

## Synod 2021-23 @ St Peter & the Winchester Martyrs Parish, Winchester

### Summary of Church Listening Sessions, February 2022

This is our summary of the responses at our Parish after a short and vibrant listening initiative. Despite a short timescale for the project, around 137 people participated. There were 23 Church Listening Sessions, in-person and on Zoom, and 4 reflections from individuals/couples.

These were mostly Parishioners, probably reflecting the demographic of the Parish in age, and a few welcome individuals from outside of the Parish community. The youngest adult voice in this process was 20. Three children (ages 8-13) contributed directly and we are aware that the reflections of Year 6 in our Parish School were submitted to the Diocese.

These were listening sessions, not debates. This summary focuses on change, because that is how the questions were framed. However, the sessions themselves were prayerful, with much thanks and gratitude expressed. Participants listened and felt listened to.

As such, the reflections summarised below do not claim to represent a consensus or majority view of the parish or even of the attendees. Rather than everyone prepare responses to each of the 10 proposed questions, participants were invited to start by reflecting on the two or three that most resonated with them as they considered the main Synod question; and then to reflect on what they heard. Three themes dominated:

- A great desire and recognition that we should be a **welcoming, listening and outward-facing Church** and this is everyone's responsibility. This welcome should include everyone, regardless of who they are.
- A great desire for **dialogue with other Churches**. For many this included the question of inter-communion. There was also a desire for more joint worship and initiatives.
- **Women**, their role, their right for co-responsibility, a recognition of their talents/charisms and a strong desire for women Priests came up frequently and was expressed by men and women alike. This was the most commonly mentioned new issue: reflections on the role of women in the Church were recorded in 15 out of 23 groups.

Other frequently voiced priorities were:

- **The role of the Priest**, the need to recognise and to avoid clericalism, real lay involvement and co-responsibility; more democratic values in the Church.
- An awareness of **people on the periphery** and the need to understand their viewpoints. With the short time scale we did not have time to go out to the periphery as well as we would have liked, but we are aware that there were people of other denominations or no faith in the groups.
- The importance of hearing the **voices of the young** and involving them at every level.

As a general observation, despite the use of the same word, the Synodal Pathway is fundamentally different in concept from the General Synod of the Church of England, which is better known.

We have listed separately comments that are specific to our **Parish**.

The report has been prepared employing methods appropriate for social research, which involves using data from conversation to create valid information and knowledge. One member of the working group led on this analysis and the other members actively contributed to the drafting of this report. We are very grateful to all those who have participated in the process and thank parishioners who volunteered to facilitate and scribe for the groups. We invite the Holy Spirit to help us discern our next steps.

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5<sup>th</sup> March 2022

**SYNOD 2023 @ ST PETER AND THE WINCHESTER MARTYRS PARISH  
SUMMARY OF FEEDBACK FORMS FROM CHURCH LISTENING SESSIONS**

“What changes need to be made – in myself, in our parish, in the Diocese –  
to make the Church’s mission today more vibrant and effective?”

*Please email completed forms to: [listening@stpeterswinchester.org.uk](mailto:listening@stpeterswinchester.org.uk)*

Name/Type of group (incl SPWM parish/other)	<b>SPWM Parish feedback</b>	
Date of meeting	February 2022	
Particular details that you wish to be noted (e.g. ecumenical, school, university etc)	Mainly parishioners but some others participated among the groups; in-person + Zoom	
Number (indicate males/females)	55 M	82 F
Age range	8 to 85 (most over 35)	

**I. THE JOURNEYING COMPANIONS**

*How can we be more welcoming as a Christian community?*

There was a huge impetus to be more welcoming as a Universal and a local Church. Changing ourselves individually and collectively to be more tolerant, accepting, attentive and aware of people was recognised as a need. The amount of material generated in this area is too big to duplicate but there was an awareness that we all need to change. It felt as though there was a collective realisation that we are each and together responsible for being welcoming, kind and accepting.

It was recognised that we should particularly **welcome all-comers no matter of colour, creed, sexuality, gender, age and so on**. Every individual should know they matter. We should be encouraged to follow people up when we have met them if we feel they need companionship. These thoughts were in almost every group feedback, combined with many ideas such as:

- Belonging to small groups whether they are ‘special interest’ groups such as cycling or sewing, or bible study/prayer/study groups helps to grow our community.
- There was also an expressed and urgent need to have more groups and activities for young people.
- We should be able to pray together spontaneously and encourage people to come into Church and pray.
- Shedding any ideas of business models. We are the Body of Christ, even though we are broken.
- We should *all* be welcomers and trained to be so.
- The subject of women, their role, their being disenfranchised and women priests came up in all areas so it is mentioned here as people included it in their ideas of journeying together.
- There was a comment that we should beware that we don’t put community before worship AND that we avoid cliques or being like a club.

Parish. Coffee times are important to share together, visiting the elderly and isolated. Let’s reinstate the things we lost in the pandemic. Let us all be welcomers. Should refreshments be free at Mass to avoid embarrassment? Could we have some weekly ‘extras’ such as Stations of the Cross.

