

We are Church International
Survey 2022 of Diocesan Activities for the Worldwide Synodal Process 2023

UNITED KINGDOM

As I begin, I would like to pay tribute to Catholics for a Changing Church, Catholic Women's Ordination, LGBT+Catholics Westminster, Root and Branch and the Scottish Laity Network among others, who are encouraging Catholics in the UK to respond to Synod 2023.

I speak from the perspective on having one foot firmly among friends on the margins of the Church, in the reform movement, and the other in the structure of the institutional Church as a member of our active parish leadership team.

Until four years ago I lived in the south of England where, because I was known to be active in the We Are Church Movement, I was not welcome by the clergy to exercise any ministry or service in the Church. The people, however, called upon me as a Reader and Eucharistic Minister and that led to some interesting situations. In the north of England, in Liverpool diocese, where I now live, I have been welcomed to be active both in the parish and as a Member of our recent Diocesan Synod. There is interest in what We Are Church stands for, and I can speak freely about the aims and objectives of the reform movement.

It is rumoured that the Liverpool Synod was supposed to be a prototype for England and Wales and other dioceses would follow suit. The 2023 Synod has superseded this. The organisation and process in the Liverpool Synod has been nothing less than excellent. Synod Members were trained in effective listening techniques, and we gathered people together wherever we could, to share their joys, fears, concerns and needs in the Church and world. 500 Synod Members collaborated to gather 27000 responses which by reference back to parishes and gatherings of Synod members were distilled over 30 months into 19 recommendations which the Archdiocese has used to create its Pastoral Plan. Apparently, the Holy Spirit led the Synod to decide the most important areas to work on were Evangelisation, Lay Ministry and involvement of Young People. My thought is that these will not be effective unless structures, communication and clergy-people collaboration are improved.

Implementation of the plan depends, as always, on the disposition of the clergy. Liverpool is no different to elsewhere: some clergy are collaboratively minded while many appear happy with the status quo and will quietly shelve any life-giving initiatives if possible. A response to my question at a recent parish leadership team meeting about taking the Pastoral Plan forward by our Deanery clergy leads me to believe that our parish is probably quite unique in its willingness to act.

One thing I have been asked to mention is what has happened to the BIG questions – our key concerns - which were indeed raised in the listening groups all over the diocese. Our Archbishop has made it clear that these are above his paygrade to resolve, but he respects them and has taken these concerns and needs to our Episcopal Conference and the appropriate agencies in the Vatican.

To turn to Synod 2023. I have looked at a number of our diocesan websites. They all pay lip-service to Pope Francis' request, but it is obvious from the way their pages are worded that some dioceses are on board while others are obfuscating. From contact with various groups and people up and down this country, it appears that many of the clergy are using subtle methods of obstruction. For example, several people reported that parish clergy will call a listening session for the synod, say the opening prayer and then leave the people to it. This is not how it is meant to be; clergy and people are supposed to work together. Other dioceses have organised consultation in such a very short window of time that it is unlikely that there will be much of a response. I have heard of silencing and manipulation within meetings. There is a lack of trust that what is expressed will actually reach the Synod of Bishops. But on the other hand, there are some dioceses who are making an effort to listen as the *Vademecum* requests and hopefully they will take the voice from the pews forward.

I close by recalling my opening remark. I believe that all reform organisations have an crucial role to play in Synod 2023. As is already happening in many places, let us listen to all points of view and make sure that the Office of the Synod of Bishops hears about them. The over-riding message is 'Don't give up – the Holy Spirit is at work'.

contact We are Church: Valerie Stroud" <valeriejstroud@gmail.com

UNITED KINGDOM

Liverpool Synod 2020 – a personal view by Valerie J Stroud

'[L]ike a man building a house, who dug deeply and laid the foundation on rock; when a flood arose, the river burst against that house but could not shake it, because it had been well built.' (Lk 6:48)

I write this as our Archbishop and his team consider the recommendations that resulted from our Synod and how 400 or so of the original 500 Synod Members prioritised them. They will use this information to write a Pastoral Plan for the diocese, to be published on the Feast of Christ the King later this year.

It would be all too easy to be doubtful and negative. In fact, many of my fellow Synod Members seem less than inspired, especially when they wanted some movement on the big issues: women's ordination; ordination of married men; LGBTQ issues, etc. To me, however, the Archbishop's position is eminently sensible. He has taken these concerns and needs to our own Bishops' Conference and to the Vatican, to show there is support for such change in the local Church.

While I am disappointed that such foundations as adult faith formation, communication in its many forms and parish/deanery structure did not figure highly as recommended priorities, I am honoured to have taken part and pleased that we in our parish community have already adopted ideas that were proposed during the 30 months of active synodal process. I praise the organisation and leadership by the diocesan Synod Team. Training for Synod Members and gatherings to receive information and support were all excellent, well-planned, warm, inclusive occasions.

