

Together on the Road, Becoming the Church we are Called to Be.



Report on the Listening Phase of the Liverpool Archdiocesan Synod 2020

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INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND

On 3rd February 2019, Archbishop Malcolm McMahon formally convoked a Synod to be held by the Archdiocese in 2020. In preparation for the Synod, the Archdiocese embarked on a listening exercise from January-June 2019. Responsibility for collating and analysing the results of this consultation was entrusted to Rev Dr Peter McGrail and Dr Michael Miller of Liverpool Hope University, who also managed an Archdiocese-wide online survey and a series of Focus Groups.

This Report sets out the findings drawn from their analysis of the data and will serve to assist the Archdiocese through the next stage of Synod planning. It has already informed the identification of the Synod Themes that will form the basis for further discussion across the Archdiocese. It will now help Synod members as they develop the Proposals that fall within those themes.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The Archdiocese set four questions for the listening phase ('The Synod Questions'):

1. Where in your everyday life do you experience love, truth, goodness, hope, and joy?
2. When you reflect on your life now, and as you look to the future, what causes you concern or worry?
3. What is the purpose of the Catholic Church in the world today?
4. Having reflected on these things, what are the topics you would like to see on the agenda of Synod 2020?

The Archdiocese also developed two simplified version of the questions for use with children during the listening phase. The first was for children at Key Stage One (Years 1 and 2 of Primary School), the second for children at Key Stage Two (Years 3-6):

Key Stage One:

1. What do you know about Church?
2. When did you go to Church? Why?
3. What did you like?
4. What did you not like?

Key Stage Two:

1. What do you think of the Catholic Church as it is today?
2. What concerns /worries/issues do you have for the future of the Catholic Church?
3. What changes would you make now to the Catholic Church?

However, quite a few primary schools elected to use the full, adult questionnaire with older children.

THE FOUR STRANDS OF ENQUIRY

The Archdiocese used four strands of enquiry to hear people's responses to these questions:

1. An archdiocesan listening exercise built around facilitated conversations carried out in a number of contexts, using trained archdiocesan facilitators.
2. An online survey of adults aged 18 years or older carried out by Liverpool Hope University.
3. A series of Focus Groups facilitated by Liverpool Hope University.
4. An online survey of young people carried out by the Archdiocese.

1. Archdiocesan Listening Exercise

The Archdiocese wanted as many people as possible to take part in preparing for the Synod. It therefore designed a meeting process to enable listening on two levels - first, people would be encouraged to listen to each other carefully as they discussed the four Synod Questions at parish, school or other local meetings. Then, the Archdiocese wished to hear what they had said. Synod members received training to lead the listening meetings, which followed the same format:

- After an Introduction to the task, participants gathered in groups of four to respond to the Synod Questions.
- Each then spoke in turn from their experience for two minutes in response to Question 1, without interruption or comment by the others. A stone passed between speakers served as a 'talking piece' to facilitate equal participation, drawing out those who are reticent and limiting the contributions of those who might dominate.
- Once everyone had spoken, a moment of silence was held. The Synod member then invited groups of four to write on a post-it note the one thing they had heard that they thought was important.
- The process was repeated for questions 2-4.
- After the meeting, the Synod member collected the post-it notes, and wrote what they contained on a *Listening Record* sheet, which they then submitted to the Synod Office.

Listening took place between May and July 2019, and 621 *Listening Records* were submitted; the Archdiocese estimates that approximately 20,000 people participated in these events. The archdiocesan Synod Office processed the *Listening Records* and securely transferred them to Liverpool Hope University. This process lasted ten weeks – and the pace of submission of material accelerated across that period: by week five only 87 *Listening Records* had reached the researchers, whilst 277 arrived during the final week.