## 2. LISTENING

*How can we be good listeners to those close to us and those outside the Church? To whom do we listen?*

This subject was split into two areas. First, listening to God and secondly (the majority) on listening to each other. On the first, being moved and guided and listening to the **Holy Spirit** was on people's minds, particularly during this process. Prayer was important.

The synodality initiative was seen as a wonderful opportunity to listen and be listened to. A large majority of attendees was pleased that the Church Listening Sessions were happening. A number of participants were less certain that this is a good idea or even necessary. Some points on listening to each other were:

- For all to have some basic training to listen well. In listening we should be humble and accepting.
- To be non-judgemental in listening and hear what people are saying, what hurts and what they find difficult.
- Visiting the elderly and isolated and listen to them.
- Listen to everyone, no matter who and reach out to listen.
- We should try and involve our young people in initiatives such as this and listen to them. They are the future.
- This process has been a good way of listening to each other. Can we do more?

Parish: Small groups and events were seen as an important means of listening well to each other.

## 3. SPEAKING OUT

*How can we be more honest in our dealings with each other?*

This covered a number of topics that also came up in some of the other areas:

- Speak out honestly and not be afraid of condemnation
- Do not judge people
- As a Church we need to speak out honestly on real issues, such as sexuality, contraception, abortion and current problems. Let us not cover these important matters up but bring them out into the light.
- Do our leaders ask us how we are, and are we able to respond honestly?
- Remember though, how far we have come by being able to have these conversations.
- Be careful, we all have different views; listen to the Holy Spirit.
- Let's also discuss Scripture together, the Sunday readings perhaps and challenge in what way they are or are not relevant to us individually.
- Could the laity contribute to the content or presentation of homilies?

Parish: There was a comment that the 'Closer to Christ' campaign is not an honest one as it is really about raising money for clergy support and training.

#### 4. CELEBRATING

##### *How might we celebrate better the Liturgy in our parish?*

This was an area where most groups had a lot to say, and much of it similar. It was mainly about the accessibility and coherence of the liturgy:

- Music should be uplifting and joyful, also relevant. Use music to make our liturgy more welcoming and accessible was a major point. People should want to come in off the street and join in!
- Is the Mass the best place to welcome non-Catholics? It is comprehensible for the knowing, but for others it can be overwhelming.
- Do not forget the importance of the centrality of the Eucharist and the presence of Jesus: the importance of preserving our reverence for the Sacrifice of the Mass.
- Could we have different style Masses? Eg Family, quiet, small, local (for those with mobility problems) and there were other ideas.
- It should be made clear that children are welcome...even noisy ones! Can the youth be more involved in the Liturgy?
- A recurring and strong theme was that of our exclusion of non-Catholics and those divorced and remarried at communion.
- The role of women, not just as Priests but also not being able to preach was an issue here
- Homilies should not only be shorter, but also of good quality and also more appropriate for children on regular occasions.
- The liturgy can be staid and correct, but should aim to be participatory.
- We should not forget the purpose of the Mass, as source and summit, a taste of heaven: Some reminded us that we should pay attention again to Liturgical documents, consider the music, language and position of the Priest during consecration and avoid anything that is not holy and sacred in the rites. Being too influenced by Anglicanism was seen as a problem.
- Some participants mentioned some young people they know prefer a more traditional approach.

Parish. The main Parish Mass is now too long (this particularly from the elderly as well as parents) and this is off-putting for infrequent attenders, especially at Christmas and Easter.

Homilies should be shorter, music made relevant

Encourage everyone to go to other Masses in the Churches and see how we all celebrate.

#### 5. CO-RESPONSIBLE IN THE MISSION

##### *How well do we work together as clergy and laity for the mission of the Church?*

There were frequent and strongly held views in this area, both for the Universal Church and locally in the Parish. Before explaining these points it should be said that there were a number of expressions of support for clergy, their ministry, their priesthood as a sacrifice, gratitude for priests carrying out their ministry within the realities of parishioners' lives.

- The Church is a hierarchy with only celibate men ultimately allowed to govern.
- What about women? Women as Priests, women as Deacons, women having much more meaningful roles and as co-partners in the Mission. Not having women as Priests might be considered to be disrespectful and sexist: this was expressed by some very young people.
- We should be aware of and beware of clericalism, it is time to challenge and change.

- The laity seek more authority, they can be trusted.
- There is no mechanism to challenge when we are unhappy with the way a Parish is run.
- The clergy do not have the monopoly on Mission of the Church, it is a joint responsibility.
- Do not let the strictures of the Church be stumbling blocks in our mission.
- The clergy workload is onerous; let the laity do more.
- Can we articulate the Mission? Many are not clear what it is.
- Remember that responsibility comes with accountability and lay people should understand that in their ministries.
- Another question asked was, what is the Mission of the Church? Have we explained it? How do we understand it?

Parish. The selection of laity onto the SLT and the ESG is not a democratic process. Only a small number of laity are involved. Perhaps both bodies should have a fixed tenure for its members (PP apart). There was concern in some quarters that laity are not representative or accountable and are often the people the Priest feels will not challenge him.

