgy. Older children want more opportunities to explore and discuss faith rather than simply have faith ‘done to them’. Younger children find the priest uses too many tricky words. Children enjoy the Catholic Social Teaching dimension/faith in action element and respond well to the need to help others. Many of the older ones want more opportunities to connect with those in need but rules and regulations often hinder them.

The experience of a student with special needs is highlighted – his experience of Mass allows him to feel like he belongs and is the same as others.

Parents / Governors / Staff Voice

Ideas emerging about their experiences of Church and the future church

In many cases, there is a sense of dissatisfaction with the Church. On one level, it is felt that themes of welcome, equality and inclusivity need to be more central. There is a mood that the Church needs to move with the times, with married priests, the place of women in the Church and an openness to the divorced and remarried. Another comment calls for the Church to be more open and honest. At another more local level, comments are made that not all priests sing off the same hymn sheet. There is fear for the future of the local parish, with fewer young parishioners and fewer priests. There is a desire to do more to confront this. It is felt that the schools are doing a lot to continue the mission of the Church and the children can relate to their faith in the school context but not when it comes to Church - the parish needs to do more outreach in order to build the bridge. In the past faith was passed from one generation to the next. This is not happening in the same way now, and work needs to be done on making faith relevant to the young people, so they can make it their own.

In some cases, responses are positive toward the local church and there is gratitude for the work of local clergy. There is a desire to focus on the joy of the gospel.

The responses include some personal experiences of church. In mass, parents with young ones feel under pressure to make sure children behave, destroying the experience for them. Some feel strongly hurt by the Church’s response to their personal circumstances. One family shared that a priest refused burial of a relative because the person committed suicide.

For school staff, including non-Catholics or Catholics who do not attend Church, school provides a context for journeying together in growing closer to God, in a situation where they feel more comfortable than in Church. In singing together we feel a sense of being a strong Catholic community. Praying together provides a sense of safety. They value the time given to prayer in school, which gives them - as adults - space for this contemplation. (Primary School).

CONCLUSIONS

Much of the feedback from parishes concerns issues that can be put in hand locally and without delay, within the parish. The parochial is what touches people immediately. Lay people can be empowered to make things happen within their parish, but their activity needs to be co-ordinated. This has been the role of the Parish Priest, but it is recognised that already not all parishes have a resident priest, and this will be the case for more parishes very soon. Alternative structures of oversight will need to be put in place.

Relationships between clergy and lay people need to change from the 'Father knows best' mentality. Lay people must be given (and take) their full dignity as baptised Christians and enabled to 'grow up' and play their full part in the Body of Christ. This will require both clergy and laity to adjust their expectations. The role and visibility of women in the parishes, the Diocese and the wider Church should be reviewed.

Formation needs

There is a call for more adult formation, with input on prayer, scripture and Church teaching. There will also be a need for training in various responsibilities that have previously been taken by parish priests. Many tasks can readily be done by trained lay people, leaving priests to focus on what they were ordained to do. These include health and safety, safeguarding, catechesis, technology, care and maintenance of buildings, financial management, as well as pastoral matters including some funeral ministry.

Training is needed to empower those within our Parishes who wish to get involved in more active outreach to people on the margins. This would enable us to serve those who need us the most, and at the same time build our Church community.

We hope to explore at both parish and diocesan level the almost universal difficulty of attracting and keeping children and young people in our parishes. Bridging the gap between our schools and parishes is vital to this endeavour.

Evangelisation is hardly mentioned, despite a diocesan event before the pandemic focussing on our all being missionary disciples. We need to foster an encounter with Christ for everyone, so all are empowered to go out and share the Good News. We want all the baptised to take ownership of the Church and to move towards a model of co-responsibility.

We want to promote synodal working and improve transparency and communication throughout the Church. It is important that the parishes and the Diocese are seen to respond to the ideas voiced locally in the Synod, and quickly.