Analysis of these *Records* identified considerable disparity, both in the detail of the material submitted and in the ways in which people on the ground carried out the listening. The meeting process designed by the Archdiocese used in many different contexts and settings - with groups ranging in size from a few people to over one hundred. Considerable initiative was demonstrated by Synod members in convoking meetings that engaged with a broad constituency - from general parish meetings, to parents of children engaged with the 'With you Always' sacramental programme, to a 'Knit-a-bit' group, school governors, marriage preparation groups and prayer groups. Meanwhile, members of

the archdiocesan Synod Working Party held similar meetings with clergy, religious, archdiocesan commissions and other identified groups. Listening also took place in Catholic primary and secondary schools across the Archdiocese, and with young people during the annual archdiocesan pilgrimage to Lourdes.

Many Synod members followed the Archdiocese's listening process to the letter - asking people to sit and talk in groups of four and submitting a report that synthesized the responses of those discussions under brief headings. Thus, for example, one *Listening Record* feedback to Question One read,

- Confession
- Church
- Praying
- Family
- Mass

Some Synod members provided a more elaborate list, giving the number of groups of four that had offered the same or similar responses. Thus, the feedback to the same question from a group of 100 school faith leaders reads:

- School ethos, school welcome, positive relationships, daily interactions, unconditional positive regard for all (x 3)
- Own family/school family/parish family/community family (clubs such as sports, music, dance, social (x 15)
- Social media – enables us to experience inspirational stories, reach out and connect to people we have not met.
- Living out the mission – all stakeholders play their part.
- Random acts of kindness (x 3)
- NHS.
- Inspirational people/teenagers and young people who are hopeful they can change the world.
- Through simplicity and nature (x 5)
- Working with the vulnerable (x 2)

Many of the reports received offered even more detailed responses, in which the use of the word, 'I' suggests that what has been reported are not collective responses from groups of four, but individual answers. Here are extracts from another *Listening Record* - again responding to the same question, and introducing a more personal dimension:

- I experience all 5 emotions in almost everything, and everyone I meet daily...in nature, animals. There is a wonder that can only be put there by God
- Being with family and friends. Being out in nature (can be rain, does not need to be sun!)
- Every day, in all I meet
- Faith can be like soap (if you try to hold on to it, it might slip away!).
- Joy in communication with others. Love in helping and listening to others.
- Love of nature, sky, trees, flowers. Love of watching the birds and listening to their song.

Helpfully, one Synod member who followed this approach set out their rationale at the head of their report:

I have encouraged those who have attended to write down as much as possible on all four questions rather than just one or two reflections because I believe this is their only chance to voice their opinions.

The undoubted advantage of this approach was that it produced rich, personal and nuanced data - and we have drawn many of the quotations found in this report from these more detailed reports.

However, analysis of the reports suggested that in quite a few places at least three other approaches to the listening process were followed. First, a large number of *Listening Records* were completed by individuals. There were good reasons why this might have been the case. - for example, to open the listening process to housebound individuals, or to enable those who had no internet access to make an equivalent personal contribution to those who completed the on-line survey (see below). These *Records* were generally submitted to the Synod Office as received, and their frequently rich content has contributed to this Report. Second, some parishes duplicated *Listening Record* forms, and left blank forms at the back of church for people to complete; these were then returned to the Synod member (or, in one case, placed in the collection box). Sometimes these forms were individually passed on to the Synod Office, but more frequently, the Synod member responsible synthesized their content onto a single *Listening Record*. Some such *Records* were very detailed indeed, others less so. One large parish, for example, collated over seventy individual forms and, by a very careful and scientific process of analysis, identified a series of succinct terms that encapsulated everything that the individual forms contained. Finally, a number of parishes distributed the questionnaire during Sunday Mass and invited the congregation to complete them after the sermon; in at least one parish this process was spread across four weeks. The Synod member then collated these reports and usually entered all the responses in their entirety together onto the *Listening Record*.