Does the Parish have a 'Priesthood of laity' on committees?!

The SLT often protects the Priest and this should not happen as we parishioners need access to the clergy for pastoral and other matters.

There is no parish forum for challenging the SLT, e.g. criticisms of Divine Renovation process, see also comments on Alpha in responses #10.

## 6. DIALOGUE IN CHURCH AND SOCIETY

*How can our group, parish, diocese and the Church be more outward-facing?*

Many thoughts and aspects were included in this subject:

- We should further reach out to the disengaged, the lapsed, the unbelievers. Try and find out why people have left the Church: we should listen and seek to understand.
- Be much more outward looking as a Church. The issue of difference, bias and prejudice against anyone was raised a number of times. This was particularly so about sexuality.
- We should pray to be filled with the Holy Spirit and move out into society, inspired by our faith.
- Let us look after the people that society has failed, the Church is a 'field hospital'.
- Communicate our mission to all and all that we are doing.
- Whilst we might have an opinion based on Church teaching, we must be sensitive and careful not to offend and chase people away.
- We must talk about the difficult issues in society and for individuals.
- We should use language that is accessible and easy to understand, especially for children and young people.

Parish. Our intercessions should be much more about the world, outward facing. Events such as 'the Night of Light' were frequently commended by participants as good ways of drawing people in to meet us and their God. Other ideas on how to reach out and help/pray for others emerged.

## 7. WITH THE OTHER CHRISTIAN DENOMINATIONS

*In what ways might we improve our dialogue and relationship with other Christians?*

- Ecumenism was a frequently voiced reflection.
- Let's get much more involved with other Churches and find things in common.
- At Feast times (eg Christmas) we might worship together.
- Sadness about a lack of inter-communion, especially for those married to non-Catholics who practise in other Churches. Questions about how this can be resolved.
- Ecumenism is a serious matter and the Catholic Church should be actively involved in inter-church dialogue.
- We could do much together in the way of practical deeds and let us shout out about what we do together.
- There were just a few small but strong voices that we 'are not all the same', we do not want to become 'Anglicised' and that we should aim to bring everyone to the fullness of truth.' This could be interpreted as not allowing our faith and Church teachings to be diluted.

Parish. Parish. People wanted to do more. Many people seemed unaware of current ecumenical initiatives locally to which the Parish already contributes, such as the work of Churches Together Winchester, Street Pastors, Basics Bank, Night Shelter and The Olive Branch counselling service. We should publicise more what we and these organisations do and try and encourage people to volunteer.

## 8. AUTHORITY AND PARTICIPATION

*How can we make the Church more participatory and increase co-responsibility?*

This and section 9 were blended and similar issues emerged, including clericalism, married Priests and the role of women, and hearing the voice of the youth of the Church both locally and worldwide.

Other points:

- Leaders both clerical and lay should be humble and acknowledge they are servants.
- More gender equality in the authority of the Church is needed.
- Everyone should be involved and welcomed into participation no matter their age, gender, sexuality and race.
- The Catholic Church was seen by many as authoritative and inflexible. Too much emphasis on 'top level' discussion.
- Some viewed the Church as hypocritical.

## 9. DISCERNING AND DECIDING

*In a synodal style Church, what new processes of decision-making and decision-taking are needed? How transparent and accountable are the decisions made?*

A recurrent theme was how effective and prayerful the Church Listening Sessions have been and people want to continue to engage in listening exercises like this.

- Remember we are not a corporate entity but a body.
- We are a Church which is out of step with the times having male, celibate men in charge.
- The Church should no longer be a 'clerical club' but have real, lay involvement.

- Whilst Priests celebrate the Mass and therefore are central to deciding how that is done, if we lose lay involvement during worship that would be unacceptable .
- Allow women and married Priests or we might find it hard to see the future
- It is time that the whole structure of Church authority and co-responsibility is overhauled with the introduction of democratic values and processes.
- Be careful that we do not lose some truths in the process of change and review.
- Do not throw the baby out with the bath water.
- Many looked at the strengths of lay involvement in the Anglican Church.
- Not all Anglicans feel their General Synod is a good thing.
- Young people should be able to participate in decision making.

Parish: As already noted, the Parish governance structure needs reviewing so as to be sure it has real and meaningful lay involvement.

There was no input from a large number of Parish groups that meet regularly, including youth, despite offers and requests. This was a missed opportunity for the Parish to reflect on for the future.

## 10. FORMING OURSELVES IN SYNODALITY

*How do we form people to make them more capable of “journeying together”?*

- There was much enthusiasm for formation on understanding our faith so we ‘go out’ firm in knowledge.
- Formation of Priests as effective leaders both in seminary and ongoing development.
- A welcome and desire for formation, courses, understanding theology and scripture.
- We should have a focus on formation for young adults.
- We need to improve our own faith lives in order to go out and evangelise.
- It helps to talk to other Catholics outside the context of Mass, for example Alpha and small groups.

Parish: Alpha was both commended and also not welcomed (more positive than not). More formation for young people. Small groups welcomed and encouraged.