For the Universal Church

The Church can use the synodal process as an opportunity to explore again some of the difficult areas of its teaching. Look at what the priesthood is for, and consider new structures where priesthood is not essential for leadership. Promote the dignity of all the Baptised, so that lay leadership and women's leadership become normal in the Church. This may or may not eventually lead to the ordination of women as well as men. All leadership in the Church should be seen as ministry, as modelled by Jesus when he washed the feet of his disciples.

Theological questions about sexuality, gender and identity should be openly re-examined in the light of modern scientific discoveries and of the lived experiences of people of different sexualities and gender identities. The Church must welcome and celebrate humankind in all its wonderful diversity.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "+ Terence Patrick Drainey". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

+ Terence Patrick Drainey

Bishop of Middlesbrough

08.04.2022

The Middlesbrough Diocesan Synod Contact Team

The Bishop of Middlesbrough Terence Patrick Draney

Mrs Kate Bailey (Diocesan Director of Schools)

Deacon David Cross (Parish Deacon and Adult Formation Coordinator)

Fr Phillip Cunnah (Parish Priest, Diocesan Youth Chaplain and Coordinator of School Chaplaincy)

Mr Terry Doyle (Member of Meditatio and worker with people on the margins)

Mrs Pat McBride (Retired Teacher and a founder member CAUSE Foundation)

Mr Michael McGeary (Diocesan Communications Officer and Data Protection Officer)

Dr Emma Morrison (Junior Doctor)

Canon Derek Turnham (Parish Priest Episcopal Vicar for Missionary Communities and Diocesan Synod Contact Person)

Mrs Susan Westmacott (Parish Pastoral Assistant)

APPENDIX

Diocesan Synod Consultation.

1. How is this journeying together happening in your local church?

As a community or group:

- Parish community – centred on Mass - Welcoming everyone inclusively without judgement, recognising the presence of Christ in each other; benefits of stewards learning people's names. People feel happy and connected; built up socially & spiritually by tea, coffee and cake after Mass, parish social events, outdoor events; lay Ministries, visiting housebound; scripture, lectio & prayer groups; SVP, Legion of Mary, UCM. Some people have not returned following COVID.
- Difficulty in reaching out to the margins and those in need; Responding to needs through SVP, CAFOD, Missio, LGBT+. Ecumenical interactions and faith sharing.
- Appreciation of PPs, liturgy, helpful homilies, Masses for special intentions.
- RCIA and methods of Evangelisation/ formation; Catechesis
- Lack of children and young people in church; need to improve links between school and parish; Understanding the pressures on family life brought about by work and other activities; children's liturgy, a desire for the active involvement of young people.
- Communication by newsletter, website, social media but could be better. Streaming of Mass and prayer; Zoom meetings
- Knowing that change is needed; Synodal process is helping our dialogue – listening to each other; Feeling of disconnectedness from the diocese. Journeying together happens in groups that are not necessarily in one church e.g., J&P Commission in this diocese and nationally

As a Diocese:

- Response to the pandemic and COVID Safe Masses/live streaming from cathedral and other parishes also Telephone Mass
- *Leading on prayer?*
- Synod process and meetings
- Communication: website, Bishops letters
- Pilgrimages

As the Universal Church:

- Synodal process is helping
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2. What conversations has the Spirit inspired in your sharing?

As a community or group:

- Church is at a crossroads, parishioners faced with the reality of life without a resident parish priest due to the decline in number of priests. Married and women priests could help tackle this. Church is Custodian of the Truth but there has been a loss of moral authority and credibility due to abuse scandals. What alternative models of being Church are there? Church structure needs to be turned upside down. There is still a real sense of the presence of Jesus in the Church and in life. Exclusive language sometimes means that the simple message is lost. The Church needs to: LIGHTEN UP, LIVEN UP and SIMPLIFY. Cut out the jargon.
- Church's Mission: The Church's Mission has not changed. We can't have mission without communication and participation. There is a need to Improve communications: diocesan and parish website, newsletter, social media and widen participation of laity in life of the church particularly in decision making. The importance of Live Streaming of the Mass and prayer.
- Need for more communal prayer such as exposition of Blessed Sacrament, for prayerful liturgy, pilgrimages. Methods of prayer such as meditation. The importance of scripture and sacraments for evangelisation. Church in the world - responding to needs of the poor – Where is Christ? We can have different opinions and still get along, power of hospitality and welcoming, inclusivity, the Parish is a family. We need to get to know each other on a deeper level. People have differing perceptions and realities. Contemplative path; More opportunities for spiritual growth and spiritual accompaniment: Synodal pathway is a continuing journey.