Taken together, these various approaches generated a vast amount of data, but the different ways in which people had gathered that data presents its own analytical challenges. It would be impossible to draw any meaningful statistical findings from this data (e.g. 'X number of participants said') because in many cases we have no idea how many individuals lie behind each reported instance of a term; all we identify are broad factors such as which ideas recur frequently across the *Records*, and which were rarer. Our prime concern in analysing the data was to identify exactly what people said, and then to understand what they meant by it. That is not a straightforward task, because interpreting the meaning that lies behind single word or extremely brief responses can also be difficult. For example, many *Records* reported 'Brexit' for the second question. However, longer answers made it clear that different people were concerned about Brexit for diametrically opposed reasons - some feared that it would happen, some that it wouldn't! So single word responses such as 'Brexit' can be ambiguous. Yet in order to be true to the process, it is vitally important that the content of the highly synthesized *Records* that chiefly comprised single-word answers should nonetheless be acknowledged. We discuss below how we sought to meet these challenges.

2. Online Survey

After a pilot held in December 2018, the online survey was open from 28th January to 30th June 2019. 1,342 responses were received; 160 of these were either empty or nonsensical or were submitted from locations outside the diocese. The remaining 1182 responses were fully analysed. There is some internal evidence that some people completed the online survey after they had taken part in a Listening Group; the number of online submissions rose after the Listening Groups had started.

Responses to the online survey tended to be particularly detailed. Although some statistical analysis of this material is possible (e.g. in terms of gender, age, broad geographical location, etc.) such results have not been included in this Report because the same process was not possible with other data sets.

3. Focus Groups

Ten Focus Groups were held across the Archdiocese with various interest groups in March and April 2019, again after piloting in December 2018. The make-up of the groups was determined by the Archdiocese, and invitations to participants were sent out by archdiocesan staff. The Focus Groups were facilitated by Peter McGrail. The sessions were recorded, fully transcribed, and analysed alongside the other data sets. The groups comprised:

- Parents of Primary-School age children (9 participants)
- Deacons and Wives (9 participants)
- Priests (8 participants)
- Lay Pastoral Workers (10 participants)
- Members of the LGBTQ+ community (6 participants)
- 'Ordinary' Catholics (9 participants)
- Catholics who preferred to use the Extraordinary Form of the Roman liturgy (10 participants)
- Members of Ethnic Minorities who had recently arrived in the Archdiocese (8 participants)
- Young Catholics (2 participants - the meeting coincided with the European Cup Final!)
- Nugent Care Society (10 participants)

4. Archdiocesan Online Survey of Young People

As the main survey carried out by the University was limited to persons aged 18 or older, the Archdiocese carried out its own complementary online survey of young people. The survey was live from 2 February until 30 June 2019. The findings were then analysed by the Synod Office, which passed on a detailed report of findings to the researchers. The overwhelming number of responses were from the North of the Diocese or from Liverpool. St Helens was the only other town to account for a significant number of responses. Given this geographical clustering, and the occasional content of the answers given, it appears that a small number of schools accounted for the overwhelming majority of responses.

Of nearly 1,000 responses, some 40% were rejected as invalid – chiefly because they were blank or contained nonsensical input. This left 572 completed surveys to analyse. A significant number of these was disregarded for mischief or nonsense, with a final number of responses in the region of 500. In the main the answers given lacked detail, with respondents preferring to write just one or two words rather than answering in sentences.

THE ANALYTICAL PROCESS

The first of the research tools to go live was the online survey. Analysis of the individual responses took place as they were submitted. This began the process of identifying the key ideas (in this Report referred to as 'headings') that were contained in the material - for example, in Question One these headings included, 'family', 'home', 'nature' etc. As the in-coming data was gradually examined, these headings were progressively broken down into sub-headings. We were particularly concerned to capture the breadth of meanings (and potential ambiguities) that the responses conveyed. In doing so, we have sometimes set very opposing perspectives alongside each other, and allowed them to 'speak' in their own right.

After the recordings of the Focus Groups had been transcribed, they too were analysed - amplifying the range of ideas that were emerging from the survey and providing additional detail for those headings that had already been created.