Our Synod began four years ago with awareness-raising and prayer in local communities. At the end of 2018, parishes selected a member to represent each of their churches, and deaneries selected 8 members with particular expertise or experience. The clergy were members as were Pastoral Associates and individuals from religious orders, educational bodies and Catholic organisations. A special feature was the inclusion of ecumenical friends.

Listening

The essence of the Synod was listening: deep listening to each other and to the Holy Spirit working among us. Synod Members were trained to conduct 'listening' sessions wherever we could gather Catholics together. Essentially this was to divide into groups of 4 persons who, using a stone as the 'talking piece', took it in turns to respond from the heart to four questions:

1. Where in your everyday life do you experience love, truth, goodness, hope, and joy?
2. When you reflect on your life now and, as you look to the future, what causes you concern or worry?
3. What is the purpose of the Catholic Church in the world today?
4. Having reflected on these things, what are the topics you would like to see on the agenda of Synod 2020?

We also listened to our families, friends, acquaintances; indeed, to anyone who wished to respond. There were 27,000 responses, including 2,000 from the on-line questionnaire.

Themes

In September 2019, Synod Members met to hear the results, which had been collated into four themes:

1. All called and gifted by God.
2. Sharing the mission of Jesus.
3. How we pray together.
4. Building community, nurturing belonging.

It was planned that these would be explored in parishes and communities between October 2019 and March 2020 and the results reported regularly to the diocese. We completed 75% of that task when, unfortunately, Covid 19 descended, potentially derailing everything.

My parish collected together the Synod Members who were members of our community. We made a team of five, who met together to discuss and plan this next step. We made displays for the churches, printed the theme leaflets, talked at Masses and convened meetings. As we listened to parishioners, we came to the conclusion that these themes, augmented by insights and ideas from the community, provided an excellent foundation for our development, quite apart from the Synod. This year, each member of our new parish Vision Team has accepted responsibility for coordinating activity around one of the themes and collaborating closely where there is cross-over between themes.

As the Covid 19 pandemic took hold, we used Zoom to keep in touch with our community and with Synod Members in the Deanery. With lock-down deeply affecting us all, the diocese suggested that communities also reflect on how Covid 19 had changed them, encouraged innovation and what could be learned from the turmoil.

Proposals and Aspirations

In October 2020, Synod Members were called together by Zoom to hear where the exploration of the themes had taken us. Within the four themes, the Synod Team has collated responses into 120 proposals and 45 aspirations, on which we were asked to reflect and pray. From these, each Synod Member had to choose five proposals and two aspirations from each theme and submit these to the diocese for further blending.



UNITED KINGDOM

Recommendations

In March 2021, we were presented with 19 recommendations in six areas:

1. Evangelisation and Ministry.
2. Invite and Welcome in God's Name.
3. Faith Formation.
4. Prayer and Spirituality.
5. Catholic Social Teaching and Community.
6. Administration and Governance.

The diocese organised six Zoom sessions for us to pray and explore these further. I have to say that conversations in the breakout rooms, with a few glimmers of light, served to convince me that there was some reluctance to put new wine into new wineskins. It seems to me that we need much more appreciation of the potential beyond Sunday Mass and maybe the various sodalities.

Encouraged by a Zoom meeting with Sr Nathalie Becquart, an under-secretary to the Synod of Bishops, our task was to pray over the recommendations and discern their importance to the life, mission and development of the Church in the Archdiocese of Liverpool.

Synod Day – 19 June 2021

400 of us met via Zoom to hear various speakers, including our own Archbishop, the Papal Nuncio, and the General Secretary of the Synod of Bishops. I was particularly impressed with Dr Jessie Rodgers, Dean of the Faculty of Theology at the Pontifical University Maynooth, who was our gentle but efficient guide for the day. The Synod Team painstakingly explained how our task individually was to use digital technology to rank each of the Recommendations into four levels, from 'urgent' to 'of little importance for now' in the diocese. We then had to choose three Recommendations which we considered to be priorities. The afternoon was spent hearing the results.

As a student of group dynamics, I hope the Archbishop's team will consider what underpins successful youth ministry, evangelisation and love of neighbour, the Synod priorities. These all need the foundations of a healthy organisational structure, good and open communication and above all motivation.

Additional information

www.synod2020recommendations.org.uk/

www.synod2020.co.uk

<https://bit.ly/3eVxVqM> - Liverpool's Catholic Pictorial

[1,124]

Illustrations: Synod2020 logo.

contact We are Church: Valerie Stroud" <valeriejstroud@gmail.com