



THE ARCHDIOCESE *of* BIRMINGHAM



WALKING TOGETHER

THE DIOCESAN SYNTHESIS

## ARCHBISHOP'S PREFACE.

### **Responding to the Pope's invitation to share the synodal journey**

Pope Francis's invitation involves the whole Church in a process of consultation that is much lengthier and broader than previous consultations. The main event is no longer the actual Synod of Bishops which will happen in 2023 - the process of synodality has been extended so that the whole Church can participate along the Synodal Pathway. The experience of synodality now embraces every member of the Body of Christ and not just the bishops when they eventually meet in Rome.

### **Ecclesial Listening and Dialogue**

The Catholic Church's commitment to dialogue with other Christians and people of other faiths – her openness to listen and learn – is now bearing fruit within the Catholic community. For over sixty years we have been ready to discuss our differences ecumenically and to seek a deeper understanding of a contrasting convictions. Now the Church within our Archdiocese is ready to promote an internal dialogue among those who hold different and sometimes opposing points of view in order to hear the Holy Spirit speaking within the dialogue itself.

As the Preparatory Document for the Synod says: *'Dialogue is a path of perseverance that also includes silences and sufferings, but which is capable of gathering the experience of persons and peoples. What are the places and modes of dialogue within our particular Church? How are divergences of vision, the conflicts, the difficulties addressed?'*

Synodality involves the kind of listening and discerning which from start to finish is the work of the Holy Spirit. It seeks to imitate Christ's own listening to his Father in the depths of his being – expressed by St Paul in terms of obedience: *'Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus ... he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death - even death on a cross'*.

This ecclesial listening is similar to *lectio divina*. It tries to listen to what the Holy Spirit is saying to the different diocesan Churches that constitute the Church in England and Wales. Our ears need to be attuned for this kind of listening and we sometimes need formation to be able to listen in this way. The Holy Spirit breathes life into our synodality and enables us to acquire the disposition we need to listen attentively, responsively, and creatively to each other in dialogue.

[Archbishop Bernard Longley]

**Archbishop Bernard Longley is our primary discerner.** On Saturday 19 March, the Synodal Pathway Group gathered at Newman University. This small group met with the Archbishop to begin the process of intense discernment and prayer; to listen to the Holy Spirit and to identify the key points from our journey together. This document is the fruit of this act of Diocesan discernment.

### **The Archdiocese of Birmingham Diocesan Vision, Unfolding God's Plan.**

As an Archdiocese we had already discerned four Diocesan priorities and themes, which shaped our approach to how we wished to undertake our *walking together*:

- EVANGELISATION
- FORMATION
- LITURGY AND WORSHIP
- SOCIAL OUTREACH

with emphasis on **Families and Young People**  
and an emphasis on **servicing in a co-responsible manner**.

Our Diocesan Vision is to be a Catholic Diocese which is faithful to the mission entrusted to us by Jesus Christ, full of missionary disciples who work together co-responsibly in vibrant communities of faith, joyful in their service of God and neighbour.

## The Synthesis and the Diocesan Vision

*'Each diocese has been asked to produce a synthesis which will be submitted to the Bishops' Conference. However, walking together is not only about producing a document, but rather reflecting upon our experience of the journey. The documentation from the Synod Office in Rome speaks of the Church as being synodal in its very nature. This requires us to be open to the voice of the Holy Spirit and making listening a norm of pastoral ministry'.*

[Walking Together, Diocesan Handbook, Page 7]

Our listening and discernment will feed directly into our Diocesan Vision and priorities. The results of this discernment will be available to all, as the responses and findings will be published alongside this document, which is the result of our Diocesan discernment.

[COMMENT: **RECOGNISING: LISTENING OF THE HEART/THE PLURALITY OF VOICES:** bring out the most important points of what emerged on the "walk together", whether they are shared by many, or because of the consensus on something that even one person highlighted.

**INTERPRETING: IDENTIFYING VITAL KEY POINTS:** The outline and drafting of the key text should go deep as possible into these points to grasp the presence of the Spirit of life.

**CHOOSING: THE OUTLINE AND THE DRAFTING OF THE TEXT:** among the many things which emerged, what is significant to share within the synodal journey? How to communicate it? - the dialogue continues.

## Thoughts on our experience of Synodality

*The opportunity to listen and discern was embraced with great enthusiasm by the majority of parishes. The response from 85% of parishes and 80% of schools surpassed our initial expectations. 'It is a humbling experience to be trusted to truthfully reflect what fellow parishioners shared of their concerns and dreams for our own parishes and wider church.'* [St John the Evangelist, Kidsgrove, St Joseph, Goldenhill, St Patrick, Packmoor, English Martyrs, Biddulph].

The quality of listening has been enhanced in every forum across the Archdiocese. This has been notable at the Council of Priests and within other pastoral settings. Many of our parishes wish to continue this synodal pathway as a means of learning and experiencing synodality in every aspect of parish life.