As a Diocese:

- There is a desire to know more about the Catholic Faith, to know Jesus and be part of a parish. There is a need for formation of people for leadership roles, also to enable ongoing dialogue and listening. Could we have mission teams across the diocese? Bring Ministers and Catechists together for formation. Small group meetings. Tensions between Tradition and Change – need openness to change but not lose our tradition.
- Laity not being taken seriously by the hierarchy and there are no real opportunities for lay people to have their say in the diocese. Church needs to trust lay people with responsibility. There needs to be transparency of the financials in running a parish. We don't really listen to each other. We don't always speak to those next to us in the pew particularly if we don't know them.
- Work with schools and catechists to strengthen children's participation. Children are the future of the Church. How do we engage with non-practising parents? Many of our children still have faith! Teaching of RE needs looking at again. Identify how young people can be involved in the parish, maybe connecting to National Youth events. Listen to what young people need.
- Fears about not being listened to, and the process not being carried through as in Vatican II for example. Learn about what it means to work in partnership – parish priest has the final say? Poor models have a negative impact on development. Demographics of our communities and how these can hinder change. Continue the synodal process so that it is embedded in the parish. This could continue to grow.

As the Universal Church:

- The Church doesn't appear to understand the world today; LGBT+, divorced and remarried, those in poverty often feel estranged from the Church. The Church has become marginalised. How do we reach out to those on the margins of the church and society? This can be a very painful process. As well as reaching out to the marginalised we need to take into account Ecology and climate crisis. Loss of people due to the Pandemic. Work of our Catholic Charities.
 - Women are undervalued and underused in the Church – what is the Church missing out on by not involving women more? Is there a need to review the theology that excludes women? Not all people are “Marys” some are “Martha’s” and happier to serve in practical ways.
 - Relevance of Mass to the “Computer generation”? Is the Sunday Obligation relevant? A more flexible approach to lay participation in the liturgy is needed. Be more creative in how we celebrate the sacrament of reconciliation. Format of Mass is recognised around the world. Don't try to fix what's working. Liaising with other parishes and faith communities re pastoral practices.
 - Abortion, Euthanasia, changing attitudes towards sex and sexuality. Need to listen to our conscience. Greater compassion and acts of kindness. Loving God and neighbour- core of our faith. Need to do more things to build community – be patient and impartial when listening. Reaching out to other faiths, denominations, and cultures.
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3. What steps does the Spirit invite us to take in order to grow in our journey together

As a community or Group:

- Is it possible to pick up on things that were successful in the past such as more opportunities for worship, communal prayer e.g. exposition of the Blessed Sacrament; lay led prayer group, pilgrimages, promoting sacramental/devotional life of the parish and whole church, Lectio, Scripture study, reconciliation, reflection, services of the Word, social events as ways of building our community and sustaining faith. Look at our Mass times – change if necessary; nourishing and relevant liturgy? Pray for vocations. Parish Missions. Do people really want all this? Things Not always well attended.
- Holding Annual Parish Forum/Consultation; establish parish pastoral council; ways of engaging with clergy when they say ‘No’. We are entrusted with journeying together. Mission and Service may be ways of helping to get people involved. Explore what it means to work collaboratively. Improve teamwork and decision-making in the parish. Be inclusive of those excluded from decision-making in the parish- women, disabled, LGBTQ+, those affected by poverty. Make sure we tap into the skills and talents available in our lay people.
- Outreach within and beyond the “Church”; learn about other faiths, traditions and cultures finding ways of linking with these; reaching out to those in need and those who feel estranged from the Church e.g. LGBTQ+, Divorced and remarried, those who have drifted away to make them feel welcome. Reach out to the isolated possibly set up a Young Mum or parents Group. Evangelising through friendship and being ambassadors for Christ; Friendship, compassion, mercy, listening. Remember that God loves us!! Celebrate diversity of cultures in our parishes.
- Communication; parish website, social media, streaming of Mass.; raise profile of active parish groups, find out who’s who in our parish – learn people’s names; go out to people where they are rather than waiting for them to come to us, become better listeners, publicity in shops, community centres to let people know about what we are doing, find ways to welcome the “Curious”. Make direct approaches to invite people to get involved in parish ministries. Strengthen/ Develop Parish Pastoral Councils.
- Renewal of our Covenant with the Poor; live out the Gospel; Live out Catholic Social Teaching; Faith and actions, charity and justice; have prayer partners for the elderly and housebound. Love of God and neighbour. Safeguarding is to be central to everything we do in the parish. We need to prevent abuse happening.
- Education: strengthen / develop the links between parish and school(s); Reach out to parents of pupils in our schools who don’t attend Mass. Listen to young people and what they say their needs are. Formation for Catechists and recruitment of them. Using sacramental programmes. Develop good children’s liturgy
- I Involve women in the decision-making of the Church and help to establish more equality in relationships between hierarchy, priests, and lay people. Turn the structure of the Church ‘Upside down’. Identify the things that people can be involved in and extend personal invitations, thinking about time limited responsibilities for ministry etc... Be inclusive
- Check that we are being moved by the Spirit with prayer and reflection -Communal and individual; Revisit the fundamentals of our faith.

As a Diocese:

- It would be helpful to know what the Diocese' plan is in relation to parishes. This would help to guide us in going forward. More transparency with regards to finances and decision-making and accountability. Safeguarding is important. Can parishes be brought together on a deanery basis to do some of the things outlined? Avoid merging parishes into big parishes 'Small is beautiful'.
- Formation of adults to be responsive to faith development needs. Encouraging lay people to develop their 'Gifts'. Form people so that they are confident in expressing their faith; develop skills needed to listen and speak with 'Parrhesia'. Continuing to help people to understand what the Synodal approach looks like and is about so that the process grows. Promote Collaborative Ministry. Formation of Catechists and other ministries. Formation in Catholic Social Teaching.
- Facilitate the linking of religious orders with parish communities, schools and in the wider life of the diocese.
- Develop methods of improving team-working and decision-making with greater equality between clergy, lay people and hierarchy. Clericalism and 'Specialness' are counter to the Gospel. Priests and clergy have been historically lauded and put on a pedestal. Encourage a more meaningful level of sharing. Maybe some formation of clergy on how to be more consultative with laity.
- Facilitate open and honest discussions with young people, listening to what their needs are Assist in development of liturgy e.g., music ministry in a manner that encourages young people.
- Demonstrate that the church understands the present context of people's lives and renew our Diocese' Covenant with the Poor. Help to engage with difficult issues with compassion and mercy. Promote ecumenical and cultural outreach. Revisit the possibility of Eucharistic Services when Mass cannot be celebrated.
- Be compassionate to others; A sharing Church; Spiritual nurturing of people; Sharing responsibility to develop parish community; Buildings should be accessible to all; Explore new challenges of being responsible for our parishes. We are to be companions on the road; Learn from our journey.
- Tackling the climate and ecology issues; [maybe let people know what we are already doing as a diocese]. Facilitate engagement with people on the margins through training and formation for lay and clergy.
- Celebrate 'Vocations' not just to the priesthood and religious life but also to marriage and family, to the single life, caring professions. Take a lead in showing that the involvement of women is important to us as a diocese so that we take women's vocations to authority and leadership in the church seriously. Help us to understand what we're missing because we're not really doing these things at present!