The Synod Listening Groups began to meet in May, and the data that they generated were progressively drawn into the analysis, together with the findings of the archdiocesan youth survey. As the complexity of the Listening Group material became apparent, it was decided that two sweeps should be made through it. First, as the *Listening Records* arrived, each one was checked against the existing sets of headings and subheadings. This allowed us to compare the brief or single word Listening feedback against the existing body of analysed data. This first sweep also identified any new headings/sub-headings, as well as identifying longer statements in the listening feedback that enriched (or challenged) the analysis of the material that we had already considered. This process revealed that the data drawn from the online survey and that from Listening Group feedback substantially mirrored each other, with almost entirely the same issues emerging most frequently in both. When new headings emerged from the Listening Group material, it tended to be in those *Listening Records* that related to constituencies that had not been reached by the Survey - most notably children and young people. Then, once all the *Listening Records* had been received, we made a second pass through the data to check that nothing had been missed, and to draw upon any further statements that enhanced an understanding of the issues that had been identified. The researchers are satisfied that we have thus identified, a breadth of possible meanings for each of the single word or brief responses given on the *Listening Records*.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Liverpool Hope is responsible for the generation of the data from the online 18+ survey, and the Focus Groups; the researchers received ethical approval from the Arts and Humanities Faculty Ethics Committee of the University. That research and subsequent analysis and storage of all the data was carried out in full compliance with University policy. The Archdiocese generated its own data within its own very strict safeguarding and GDPR protocols.

Anonymity has been respected throughout this Report. The only persons whose identity was known to the Liverpool Hope researchers were the Focus Group participants, and any markers of their identity were removed at the transcription phase, before their data was analysed. Neither the *Listening Records* nor the archdiocesan analysis of the young people's survey offer any indication as to the identity of the respondents. Any references to geographic location contained in the *Listening Records*

have been redacted. Data was passed from the Archdiocese to the researchers in a secure manner in compliance with GDPR requirements.

THIS REPORT

This Report sets out in detail the range of ideas that were raised by the listening process, considering the responses given to each of the four Synod Questions in turn. This vast amount of data has been organised according to the various headings and sub-headings identified by the researchers. The Report concludes with a separate summary analysis of the findings from meetings held with children and young people.

The picture of the Archdiocese of Liverpool that emerges is complex. Readers will find here a spectrum of opinions on virtually every issue. During the listening process and across all its strands people spoke with honesty about their own experiences. It is clear from the *Listening Records* and from the survey responses that people frequently spoke and wrote with feeling about things that mattered a great deal to them. The researchers have sought to respect the way in which so many people opened themselves to this process, and we hope that we have set out the different positions in a way that does justice to each. We have not sought to 'resolve' conflicts within the data, nor to censor what people have said.

Given the nature of the Report, the usual disclaimer is hardly necessary, but for completeness: the ideas expressed in this Report do not necessarily represent the opinions of the researchers, nor of the Trustees of the Archdiocese. What they do represent, we hope, is a snapshot of the hopes, fears, creative thoughts, questions and vision of the members of the Archdiocese as they look to its future.

Peter McGrail and Michael Miller

September 2019

SYNOD QUESTION 1: Where in your everyday life do you experience love, truth, goodness, hope, and joy?

‘People experience these things when they belong to a family, a community, a church. “Togetherness” was key to these experiences. Isolation is the threat.’

The first two Synod Questions echo the opening lines of the Second Vatican Council's Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (*Gaudium et Spes*):

The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men and women of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ. Indeed, nothing genuinely human fails to raise an echo in their hearts. For theirs is a community composed of people. United in Christ, they are led by the Holy Spirit in their journey to the Kingdom of their Father and they have welcomed the news of salvation which is meant for everyone. That is why this community realizes that it is truly linked with humankind and its history by the deepest of bonds.

These two questions, therefore, appropriately invited the members of the Archdiocese to consider its mission against the background of the realities of life in the early 21st century. A few people, however, found the first question confusing:

I do not really understand the question or its purpose – it’s too wide-ranging and airy fairy.

This is like an icebreaker at a party.

At home, where I follow my hobbies. Don't really see where this question is leading.

Others found it difficult to find an answer:

All five aspects of the question have been experienced in four or five different ways within our group but there was no common view.

These five are non-synonymous – they may have to be sought in different places.