Some of our priests have welcomed this opportunity:

*'Thankyou for going to the trouble of inviting responses from clergy. I don't think we have ever had an opportunity in my life as a priest [over 30 yrs] to have our reflections recorded like this in written form. I hope there is a good response. If there is, it could also be painful reading though! Nevertheless, it could also be very fruitful'.*

[Individual Submission; Priest of the Archdiocese of Birmingham].

Other Priests found this experience challenging:

*'The synodal process at the parish level has, from my perspective, been divisive. There seems to be distrust among many parishioners that the synod is a means of 'liberalising the Church.' If such changes do not come, it will be pastorally challenging to deal with these unrealised expectations. Likewise, if such changes were to come, I think there would be great upset among another groups of the faithful. I have personally found this to be a challenging situation to deal with in the early years of the priesthood. The report has been challenging as most of the views expressed are both critical of the Church (her teaching and disciplines) and its priests. I have taken away from the synod process that people value the community of faith that they find in their parish'.*

[Individual Submission; Priest of the Archdiocese of Birmingham].

There is a sense that the experience of synodality is beginning to be embedded within the life of the Archdiocese. There is a sense that we are at the beginning of a new expression of Diocesan life, which will be aided by the visible and practical implementation of our Diocesan Vision.

Our Synodal methodology has sought to reach out beyond our parish communities and those who attend Mass regularly. Several parishes invited responses from other Christian Churches and ecclesial communities, as well as other faith communities. For example, St Peter's Church,

Leamington invited their local Mosque to contribute to their discernment and received a three-page response from the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community.

*'I truly appreciate that the Catholic Church is trying to create platforms and ways so that all faiths and communities can work together in creating peace in the world'.*

[Shahzad Ahmad Missionary in charge, Baitul Ehsan Leamington Spa & Baitul Muqet, Walsall].

We have managed to reach many of those families on the periphery of parish life through our schools. Each school has organised meetings for students and their families, many of whom value their participation through the school family. In this way our schools offer an invaluable service of reaching out towards and inviting those on the periphery, to participate more fully in the life of the Church.

Other educational institutions played an essential role on our synodal journey. Newman University enabled the Diocesan discernment and reflection; and alongside other University Chaplaincies and CathSocs, offered submissions. St Mary's College, Oscott, our Diocesan Seminary, embraced the Synodal experience. Individual pastoral groups spent several months listening and discerning. In March Oscott College hosted a Symposium on the Synod, which proved illuminating for staff, students and visitors.

## COMMUNION

Communion expresses every aspect of our life in Christ and in the Church. This in turn leads naturally to our participation in this life and from this, our Baptismal mission to bring Christ to the world. Our questions focused upon our experiences, particularly in the light of the pandemic. Much of the feedback focused on the reception of the Sacraments, in particular, and the life of Prayer.

*'The absence from church has led people to a deeper appreciation of the Mass and what it means to belong to a community'* [Our Lady & St Benedict's, Abbey Hulton].

### **The Eucharist at the heart of Communion.**

*'Missing the sacraments does not make me feel guilty but empty!'*

[St Mary & St Benedict's, Coventry].

*'For me the Sacraments are God's 'life-support system' but I sense the danger in 'routine' celebration, mediocre liturgy and homilies that do not speak to the real world.'*

[Individual submission].

*'Mass is part of what we are. It is part of a communal expression of belief and worship. The Mass is not a lifestyle choice or an optional extra but part of a Christian way of life. A common purpose, it radiates outwards.'* [Blessed Carlo Acutis, Wolverhampton].

There was also an acknowledgement that other expressions of prayer and worship were necessary to build up a life of faith:

*'Add more forms of worship and faith-building events outside the Holy Mass e.g. Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, Bible study groups, prayer groups, pilgrimages, etc.'*

[St Michael's Birmingham].

*'We need more spirituality and faith development outside the liturgy to bring people back.'*

[Erdington Abbey].

[COMMENT: Greater faith development for Mission was the most frequently mentioned request of all of our submissions. Therefore, Faith development will be discussed in detail, in the context of Mission. [Synodal Pathway Group]

### **Periphery and Perception:**

We also reflected upon the perception of the Church by those on the periphery of parish life and those who are not Catholics. The majority of these submissions challenged how the Church is perceived.

*'In terms of the Church's responses to modern issues, a number mentioned the problems we have relating to single parents, family/marriage breakdown, gender and LGBT. These are the contexts which families and individual Catholics live in today. Church teaching and practice, it was believed, needs to be adapted to modern times.'* [St Dunstan's, Kings Heath].

*'I feel that the divorced and separated Catholics or those in relationships outside a failed marriage are currently not treated compassionately by the Church'.*  
[Our Lady of the Wayside, Shirley, Birmingham]

**The family responses** gathered through our schools had a strong sense of belonging to the wider family, all sharing the same beliefs. This was considered to build community and enabled people to feel closer to God.