As the Universal Church:

- Serious consideration of shortage of vocations to priesthood in England and Wales. Consider the ordination to priesthood of Married men. Priests should be allowed to marry. The fact that we already have some married priests shows there's no real barrier to that. Also, consideration ought to be given to the ordination to the priesthood of women. Priests are overstretched – change the model of the Church.
 - Revisit issues of divorce and remarriage, LGBT+ communities, abortion and euthanasia, contraception, inter-communion. Mercy, understanding and compassion. Explore other models of being Church. Show that the Church is listening to the people. Speak out on things like The Arms Trade, refugees, homelessness, economic issues that keep people in poverty, social justice.
 - Review Canon Law so that it become enabling rather than constricting and bring it into line with Human Rights. The implementation of Canon Law in some cases has caused great pain to those people on whom it was exercised. At Sametime. We need Canon Law.
 - Recognise Joy of the Gospel; Celebrate Catholic Social Teaching; Become a Church that is: Relevant to people throughout their lives; that recognises and honours the vocation of all baptised; where listening to each other is embedded in our culture; Consider pastoral opportunities for laity.
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Other Comments:

- Timescale for the synodal conversations was too short but the process of discernment needs to continue with help of the bishop. People are happy to have this experience. Our meetings were last minute. There is an appetite to build on the foundations of the Parish consultations
 - There are concerns that the local lay view will not be reflected in the final synod outcomes. What checks and balances are there to ensure that the laity's voice will be heard by Pope Francis? Pope Francis has put himself out on a limb to achieve progress.
 - We must not claim that our own thoughts are always inspired by the Holy Spirit. We feel enlightened by our conversations with a Holy desire to move forward, we've enjoyed our journey. We need to learn to live with the tension that arises from listening to other's views. Synodality is a lifelong process. This process has helped us to listen to other's views and to ground ourselves in authentic experiences.
 - Is the Sunday Obligation still relevant or necessary? Many young people feel that they can be a good catholic without going to Church. Week by week there are relatively few who attend church regularly.
 - The Church is news when there is bad news – The Gospel is the 'Good News'
 - There is a feeling that our Polish brethren are not so well integrated into the life of our parish.
 - Some younger priests seem to be less in touch with the people of today. We're grateful for the support of our PP.
 - What happens between March 2022 and September 2023?
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Individual Comments:

- The purpose of the synod seems to have been totally missed by our parish group and not reflected in the feedback. Many people are involved in various ministries and always have been. I'm not sure what the Synod is about
 - Good liturgy is important as is reverence along with good sacramental preparation of our children and young people.
 - To say the Church should relax some of its teachings on sexual morality is not to endorse the 'anything goes' attitude. If we can't ask questions in the context of the Synod, then where can we ask them? The Catholic Church cannot continue as it is and we cannot escape a modern & connected world. One of the positive effects of Vatican II was that we stopped seeing God as inaccessible and harsh. Issues of sexuality need to be addressed in atmosphere of love and sensitivity. Traditional view has given us celibate clergy and clericalism. Marriage and sex have been seen as Inferior.
 - I wish more people would come forward to help in the parish when they are asked instead of it always being the same few.
 - There was much lamentation over the loss of the John Paul Centre
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Some Direct Quotes Taken from the Feedback

LGBT+ Community:

- Our monthly Masses draw LGBT+ people and their families and friends from across the diocese and beyond. Community is also built through social gatherings and electronic communication. Evangelisation notably happens through our presence at York Pride festival and other forms of outreach.
- The Eucharist nourishes us and needs to be promoted as widely available for those seeking Jesus, not only for those who 'keep the rules'.
- We are part of a growing movement within the Church, nationally and internationally, to welcome and celebrate the presence of LGBT+ people, which feels challenging and exciting. We want to develop links with other such ministries, including parts of the Church worldwide where LGBT+ people are actively discriminated against.
- We need to ponder how better to welcome those especially vulnerable in the LGBT+ community, including women, younger people, older people, and trans people.

