

Synod 2021 2023

For a synodal Church: communion / participation / mission

Summary notes from synodal conversations and questionnaires held in January and February 2022 in the Salisbury Parishes of St Osmund's, Holy Redeemer and St Gregory's and the parish of Christ the King, Amesbury.

Salisbury Catholic Churches have a combined registered congregation of 2,887 with 800 more in Amesbury. There were four open consultation sessions where facilitated discussions were held and one remote meeting via Zoom. In Amesbury, 237 people completed a questionnaire and 65 participated in meetings. Voices from various parish groups were heard: Bible Study, Nicodemus, Art Group, Rosary Group, the Salisbury Catenian Society, the Alabare Community and people involved in the Catholic schools. Parishioners invited their friends and neighbours to offer their views and gathered the responses. Responses were also sought, via on-line surveys and direct contact, from non-Catholic and non-Christian stakeholders: elected representatives, local authority officers and local Anglican contacts. The responses are provided as appendices to this summary. About 422 people voiced their aspirations, concerns, joys and frustrations (approximately 11% of the combined congregation).

The responses are summarised below. The words used in summary are those of the recorders, note-takers and facilitators as well as taken directly from what people said. If the words or phraseology employed below do not chime with the reader's memory of the event or understanding then he or she can go to the appendices provided where all the notes, original forms and individual responses are preserved.

The summary uses bullet points to present the data. These bullet points are not ordered in any way. Some of the points do not bear an immediate and obvious relevance to the questions or topics under which they appear. This is largely due to the stream of discussion and thought that was going on in that session; they reflect the responses that people gave to the questions.

If any issue, theme or pattern has been missed, misinterpreted or misrepresented then please accept my apologies. You are encouraged to read the original notes and words; they are fascinating and enlightening.

The responses were brought together by Deacon John Proctor, Eric Williams, Graham Brown, Lee Proctor, Nicholas Walker, Fr Saji Matthews and Dave Blake. The summary was written by Dave Blake.

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Questions about journeying together

How is this journeying together happening in your parish?

- Those belonging to parish groups feel a greater sense of belonging.
- Participation in the liturgy brings joy, comfort and spiritual growth.
- Several people regretted that the Papal encyclicals and doctrinal documents were not discussed or presented in the parish.
- People who only come to mass and take no other role in the community feel less of a sense of belonging than those that do.
- The appointment of the Outreach Coordinator in 2017 had had a positive effect on community spirit.
- Many respondents commented that given we are taught to love and treat everyone with compassion, it was strange that the Catholic Church did not follow this teaching for LGBTQ+, those with physical or mental health issues or the divorced.
- Tea and coffee after mass fosters a sense of community.
- There is a feeling of alienation from the Church in social groups and over certain issues. Some people feel that they and their concerns are not included. This causes difficulty in journeying together.
- A significant number of people did not understand what “journeying together” means for them, the parish or the Church.
- Some people did not think that they were journeying together. A few cited the recent closure of churches in the pandemic as an example of feeling cut off or separated from the Church.
- Some respondents felt no connection through on-line televised Mass; live or recorded.
- A significant number of people said that the investment, pre-pandemic, in the capability to live-stream and record services had been a prescient God-send; that without the live-streamed Masses they would have felt even worse when the churches were closed and limitations placed on attendance at Mass.
- Special occasions and the sacraments as rites of passage bring the Catholic community together.
- Fr Michael Fitzpatrick’s 50th Anniversary and Retirement Mass was frequently cited as a time when “we were all together”.
- The role of women in the Church was debated in the on-line session and in the Amesbury responses. A significant number of people saw a need for women to have a higher official profile in the Church, including being able to become deacons. In Amesbury, a clear majority said that women should be able to take on more lay roles in the Church. There were many references to lack of appreciation of the importance of women to the Church.

Questions on the Holy Spirit

How is the Holy Spirit inviting your parish community to grow in journeying together?

Where in these experiences do you hear the voice of the Holy Spirit?

From your small group sharing, name one insight where you heard the voice of the Holy Spirit.