The overarching support came at sacramental moments when they sought the Church. Preparation for the Sacraments was valued and was a significant support, as it helped parents to understand their faith more deeply and encouraged them to attend Church regularly. However, many felt that their main focus of support came through the school community but there was a detachment from the life of the parish/Church. The vast majority of these responses said that they prayed regularly at some time at home. Often as a family either in the morning or at bedtime, or before meals.

One submission valued 'teaching our children the faith and watching them grow into wonderful compassionate people – this is something missing in today's society'... 'I have come to understand the sacraments more as I have grown up. The teamwork required in marriage was something I underestimated as a youngster, but my husband has been my rock. Now as my children prepare for these sacraments, I can help them and teach them further about their importance'.

[COMMENT: We are not yet in the position at all where priests and laity are working together. It was noted that very few of the clergy themselves participated in the discernment groups, (as opposed to organising, supporting, and enabling them to happen) this was often to ensure that the discussion might be more open without their presence. Therefore, we need to develop a greater sense of the People of God including all those ordained. Perhaps they are just so used to priestly formation as called to be servants of the laity. It was decided to contact the priests and to get an honest sense from them as to what they really think about the experience of the synodal process. [Synodal Pathway Group]

## **PARTICIPATION**

By virtue of our Baptism, we share in the life of Christ. As members of the Church, we are called to participate in its life and mission by the exercise of its priestly and prophetic office and being at the service of all. Our participation in the life of the Church is underpinned by our understanding of co-responsibility: whereby we all share in the mission and life of the Church, precisely because of our Baptismal mission.

Many responses recorded a positive understanding of participation, particularly as part of the Synodal experience of *Walking Together*:

*Those who took part did have a good experience, listening to their fellow parishioners, their experiences being a Catholic. They felt being part of a wider family and getting a sense of belonging as in people who share the same faith and who are very eager and enthusiastic to come forward and work together as one parish community.'* [St Catherine of Siena, Birmingham].

*'People recognised too, that our participation and involvement in the life and mission of the Church is more than we do on a Saturday evening or Sunday morning.'*  
[St George & St Martin's, Birches Head, Stoke-on-Trent].

Others believed that the Archdiocese needs to do much more to encourage greater participation:

*'The Church is struggling to educate, utilise and empower lay faithful to play an active part in parish life.'* [St Joseph the Worker and St Thomas More, Coventry].

*'There is little provision of informal Church structures at parish, deanery and diocesan levels in this country for the involvement of adult lay Catholics in dialogue with the clergy and decision-making. Lay people have valuable experiences to share and insights to offer. They exercise responsibility and authority in many areas of their lives but not in the governance of the Church where they are expected to take a subordinate role.'* [Individual submission].

**The family responses** gathered through our schools had a strong sense that the role of grandparents was crucial for the faith development of their grandchildren. Often, children's participation was enabled by their grandparents, rather than their parents. Often children shared with their parents what they had learned, this was especially the case during Sacramental preparation.

The main barrier for greater participation was the balance of work/life/commitments as well as family commitments. There was mention that there was no engagement for children other than through the schools – expressing missed opportunities. Children's liturgy at Church was highly valued. Some non-Catholic parents feared that they would not be welcomed.

[ARCHBISHOP'S COMMENT: **Respect for the Individual Voices Heard**

The Diocesan synodal process gives due respect to the voices of individuals and distinctive groups and we hear their own words in this synthesis. As we look beyond our immediate contribution to the Synodal Pathway at national level we need to capture these voices and insights within our own Diocesan Vision and planning. When individuals and communities recognise their particular contributions, it encourages further engagement in the Diocesan dialogue.

In these voices I recognise the *Sensus Fidei* fruitful and at work within all the baptised and inspiring their contributions. It is my responsibility, supported by the priests and deacons of the Archdiocese, to provide and enhance further opportunities for this manifestation of the Holy Spirit's influence. The People of God have a role in contributing to and helping to shape our diocesan decision-making. I am grateful that laymen and laywomen work alongside clergy as diocesan trustees in support of our diocesan mission. [Archbishop Bernard Longley]

## **Co-Responsibility**

Some responses spoke of the frustration at the lack of Co-Responsibility:

*'I feel I could do more but don't have the permission to fulfil my full potential. Responsibility isn't something that is spoken or thought about. Assumed that our role is 'taking part' instead of leading or having responsibility'.* [Blessed Carlo Acutis, Wolverhampton]

*'The priest does have an insight into the gifts and talents of the Church people, and I know that some people will ask others to help, but this will always be something that needs discernment so that people's gifts will help the Church and are not missed. This can happen through a church getting to know itself better. Too often churches are 'run' by a small group of people who do not want other people with differing views to theirs to become too involved. The parish level is too fragmented. The Church would benefit if there was some mechanism in place which could link individual members with professional skills – from different parishes across the diocese.* [St Teresa of the Child Jesus, Trent Vale, Stoke-on-Trent].