Those marginalised through poverty, addiction, seeking refuge:

- "I just can't expose my private life to people so I can start to receive Communion again. I had to get divorced for my mental health and I want to come back to the Church, but I don't feel welcome."
- "I don't go to Church on a Sunday but it doesn't mean that I don't have a faith in God....I like to show my faith by doing something in my community through the week so I volunteer with

a charity that works with the homeless and I sometimes go on a march/demo with Extinction Rebellion”.

- “I couldn’t believe that I was able to receive a Blessing after all I’ve done in the past. My whole body was shaking when I walked up with you and I cried and cried after it, but in a good way, like a release!”

Female former sex worker in Recovery Group who came on a retreat and went to Communion in spite of feeling unworthy!

- “How can I come into Church smelling like this?!”

A very self-conscious adult male who feels very outside the fold and is in need of loving re-assurance, as well as some clean clothes and compassion.

- When I was invited to participate in the synodal process embarked upon by the Catholic church, by writing some words involving my ideas and hopes for the church, its mission and future direction, some words in particular sprang immediately to my mind: words like contemplation, transformation, meditation, knowledge, understanding. This is born of my own experiences of adversity living on the margins and desiring a meaningful and palpable relationship with God, it was these things that ultimately led to me having a greater sense of the spirit of Christ within and connection to the church.

Religious Orders

- The issue is not feminism, making sure women are involved whatever. The point is that half the Church is not being engaged at the depth/breadth it could be and therefore the Church is missing something, losing something.
- We cannot do without law, but the way it has developed, been used and *experienced* by many ordinary has caused much needless hurt and harm. People have been ‘broken’ and ‘crippled’ by its application (list of horror stories caused by canon law) - laws on fasting before the Eucharist, rules about eating meat, marriage, needing permission from the Holy See to build a church, etc.
- The big problems of poverty, injustice, war, etc., are solved by people at high levels, in governments, etc. At present, there is worldwide loss of spirit of service, absence of integrity. What we can do, at ground level, is work in our own spheres to be good, holy people. People in government, etc., come from this ground level. Form people at ground level.
- Centrality of the Gospel: rediscovered after Vatican II, when we heard the scriptures again in our own language. We want a Church that is focused on the Gospel rather than narrow legalism.
- We can’t expect a document produced by the synodal process to solve the Church’s problems. People talk about many crises in the Church; a crisis is a turning point. Do we know the good news we want to pass on? This is what our life is about – passing on the good news about Jesus Christ.

Contributors to the Synod Consultation in Diocese of Middlesbrough

- Over forty parish communities responded to the invitation to enter into the consultation process.
- The following Apostolic Groups responded: Diocesan Justice & Peace Commission; LGBT+; Mustard Seed Group; People marginalised through poverty, addiction, seeking refuge; Society of St Vincent de Paul; York Circle of the Newman Association; York Camino Group; Young Christian Students of England and Wales; members of the following Prayer Groups: Divine mercy Apostolate; World Apostolate of Fatima England & Wales, Padre Pio of Pietrelcina Group; Pro-Life Group; Charismatic Renewal; Sycamore Group.
- The following Religious Orders in the diocese responded through holding a day on the Synod for religious: Benedictines (Abbot) of Ampleforth; Benedictines- Stanbrook Abbey; Carmelites - Thicket Priory; Congregation of Jesus - Bar Convent; Corpus Christi Carmelite; Marists - Hull; Sisters of Mercy.
- Eighteen people responded as 'Individuals'

The diocese of Middlesbrough is grateful to all those who have responded to this stage of the synod process.

All the feedback is obtainable electronically through Adult Formation and will be provided in a Zip Folder upon request.

adultformation@rcdmidd.org.uk or by calling 01642 850505

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