Two *Listening Records* were returned blank for this and for the second Synod Question; a rationale was not provided. Yet, overall, this first Question yielded a rich and varied set of responses. These have been analysed under seven broad headings:

1. People
2. Faith and Religious Activity
3. Work
4. Home
5. Nature
6. Leisure Activities
7. Other

1. People

'People make our everyday lives richer. You find love, truth, goodness, hope and joy in unexpected places - and not always in the Church.'

The material is arranged under four subheadings:

- A. Families
- B. Friends
- C. Strangers
- D. Link to Spirituality

A. Families

'Families contain buried treasure'

The overwhelmingly most frequent response to this question referred to family life. Four participants summarised the position taken by many:

Initially I experience all of these within my family, from my wife through to our grandchildren.

In the love between my husband and I, firmly built on truth and goodness and evidenced through the joy and hope we share daily with our children and grandchildren.

Every day with my wife and kids, we create memories every day.

Through the changing pattern of life as I move from being a mum to a nan – family has been a constant source from which I get all of the above.

Another person thoughtfully reflected on the extent to which family members can convey love, truth, goodness, hope and joy to each other without even being aware of it:

In one member of my family, who exudes all of those five characteristics on a daily basis and without realising they are doing so. So humbling.

Some identified simple gestures and actions from family members as sources of joy or hope:

The smile my wife gave me last night was worth everything.

When I hear the voices of my grandchildren.

Love – coming home after school to my family.

However, in the midst of life's hurly-burly, the experiences of joy, hope etc. are immediately apparent:

Although the feelings described above may not be uppermost in my mind whilst engaging in conversation or activities in daily life, I am aware of them by how I feel and upon later reflection.

Furthermore, joy can be experienced in family life in the face of difficulty. Thus, a mother related her joy in the practical tasks of helping her children to grow up:

I experience joy in seeing my children overcome the challenges and difficulties life throws at them, in working with my husband to reduce the barriers in our children's path.

The relationship is, of course, reciprocal; one primary school child said that they experienced joy, hope, etc., 'being comforted by my Mum when I'm sad'. However, another found them 'when I scare my brother'. Then as life progresses, the supporting relationship between parents and children shifts:

My family are everything. Three boys and three girls; they all are in touch with me. I am lonely since losing my wife six years ago, 57 years married: most wonderful mother anyone could have had. I am the luckiest man in the world to have met her. I have the loveliest family; they can't do enough for me.

The maintenance of family links that is so evidently appreciated in the last quotation was picked up by other participants. Here a Listening Group participant hints at the challenges but also the joys of life within a geographically spread-out family:

The main place I experience all these things is from my immediate family. We are stretched across the country and don't live in each other's pockets, but we have a strong bond of love and joy which always transcends any differences or frustrations that we may have. Even if we have annoyed each other, we are never 'not speaking'. We are also big on forgiveness.

Family life was important to the LGBTQ+ Catholics, for whom changes in civil law had opened up experiences and choices that had previously been closed to them:

I would say my wife and kids. ... just having some stuff that other people do, and it's nice to be able to do those things because I want to. You know, it's nice to have the choice and to just, yes, have the... they're not the small things, but to have the everyday things that everybody else has had for a while, to have that choice and to want that, and just to enjoy it.

That woman's sense of finding hope and joy in the sheer ordinariness of family life was echoed by very many. Participants frequently spoke of this – and of the challenges that lie in the background. Here are three examples:

Watering the plants with daddy.

Being together as a family. Hearing our son laugh brings us joy. Just having quality time together to have fun and worry about our full-time jobs and making sure his homework is all complete as we don't have enough quality time together already.

Getting through the day. If you can get up, everything goes to plan, you get through the day and you can sit down at a reasonable hour. Everyone's happy. Everyone's fed. Everyone's done everything that they need to do. It's a good day. They're very few and far between, but it's a good day. That gives me hope that there will be more good days, and everything is good.

B. Friends

'I think it is easy to experience these things in and with good friends.'

Many survey and Listening Group participants bracketed 'family' with 'friends', though very few elaborated the theme of friendship. When they did, a striking feature was the inclusion of an element of mutual help and support, particularly among older people:

In my leisure activities and meeting friends. In my friend and neighbour across the road who keeps an eye on things when we are on holiday.