*'We should try and find ways we can engage people with their skills so we can spread the burden and not rely on a few active volunteers'.* [Our Lady of the Wayside, Shirley, Birmingham]

*'I was pleased to be asked to use my professional skills to help prepare music for Mass. We need to be more proactive in recognising people's gifts and asking people directly to take part and use their gifts'.* [West Indian Chaplaincy, Birmingham].

*'A more widespread movement of lay roles in the church, following the Pope's opening up of the roles of lector, acolyte, and catechists to lay people, including women. This will help take the Church out to the people of the community, with the priest's focus on the sacraments. Catholics often rely too heavily on clergy to organise things whereas we can do it for ourselves'.* [Blessed Carlo Acutis, Wolverhampton]

*'Truly inspirational parish life is more vibrant now because we the laity are now having the opportunity and taking responsibility and accepting a new movement, gaining strength in faith and moving forward together'. [Our Lady of the Wayside, Shirley, Birmingham]*

*'All people should speak by virtue of Baptism and Confirmation. Common Priesthood. We don't do enough to build up the laity in order for them to speak the truth in their own spheres and workplaces. Well informed laity and that's what we lack, we should have catechised the laity before this synod process'. [Seminarian submissions. St Mary's College, Oscott.]*

*'Members of the parish are fully encouraged to participate in the life of the church and there is a wonderful mix of people of all ages. I think having an actively involved priest is essential.'*  
[Christ the King with St Augustine's, Coventry.]

*'Through prayer, invitation and teaching people to understand their role and recognise that their gifts and expertise are God given for the building up the Body of Christ. People need help to discern what their contribution ought to be and encourage all skills to take up new challenges.'*  
[Our Lady & St Werburgh's, Clayton and Our Lady & St John the Baptist, Ashley]

[COMMENT: The discernment group discussed at length how to be transparent with the laity as to all steps on the synodal journey right up to the Bishop's meeting next year so that they experience their own involvement with the ongoing synodal pathway. [Synodal Pathway Group]

## **Inclusion**

Participation also presumes inclusion; that the Church is a place for all, where each can enrich its life by their gifts and charisms. This includes schools, families and young people; the role of women in the Church, and the inclusion and welcome of those who feel marginalised from the Church's life.

## **Role of Women**

There was extensive commentary on the role of women throughout the submissions. Two main themes emerged: women's ordination, which, owing to its doctrinal and universal implications, is covered in the final section on matters for further discernment, and the effective use of gifts and wisdom of women in the life of the Church which is noted here. Some of the issues raised are to do with the role of the laity rather than the role of women, but within this there is clarity expressed on the different experiences.

*'Improve procedures to involve laity. It's a good thing to involve more lay people in the decision-making process, and especially women who bring a different perspective i.e., have experience of family life. It was noted that the Pope has appointed women to some key roles in the Vatican, which was welcomed. Women's rights and involvement. Women must be seen to be much more prominent at youth level and senior levels. Women are on the Board of Trustees for the Diocese – how many people know that?' [Blessed Carlo Acutis, Wolverhampton]*

*'The Church treats women as second-class citizens and does not meet today's standards of equality and diversity. The Church loses out on the potential of women and the benefits of collaborative ministry.'* [Bewdley & Stourport].

*'It is surely clear by now that in the main and for decades, the laity including women religious have had little or no voice in the structures of the institutional Church'.*  
[Individual submission. Female Religious.]

*'The parish needs a better consultation process that allows every voice to be heard. The role and participation of women in discussions and decision making is not proportionate to their support in parish life'. 'Women are an untapped source with a great deal to offer at every level.'*  
[Our Lady of the Wayside, Shirley, Birmingham]

*'There is a need to review/clarify the role of women in the church generally and in the various ministries.'* [Warwick University Chaplaincy].

*'The question of female involvement in the decision-making at all levels was raised to bring more balanced decisions, and a question as to how that was going to be reflected in the synod process at a diocesan level.'* [St Francis of Assisi, Kenilworth, Warwickshire].

'The lived reality is that parish life is effectively sustained mostly by the contribution, loyalty and commitment of women of all ages.' [St Ambrose Barlow, Hall Green, Birmingham].

'Church decision-making need for the perspective of lay people, esp. women and young people to be involved'. [Our Lady and St John, Goring and Christ the King, Woodcote, Oxfordshire].

'The place of women in society has thankfully changed out of all recognition. The Church's reactions to this has spread from the welcoming to obstructionism. In our own diocese it is obvious that some people are not aware of just how far we have moved – even if we could move further. At the same time the Church as a whole, has again not carried out the necessary reflection which is needed. We need again to move away from inherited cultural and social stereotypes'. [Individual Submission. Male Religious].

