



Synod on Synodality 2023

FEBRUARY 27

**Parishes of Saint Monica, Saint Winefride
and Saint John Henry Newman**


SYNOD TALK
SOUTH WARRINGTON

Introduction

Process

The following submission is a summary of individual and group contributions posted via our dedicated website <https://synodtalksouthwarrington.org/> forms platform and from a shared gathering held at Latchford on Saturday 19 February attended by over 30 participants.

The website provides material to enable participants to understand the context, purpose, and principles of the Synod process and how it is being conducted in a spirit of prayerful discernment, sincere and candid sharing, and respectful listening.

“Synodality is a style, it is a walk together, and it is what the Lord expects from the Church of the third millennium” Pope Francis

Five Starter Questions were provided to help participants to focus on their personal experiences, understanding and insights. What is reported below reflects their responses. There was a noticeable concurrence on the majority of themes, concerns, insights, and proposals shared. Unquestionably this applies to issues concerning the role of women, the inclusion of LGBTQ+ persons, compulsory celibacy for the secular clergy, sexual and reproductive ethics.

It was also observed that many of these issues have been of perennial concern for an increasing number (conceivably the majority) of those who have faithfully continued their practice of the faith and given their energies in service of the Gospel

People took part willingly but with reservations, based on previous experience, that the process might not fulfil the expectations of Pope Francis and/or that the issues raised would be air-brushed out or swept under the carpet.

Those who took part look forward to reading the response submitted by the Diocese to see if it fairly reflects their concerns and contributions.

1. How does the Catholic Church enhance your life?

- Sense of belonging, love, support, constancy, happiness and welcome (applies both locally and universally)
- *Eucharistic Life and Compassion*, at the heart of the community of faith
- *Sacramentality* in its widest sense (not limited to the 7 sacraments, as valuable as they are)
- Developing, sharing, and deepening of faith as disciples of Jesus, parish groups and sodalities including SVP, Legion of Mary, Faith Groups, CLC
- As a provider of Education, moral formation (“moral compass”)
- Advocacy for Social and Ecological Justice, Care for Migrants, CAFOD, Caritas, Saint Joseph’s Family Centre etc.
- Added dimension and meaning to life, Source of Salvation

2. Which of your concerns does the Church fail or struggle to respond to?

- Considering that we understand ourselves to be Catholic/Universal, the Church is widely perceived as exclusive, unattractive to youth, misogynistic, beset with clericalism.
- Hierarchical structure self-serving rather than supportive of the discipleship of the faithful
- There is an urgent need to include women in the sacramental ministry and the decision-making processes of the Church.
- We frequently fail to give witness to the gospel by neglecting those on the margins of the Church and society including the poor, LGBTQ+ persons, divorcees, cohabitees.
- The manner in which moral teachings are framed is too prescriptive and rarely addresses the very real dilemmas of traumatized and perplexed individuals, some of whom are victims themselves of abuse, poverty, compounded by the absence of material, medical and emotional support.
- We have not progressed sufficiently in the search for Christian unity.
- There is an unhealthy undercurrent akin to the politics and culture wars that beset society at large.
- Resistant to many of the positive changes taking place in wider society and reluctant in embracing the changes determined by the Second Vatican Council.

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- Incapable of recognizing the value of listening to the insights of the laity, including the theologically literate, professionally qualified, the idealisms of youth, and, not excluding those of senior years who recognize how negatively doctrinaire attitudes harm their loved ones and undermine reception of the Gospel message, causing the Church to lose many who truly are searching for an authentic faith to live by in communion with others.
 - We have failed to live up to our undertakings in relation to the scandal of abuse. The emphasis remains on protecting the image of the Church rather than reforming the clericalist culture that exacerbated the heinous crimes of abusers and providing care and restitution to victims.
 - Application of canonical loopholes give the impression that the well-connected benefit most from double standards
 - The pulpit being the preserve of the male clergy
 - Disingenuity of ordaining married former Anglican clergy while retaining the discipline of celibacy for other secular clergy

3. How is the Church perceived by your family, your friends and work colleagues?

- Many of the same issues that were raised under the previous heading were consistent with the perceptions of those outside the Church; some of whom hoped that the Church might regain its place in their affections and loyalty.
- Irrelevant and out of touch
- The Church fails to practice what it preaches
- Mixed messages on war and peace
- Secrecy
- Sexist, transphobic and homophobic

4a. What is your understanding of how decisions are made in the Catholic Church: Globally, Nationally, and Locally?

- Top down, Male/clerical dominated, non-collaborative, minimal if not totally absent involvement of the laity, poorly communicated and intolerant of criticism or divergent views
- Irrelevant to the issues of our times
- Centralized and lacking respect for the variations appropriate to different cultures

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- Absence of effective structures for lay participation
 - Resistance to reform and lack of heartfelt support for Pope Francis, even outright hostility, among Roman curia and some bishops and clergy
 - [a concern was voiced by one contributor, to the effect that relevance and truth are opposite sides on the coin and that it is not the laity but God who leads the Church]

4b. How might the Church improve its decision-making processes?

- Respect and pay heed to the *sensus fidelium*
- Follow the practice of earlier synods where laity (albeit powerful authorities had active voice) One example cited from our own country was the Synod of Whitby where the Abbess Hilda was not without influence
- Apply the insights of John Henry Newman in his Essay, *On Consulting the Faithful on Matters of Doctrine*
- Greater application of the principle of *subsidiarity*
- Provide effective structures for lay participation
- Open to female wisdom
- Transparency at all levels
- Make synodality the norm, including its openness to those on the margins

5. If you could describe your local parish fulfilling your dreams and concerns for the whole world and the local community, what would it be like?

- An inclusive array of ordained ministers
- Adult education at the local level
- Prioritizing the young and families
- Engaging liturgies and preaching that address and express the lived experiences and shared concerns of the community
- Active compassion and focus on bringing hope
- Patience and kindness with those who struggle
- Access to all sacraments regardless of sexuality, gender etc.
- Wider availability of communal celebrations of the Rite of Penance