- Many people do not recognise, or find it hard to discern, the voice of the Holy Spirit.
- While a few respondents doubted they, or anyone else, had genuinely heard the Holy Spirit, the majority of respondents spoke about the centrality of prayer and the Mass in their lives and described how it was through the Mass that they received love, mercy, direction and energy from God.
- Many people shared with the groups that they had a physical sensation when they felt or 'heard' the Holy Spirit in their lives and answering their prayers.

Questions on hearing a diversity of voices

How is God speaking to us through the voices that are in our midst?

How is God speaking to us through voices we sometimes ignore?

What space is there to listen to the voices on the peripheries?

- Young people and children are not heard in the parish as there is no process or forum to do so.
- In Amesbury, there was a call to enable participation in church life of younger people, closing the gap between confirmation and the 'next' sacrament of marriage but with a caution to find out what was wanted, not assuming that we know best!
- We find it difficult to listen to brothers and sisters in the Church who are "other".
- Many people feel that they are not listened to because their views are unpopular or unfashionable.
- Some people said that the love we express for the marginalised or ostracised is ineffectual; evidenced by their feeling that we cannot hear their voices.
- A significant number of respondents expressed concerns about the diversity of voices being listened to. The concern was that in listening to a voice we are bound to agree with, follow or include that viewpoint even if it goes against the teaching of the Church.

Questions on speaking out

What enables or hinders you from speaking out?

What space is there in your parish for the voice of the people?

- Experiences such as pilgrimages, prayer groups, groups of common interest, age, sex or locality all enabled people to speak out and listen.
- A significant number of people said that in order to speak out with authority one must know the Scriptures and read Scripture regularly. They also said that many Catholics do not know or understand Scripture so do not, cannot, speak out.
- Homilies were, for many people, a source of revelation, increased understanding and inspiration; but an approximately equal number of people spoke about how poor homilies can confuse, antagonise and discourage.
- Lack of confidence was considered to be a main cause of discouragement, caused by:
 - Lack of adult formation, especially amongst parents and converts.
 - Fear of reprisal, cancellation and antagonism in the wider world outside the Church.
 - Low confidence in one's knowledge and authority leads to a lack of confidence in a Catholic's opinions.
- There is no forum for discussion and good natured disagreement.
- Many felt that the Synodal process was the first time that the Church cared about or valued their opinion.

Questions on sharing responsibility for our common mission

How are baptised members of the parish able to participate in the mission of the Church to proclaim the Gospel?

What hinders people from being active in the parish?

- A lack of support for families, particularly those with school-age children.
- Schools, sacramental rites and catechesis offer good opportunities to support families.
- The practical pressures of secular life (work, sports, etc) draw young people away from the Church.
- Asian parents provide a great example of taking responsibility for the catechesis of their families.
- A lack of knowledge of the skills and talents in the parish holds us back from being able to take responsibility.
- We assume that the clergy will take responsibility for everything.
- There was great appreciation from the majority of respondents for the Outreach work in the parish, the web site and newsletters.
- Volunteering evoked a range of responses. Some praised the willingness of people to give time, effort and expertise, while others deplored the fact that many parishioners only attend Mass and do not become involved in making the community function.

In Amesbury, the large size of parish was seen as both a strength and a weakness. There was sadness at a lack of welcome for newcomers. There were many practical suggestions on how to improve communication, to instil a sense of welcome and promote a sense of parish cohesion. A perception of lack of joy in the mass was a common theme of the listening events. There was a clear call for Christ the King to open its doors, welcoming the wider community, with examples of other churches at the heart of their communities, serving coffee, hosting art events, holding concerts, in use every day of the week.

Questions on authority and participation.

How is authority and governance exercised in your parish?

How are teamwork and co-responsibility put into practice in the parish?