'Women should be invited to participate in institutional Church governance, decision-making, discernment and guidance e.g., at Deanery meetings, Pastoral Councils, etc.' [Women of the Diocese Group]

## **A Place for All**

In a large number of Synod responses there was a strong sense that the Church must be there for all. Without undermining the Lord's challenging call to repentance and holiness, it was felt strongly that the Church should embrace all its members and those at the point of entry, those on the peripheries and those bruised by our hurting world. This was seen to include especially those from minority groups, those who have been abused, people who are divorced and re-married. It also includes same sex attracted persons, those who struggle with gender identity, people in difficult situations and those who find it hard to follow all the moral teachings of the Church. However, the parish was found to be a 'safe place' to begin discussing such difficult and contested conversations, which is evident by the number of times this was mentioned in submissions:

One meeting included people who identified with the LGBT community and parents of people who do. I quote from some of their comments:

- *They all said they felt unwelcome in Church.*
- *One man said he had been asked to leave a church because of his sexual orientation.*
- *The youngest member there said he looked back on the Church as something beautiful that he used to have but does not have now.*
- *One person said that their Priest had, in a homily, likened the LGBT community to ISIS.*
- *They all felt that while they would love to belong in a Church community "the emotional toll is too much and not worth it".*
- *There was one older man present, and he said he has come back to the Church now he is older and no longer has a partner but if he still had love in his life, he would not feel he could. The same man said it would make such a difference if the Church would respond to them.*

The enabler concludes, '*they were a small group, in no way angry with the Church - just hurt*'.

**'The Settled Travelling Community** within the Midlands feel very isolated as they are scattered all over the central region of the UK. When the travellers attend their local parishes they are never made to feel welcome by other church parishioners due to the behaviour of other traveller groups in the past this they feel very much discriminated against'. [Feedback from Travelling Community].

A sense of marginalisation and pain included those who value **the traditional Latin Mass**:  
'*Seeing how fundamentally these Masses have affected our own journey in faith, and how profoundly they are drawing souls to the church, including many young families, we are concerned that a baseline policy going forward will be to make provision of the Latin Mass a serious and real priority in our Archdiocese and beyond; something which appears to be under threat at present, and a cause for alarm even in the secular world, making headline news.* [Individual submission].



## Schools, Families and Young People

*'I like being in a Catholic School because it's not just full of Christians, its also Muslims, Indians and more religions. God is wanting us to treat other people with respect and spread God's love'.*

[Pupil. Class 6R St. Francis of Assisi, Handsworth, Birmingham]

[COMMENT: The Kenelm Youth Trust and the Birmingham Catholic Youth Service visited the majority of our 36 secondary schools and Multi Academy Companies (MAC's), to conduct listening sessions. The schools eagerly accepted this invitation, and all of their sessions were all booked up within 90 minutes. Examples of their findings can be found in the appendix to this document.

*'For many young people their only experience of community within the Church is through their school, but those of all faiths and none recognised the nurture and strength found in their school community and identified the Catholic ethos as the source of this'.* [Kenelm Youth Trust]

*'Sunday Mass isn't central to young Catholics' lives – even those articulate about their faith and passionate about mission might not make it a priority. And for the first time we began to hear from multiple young people that their own parents were a barrier as they did not attend and weren't keen on their child doing so'.* [Kenelm Youth Trust]

*'There was far greater commitment to a life of prayer than the practice of attending Sunday Mass. The Sacrament of Reconciliation was spoken of in very positive terms – opportunities in school are valued and have been missed during COVID'.* [Kenelm Youth Trust]

*'Music was a key way in which young people either engaged or struggled to engage in Mass whether in the school or the parish. There was a strong desire for greater sense of joy within Mass. Where young people had a positive experience of clergy, there was joy found in these interactions and it was often stated as a reason for attending Mass on a Sunday'.* [Kenelm Youth Trust]

There was clear and deep concern for the youth and young people. Concern regarding the departure of young people, after Confirmation, was aired by a number of parishes.

*'Full participation of children through restarting Diocesan youth ministry events and camps. Important to foster participation from an early age. Diocese should do more to encourage young families.' ... 'Missed opportunities to involve youth more – especially following the very promising synod for the young. We need to reach out to young people. Need to find a way to get younger people to commit. How can we re introduce the children's liturgy and the youth club?'*

[Blessed Carlo Acutis, Wolverhampton]

## MISSION

*'This Synodal process has a deeply missionary dimension to it. It is intended to enable the Church to better witness to the Gospel, especially with those who live on the spiritual, social, economic, political, geographical and existential peripheries of our world. In this way, synodality is a path by which the Church can more fruitfully fulfil her mission of evangelization in the world, as a leaven at the service of the coming of God's kingdom'.* [Vademecum for the Synod. 1.4]

Several parishes have begun to realise this understanding of how an experience of synodality can deepen our formation of faith for mission.

