

Walking Together

Synodal Update for the Diocese of Plymouth



Welcome to the fourth of our Walking Together Updates

We are now moving towards the end of our local Diocesan listening phase with our two pre-Synodal events on 26 February in Poole and 12 March in Plymouth. These events will bring our listening phase to an end and the Synodal working group will then do its best to pull together a Diocesan synthesis that reflects the very wide range of feedback we have received. The synthesis will be shared on our website. Canon John Deeny and Deborah Fisher—Diocesan Co-Contacts

FEEDBACK SO FAR

How does this “journeying together,” which takes place today on different levels (from the local level to the universal one), allow the Church to proclaim the Gospel in accordance with the mission entrusted to Her; and what steps does the Spirit invite us to take in order to grow as a synodal Church?

We have received over 400 separate pieces of feedback including contributions from over 50 groups who have come together to listen to one another and share ideas. There has been much positive feedback about the listening process and the benefits of taking time to come together and share views.

We are looking forward to our pre-synodal meetings, at which Bishop Mark will be present to hear the thoughts of people from across the Diocese. The events are being held in Poole (26 February) and Plymouth (12 March). There are still some places available. If you would like to attend please register here <https://forms.office.com/r/ibCQhMvd7w> and we will be in touch. The events will run from 10.30-15.30 and include lunch.

After these meetings, the working group will be starting to draft our Diocesan synthesis for Bishop Mark to consider before sending our submission through to the Bishops’ Conference. The Bishops will then hold a number of gatherings to review the documents submitted by each Diocese before creating a synthesis for discussion at continental and then global level.

Thanks to St Mary’s Poole for sharing some of the lovely reflections on the Synodal journey from their children.

When I think of church I think about the lovely, kind priests. I think of the peaceful silence and everyone praying. The best memory I have is singing in the Christmas concert. I think faith is strongly believing in something with all your heart. [REDACTED]

The Diocesan Synthesis



The diocesan synthesis 'conveys the main fruits of the discernment of the whole People of God across the diocese. It is recommended that this be captured in a written document of up to 10 pages'. Some have asked how on earth are we going to turn over 400 pieces of feedback into a document of less than 10 pages without losing the richness of many voices? Will critical voices be watered down?

We have taken an incremental approach to reflecting on the feedback. Each piece of feedback is read more than once and quotes highlighted and noted down. So far, 19 people have contributed to this process in different ways. We held a one day meeting of prayer and reflection with a wide group of people to reflect on the feedback and explore common themes; several smaller meetings to review the same material and consider alternative interpretations and further meetings are planned. We have people looking at the same set of material independently and feeding back their reflections. Reflections are compared, to ensure that no one perspective dominates. Those involved include clergy, religious and lay, men and women, staff and volunteers. (All the feedback is anonymised before sharing so that no comments are attributed to a particular person). All the submissions have been reviewed in a spirit of prayer.

After the pre-synodal events, the Diocesan synodal working group will bring the diverse voices into one document which will aim to reflect the range of views we have heard during this listening process. Not everyone's points can be included but we will do our best to ensure the authentic voice of people is reflected in the report. Whilst we will inevitably reflect the most repeated comments heard, we will also seek to honour the heartfelt views expressed by smaller groups or individuals.

A number of people have expressed concerns that more critical views will not be included as material is synthesised. The Vatican has reflected on some of the challenges of [this journey](#) *'Many of the faithful perceive the synodal process as a crucial moment in the Church's life, as a learning process as well as an opportunity for conversion and renewal of ecclesial life. At the same time, various difficulties have also emerged. In fact, fears and reticence are reported among some groups of the faithful and among the clergy. There is also a certain mistrust among the laity who doubt that their contribution will really be taken into consideration.'* We are conscious of all these challenges and ask for your prayers and support as we seek to accurately reflect the listening process in our Diocesan synthesis.

There is also much to celebrate in this process. One lovely comment from a parish that we would like to share: *'Through this Synod we have been reminded how remarkable and gifted our fellow parishioners are'.*

Come Holy Spirit!

May the synodal process lead us to become like the first assembly of the Church where the disciples persevered steadfastly in prayer with Mary, recalling the memories of Jesus, his words, deeds and promises.

We ask the Spirit of love to lead us to that common vision which will unite us as a community of faith in one mind and one heart.