- The clergy work very well together: shared responsibility is a prerequisite for teamwork.
- Authority is understood to rest solely in the priest. People discussed if this can persist in a parish of greater lay involvement.
- There was discussion about the benefits and disadvantages that come from a compulsorily celibate priesthood. A significant number of people felt that the priesthood should be open to married men.
- Parishioners are not clear who is responsible for what function or activity in the parish: Caroline Williams is the default fount of all wisdom and this creates the impression of centralisation at St Osmund's.
- Caroline also came up in the comment that if she suddenly left, what would we do?
- A common theme in responses and discussion was that laity must be allowed to take on, and must accept, real responsibility and accountability for parish activity.
- In the discussions and responses, there were many references to how divided and insular the Mass congregations are, not just between churches but also between Mass times on Sundays. People attend the same Mass with the same people, they sit in the same pews and do not mix afterwards.
- Many commented on how busy life has become (compared to when they grew up) for parents, children, working couples and single people. There is little time left in people's lives for participation in the Church.
- A few people end up doing many different things and giving a large amount of time and energy. This represents a single-point-of-failure risk to the parish.
- There was some discussion about the management of volunteers and their roles. Charities that employ volunteers actively manage both people and roles.
- In Amesbury, it was felt that there is little or no understanding of Church and parish governance, decision making, finances, and management. At a parish level, many referred to the lack of transparency about where decisions are taken and by whom. Concern was expressed that where committees existed, the recruitment process was opaque.

Questions on discerning and deciding

How does your parish use the methods of listening and speaking to make decisions?

Do the decision-making methods in your parish help you to listen to all members of the community?

- Many people enjoyed, and were inspired by, the consultation process.
- Many people were sceptical of the consultation process and found it frustrating.
- Some people said that decisions in the parish are made by a few people with too little consultation.
- Many people felt that decisions were made well in the parish.
- A significant number of people felt that the Church as a whole, particularly at levels above that of the parish, was self-absorbed, self-referential and mostly concerned with self-justification.
- Many respondents (probably a significant majority) felt that, as a whole Church community, we are too judgemental of other Catholics and especially non-Catholics and those in lifestyles of which there is formal disapproval. This majority felt that there should be an end to judgement of this kind although there was no clear consensus where it should begin or end.
- A significant number of respondents emphasised the importance of prayer and discernment in decision-making.

Questions on celebration.

How does prayer and liturgical celebrations inspire and guide the parish?

How does your prayer life and celebration of the Mass inspire your personal decisions and those of the parish?

How does the parish invite all baptised Catholics into the active life of the parish?

Mass

- More people should be involved in the preparation and delivery of the liturgy – writing bidding prayers, reading, singing, playing, flowers ...
- There was a widely-held recognition of the Mass as the centre of the life of the Church.

How we could make our communal worship more celebratory:

- Celebrate the International Mass more than once a year.
- The Rosary could be scheduled in with the rest of the weekly liturgy and services in all the parishes in the Deanery, with one volunteer to lead each session.
- Retreats and study days at or with religious communities could enrich our church life.
- A significant minority of people expressed their desire to celebrate Mass according to the 1962 Roman Missal (Traditional or Tridentine Rite).
- A significant number of people expressed delight at the return of hymns and singing to the liturgy. No one regretted it.
- Some people wished for the music in church to be more appropriate, Catholic and traditional. Gregorian chant and other sacred music is no longer used in the liturgy (it was claimed) and this was much missed.
- Some people regretted greatly what they understood to be ignorance of the musical traditions and heritage of the Catholic Church.
- Many people wanted more time to contemplate and meditate, both at Exposition of the Blessed sacrament and before and after Mass.

Views expressed by respondents from outside the Catholic Church.

- There was a perception shared amongst several respondents that the Church has a preoccupation with sexual morality. There was an accusation of hypocrisy in how this was expressed, in the light of so many sexual crimes and scandals involving Catholic institutions, religious and clergy.
- Some respondents felt that the Church is quiet on social equity and justice. Very little was known or mentioned about Catholic Social Teaching.
- The Church is recognised as having a deep history and rich heritage.
- There was a perception amongst some respondents that the Church interposes itself between people and God, seeking to replace Jesus.
- Words associated with the Church:
 - Hospitable
 - Friendly
 - Insular
 - Critical
 - Stuffy
 - Discriminatory
 - Outdated
 - Irrelevant
 - Misogynistic
 - Hierarchical
 - Prayerful
- The Salisbury and Deanery Churches were not regarded, by the respondents, as good members of the wider community. Catholics are seen (by the respondents, at least) as insular and not interested in community and local social issues.