*'A church where the current Synodal process is sustained and enhanced, becoming embedded in the life of the Church, and there is continued dialogue and comprehensive lay engagement.'* [St Peter's, Eynsham, Oxon.].

*'They enjoyed the meetings so much they want us to meet again every few months to have a similar session 'to talk openly about our faith.'* [Our Lady of Perpetual Succour, Stoke-on-Trent].

## Social Outreach

There was a very strong sense of the Church's commitment to Social Outreach and care for the poor and needy. This understanding was evident for those both within the Church, and those who are not Catholics. Even when those outside the Church were very critical of its structure and teachings, they nonetheless praised its Social Outreach. Action through Good Shepherd Ministry, CAFOD, Mission charities and donations to food banks were mentioned frequently. Many of the

submissions mentioned that Pope Francis is a powerful advocate for the poor both in word and deed. This was also true for those outside the Church.

*'Wolverhampton almost an epicentre for the poor, marginalized, immigrants, asylum seekers, economic migrants, disabled and those displaced by family breakdown and abuse. Wolverhampton is a rundown, under resourced city compared to most before one even looks at the issue of its population's poverty. Jesus would feel very at home here standing in Queen's Square!'* [Blessed Carlo Acutis, Wolverhampton]

## **Evangelisation**

*'I like being in a Catholic school because we can learn more about Jesus than being in a normal school also we go to Mass and I can learn about my religion and share it to others, we have a prayer life and we are taught to be truthful and respect others. We want to spread God's love on earth and keep his love everlasting and to stay faithful and tell people about the good in God for he has done for he has created and filled us with his kindness and love in our body.'*

[Pupil. Class 6R St Francis of Assisi, Handsworth, Birmingham]

*'Compassion- a desire to reach out to those who are in need of befriending, in any sort of pain and suffering, of loneliness. To reach out, also, to those Catholics who have left the Church, wanting to help them rediscover this closeness and intimacy of God's loving presence.'*

[St Francis, Handsworth].

*'To evangelise- preach the Gospel to all and to work for the conversion of individuals to Christ. The Church must focus on preaching the Gospel by its teaching, preaching and actions. All Catholics should be encouraged in this. New methods are required, meeting the needs of today's society. It is of paramount importance especially now, many of the people who need converting and are at the same time hard to convert are former Catholics who left the Church.'*

[Warwick Catholic University Chaplaincy].

*'Do we work hard enough for those who cannot get to Mass- we need to make sure they know we haven't forgotten them and that the parish are still praying for them and they have lost their voice.'* [English Martyrs, Sparkhill].

*'Evangelisation has to be part of our next steps, both inviting back and inviting new disciples.'*

[St John Henry Newman Cluster, Wolverhampton].

[COMMENT: We need to ensure that evangelisation is more than simply sacramental preparation but helps people to encounter Christ in prayer and in a personal way (more opportunities for adoration and scripture sharing). The laity need this and are asking for this. (Perhaps basic ecclesial community type groups in parishes to continue the faith sharing begun in the synodal conversations; Focolare have some good models of faith sharing around the word).

[Synodal Pathway Group]

## **Formation for Mission**

[COMMENT: We have discerned that this is one of the vital key points arising from our experience of walking together. However, formation does not exist in a vacuum, rather it is directed towards Mission. It is within this context that we wish to discuss this finding.

The subject which arose most frequently throughout almost every submission was the question of formation. Participants enjoyed 'talking about their faith', found the parish to be a 'safe place' to begin discussing difficult and contested conversations, or hoped that there might be greater opportunities for formation in the future.

*'We need to share our personal testimonies with an authenticity that reveals the love, mercy and compassion of God in order that others can see and know they are uniquely loved, precious and cherished.'* [Life in Spirit small group].

*'The parish can be a 'safe place' for people to get used to the idea of discussing their faith with like-minded people who are unlikely to be hostile or ask difficult questions. They can help prepare people to speak to those with no faith outside the Church community'.*

[St Christopher & St Thomas of Canterbury, Wolverhampton].

*Dreams.... 'That Catholics would be continuously formed in their faith throughout their lifetime and that adults especially would be equipped with the knowledge to defend the faith and to develop a deeper and more mature life of prayer.'* [All Souls Parish, Coventry].

#### [ARCHBISHOP'S COMMENT: **Diocesan Resources**

As well as the lay, Religious and ordained members of the diocesan family, we are blessed in the Archdiocese with resources for formation which we will need to fulfil the vision of the committed and equipped missionary disciples which all Catholics are called to be. A strong appetite for formation has emerged from the Synodal Pathway and our diocesan agencies and organisations will have a part in the formation required.

We are particularly blessed by the presence and work of the seminary at St Mary's College, Oscott; by the catechetical and theological formation offered by the Maryvale Institute; by the unique contribution of Newman University; by the formation of our young people within the Kenelm Youth Trust; and by the formation in the Church's Social Teaching which is part of the outreach of Father Hudson's Care. These are some of the prominent and distinctive features of our Diocesan landscape that will help us map our way along the Synodal Pathway in the years ahead. [Archbishop Bernard Longley].

### **Barriers to Mission**

#### **Confidence**

*'When 'evangelisation' is mentioned, this seems to make many Catholics feel uncomfortable and at a loss as to how to respond. Would local processions and pilgrimages help people to evangelise by witnessing to their faith in public, while supported by others. Through example we have to convince others that faith is integral to a complete life, not an optional extra.'*

[St Michael's Catholic Church, Sonning Common].

*Sharing your faith- 'more help with adult formations to be to do this. Actions as well as words proclaim the Gospel'.* [Holy Redeemer, Pershore & St Joseph's, Worcester].

*'Evangelisation is the aspect of the Catholic faith which I find the most difficult.'*

[Christ the King, Coventry].

#### **Abuse**

*'Many of my friends are lapsed Catholics citing the atrocities of priests and religious orders as a stumbling block for them. ... These issues are constantly raised by those who are non-religious or lapsed of the hypocrisy of the Church and its failure to live up to what Christ has called us to be'.*

[Our Lady of the Wayside, Shirley, Birmingham]

#### **Pandemic**

*'As in other walks of life, I think the pandemic and severe lockdowns have caused us as 'church to 'lose our voices'. It has been hard to emerge from isolation and I know from listening to them that some church members feel demotivated about attending church again or getting actively involved'.* [Individual submission. Female Religious.]

#### **Ecumenism**

Several submissions praised the strong Ecumenical relationships in their area. Others wanted more Ecumenical encounters. [Dudley & Tipton].

*'In terms of the wider ecumenism there is a felt need, and willingness, to be engaged with those of other faiths and those without faith.'* [Women of the Diocese Group].

*'Maybe relate more to those outside the church try to involve people of all denominations, we are all God's people not just Catholics.'* [Christ the King, Coventry].

*'Share with other Churches speak together walk together not a competition.'*

[Sacred Heart, and St Joseph's, North Staffs Deanery].

*'Christian unity is so important. Breaking down barriers. Praying together for peace and to overcome poverty and injustice in our own communities and worldwide.'* [St Joseph's, Thame].

*'It was felt that greater efforts could be made on Christian Unity. Christian churches should stand shoulder to shoulder in an unbelieving world. There should be more opportunities for sharing and collaborating and praying together, Christian Unity week, Remembrance Day, World Day of Prayer etc.'* [Holy Trinity Church, Chipping Norton].

*'Although the focus of the questions were very Catholic Church centred and parish based, it was good to see that there is a strong feeling that parishes need to be more inclusive and engaging, and that an important element of this is engagement with other Churches. There is a strong desire for improved social outreach, and action to address the climate emergency, and that the Christian Community should speak and act with one voice in this regard'*.  
[The Ecumenical Commission, Archdiocese of Birmingham].

## **Environmental Issues**

*'Should recycle as much as possible e.g., after community gatherings and bear this in mind when planning e.g., don't use plastic cups and plates and cutlery etc where possible (not just to save work) or paper ones, if reusable crockery and cutlery is available. Consider planning a route for leftover food beforehand so that it can be used asap not thrown away'*.  
[Blessed Carlo Acutis, Wolverhampton]

## **MOVING FORWARD – OUR NEXT STEPS**

The People of God across the Archdiocese of Birmingham have responded enthusiastically to Pope Francis' invitation to a process of consultation. This experience of synodality -of *Walking Together* – is the beginning of our Synodal Pathway in the years ahead. It requires us to be open to the voice of the Holy Spirit and making listening a norm of pastoral ministry. This listening and discernment will feed directly into our Diocesan Vision and priorities. Your response will shape our understanding and the implementation of the next stages of our Diocesan Vision. We hope you will see the fruits of this discernment in action before the Synod of Bishops begins in 2023.

## **Co-responsibility and the Way Forward**

[ARCHBISHOP'S COMMENT: Co-responsibility calls for new modes of participation in diocesan decision-forming and decision-making which support those with responsibility for decision-taking.

The voices of young people and families, of women, of LGBT+ Catholics, of people from a variety of different ethnic backgrounds and cultures, of priests and deacons and Religious, of victim/survivors of abuse, of active parishioners and of those who have felt marginalised or overlooked have all been welcomed in this Synodal Pathway consultation and they have been reflected in this synthesis. They need an enduring forum in which to influence the decisions shaping our diocesan mission in the years ahead, perhaps through the provision made in the Code of Canon Law (Canons 511-514) for a diocesan Pastoral Council.  
[Archbishop Bernard Longley]

## **MATTERS FOR FURTHER DISCERNMENT**

A number of parish and individual/group submissions recorded voices asking for a reconsideration of the Church's official teaching on a number of specific topics, particularly concerning Catholic moral teaching and also women's ordination (both to the presbyterate and the diaconate). While it is not within the scope of this Synod to consider matters of doctrine, it is important that all voices and opinions are heard. The most common and underlying points regarding these stated matters were first, the express need for the Church to be more inclusive and welcoming to people whatever their situation in life and/or starting point, and secondly, the acknowledged disconnect between the Church's teaching and present societal views and the lived experience of many Catholics in the world.

Regarding the first of these underlying points there was a strong desire not to exclude people and to express the patience of the Lord and his open-hearted love for all. There was a need for the Church to be less judgmental and more understanding and supportive. At the same time many also expressed the Church's teaching and its effective transmission precisely as a way of charity, to build up the human person and to help forge a better society.

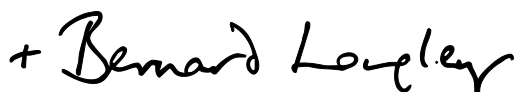
On the second matter of the divergence/disconnect between the Church and the world, while many voices would prefer to see the Church's teaching shift, many other voices in the Synod process were calling for better formation, catechesis and explanation of doctrine to bridge that gap. There was a strong call in many submissions to uphold strong values and to teach with greater clarity and confidence, joy and positivity.

In each of our submissions it was clear that these issues were the fruit of careful discernment and that in each of these discussions there was a sense that the parish was a 'safe space' where these matters could be voiced with integrity and heard with charity.

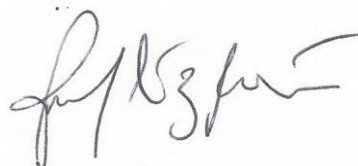
### **A Word of Gratitude**

[ARCHBISHOP'S COMMENT: On behalf of all who will benefit from these insights in the years ahead I thank all those individuals, groups and organisations who have contributed to this consultation. In particular, I thank all those who came during Lent to read through the thousands of submissions, the members of the diocesan discernment group who have recognised the principle themes to emerge, and Canon Paul Fitzpatrick for completing the enormous task of collating all the responses and drafting the diocesan synthesis.

*May God Who has begun the good work in us  
bring it to completion*



+ BERNARD LONGLEY  
ARCHBISHOP OF BIRMINGHAM



CANON PAUL FITZPATRICK  
WALKING TOGETHER DIOCESAN LEAD

8 April 2022

### **APPENDIX:**

The Synodal Pathway Group received:

- 189/219 Parish responses
- 104 Individual School responses – [Pupils, Family Life, Teachers].
- 29 Group responses
- 271 Individual responses

We began with a period of training and formation: firstly, for the Deacons, three meetings with the Priests of the Archdiocese and four online formation evenings for our parish 'enablers'. These formation meetings averaged 250-300 attendees. The formation and enthusiasm of this large number of enablers is, in our view, one reason why the number of parishes participating in the Synodal process was so large. We are indebted to this group of enablers, whose participation will be welcomed in the future.

Alongside the formation of our enablers, the Archdiocese of Birmingham website became a platform for a range of high-quality materials (documents, videos, online recordings, presentations on Synodality, Ecclesiology, Parish Conversations, Discernment) and our *Walking Together Handbook*, which was frequently downloaded. This opened our listening, spiritual conversation, and Diocesan discernment to a much wider group of participants. The dedicated webpage was viewed extensively over several months. All of our communication and responses were coordinated by the creation of a Diocesan email account [synodalpathway@rcaob.org.uk](mailto:synodalpathway@rcaob.org.uk) which allowed everyone in the Archdiocese direct access to Canon Paul Fitzpatrick, our Diocesan Lead.

The Diocesan discernment phase was led by members of the Synodal Pathway Group who opened the process of reading and discerning these several thousand pages or returns to groups and individuals who represented every aspect of Diocesan life. These included:

Archbishop Bernard Longley, Bishops Stephen Wright and David Evans, Canon Richard Walker VG, Diocesan Trustees, Diocesan Social Outreach Sub Group, Co-Responsibility Sub Group, Evangelisation Sub Group, Formation Sub Group, Liturgy & Worship Sub Group, Climate Action Group, Commission for Women's Affairs, Kenelm Youth Trust, Diocesan Youth Service, Commission for Inter religious Dialogue, Diocesan Communications Team, Diocesan Education Service (DES), Ecumenical Commission, Evangelisation Office, Ongoing Formation Department, Family Ministry, Justice & Peace Commission, Ongoing Formation Committee, as well as individual Parish groups. Our intention is that every aspect of *Walking Together* should be synodal in its very nature.

## SCHOOL DISCUSSION SUMMARIES.