Relationships with friends and close neighbours also evidence love, goodness and joy as we share common views and interests. The ability to help others is also uplifting and shows love and joy.

This element of reciprocity was highlighted by another respondent, in the context of living and working in their Pastoral Area:

I experience love, truth, goodness, joy and hope in the people I meet on a daily basis, by participating in my pastoral area community. Also, by helping people whenever possible, by listening or providing assistance if need be. This I find is reciprocated and rewarding by those I meet.

Someone else named as a source of joy and hope exactly this type of mutual help: 'elderly people helping the frail among them and not expecting any reward.' Yet there is a sort of reward to this kind of activity, which is the reduction of loneliness:

When I go out and meet my friends and do little odd jobs for them which give both of us these experiences and feelings. For living alone can be lonely when you some days see or speak to nobody.

Participants at one Listening Group spoke of their discovery that those who give in friendship may discover that they receive far more in return:

Befriending a Palestinian Muslim family seeking asylum in the UK. They say they have only their food and friendship to offer. Their home is open to neighbours who are invited to eat with them. They invited us to share Eid with them and the Iftar meal during Ramadan. They give so much more than we give them and teach us the real meaning of humility, gratitude and sharing.

Two people - picking up both sides of the equation - noted the value of honesty in friendship:

[I receive these things] from friends who are close enough to me to tell the truth lovingly.

When a person allows you to see their vulnerability, wearing no masks, but being themselves - and in that they are being truth, love, goodness, hope and joy.

A Listening Group of young people, meanwhile, marvelled at the phenomenon of friendship itself:

Truth of friendships – how a seemingly 'random' group of people can come together almost by chance.

As did two, older, Listening Group participants:

My drinking friends have turned into much more. After being diagnosed with an incurable illness, the love and goodness shown has taken me by surprise. They are all much more than

men I have a pint with. They have recently shown real love and care for me that has taken me by surprise. At the end of the day, we all need each other.

Many of my friends have turned out to be much more than friends. The love and support they have given to me due to my illness have been a surprise.

For the priests of the Archdiocese, sharing in their own fellowship was regarded as a source of particular joy:

I think being a member of the Presbytery of Liverpool is a joy. On the whole the priests, when we get together, there is a joy about it. I think, undoubtedly, we're one of the best presbyteries in England if not further afield. I think there's a great joy in being together, especially working now, with peace, in a different way. That's where I get my joy from.

For some priests, that friendship also could extend beyond the Archdiocese, and be tied in with charitable work:

My friends are important to me, I find that gives me hope and joy. I hope to count members of the presbyterate among my friends as well, so that's important to me. There are one or two things I'm connected with outside the diocese, partly because I am in such a small parish, it gives me more time to do things for the charity I'm involved with and raise a lot of money for people suffering from leprosy.

Indeed, one priest stressed how important it was to him that his friendship circle extended beyond people who professed even to be religious at all:

I actually find having friends who are not religious at all a great joy because it keeps you grounded in there being another world out there. The things that we think are the end of the world... Actually, there are bigger issues. I find a great joy in friendship in general but, in this context particularly, those who are not religious.

A lay adult survey respondent, on the other hand, chose to restrict her friendship group to those who shared her faith:

I do not have friends among those who call themselves Catholic but might as well be atheist. I find no truth, goodness or joy in them.

Meanwhile, several Listening Group responses from young people introduce a note of anxiety:

I don't think I have ever felt all those five things at once. I feel most happy with my friends and family, but I do feel self-doubt and lack of confidence stops me from experiencing those things in everyday life. I feel safe with the people I'm closest with and who I can trust and be myself. (I don't feel I can be fully myself in church).

I worry about loss of family and friends - people not wanting me in their lives.

None of this has happened in my life.

C. Strangers

'In the people of Tesco's when they help me with a smile'

It was striking how several people referred to 'random acts of kindness by strangers' as a source of joy and hope.

In the most surprising places sometimes: - in the look of love between couples and their actions; in random acts of kindness from strangers; the concern shown by carers for the sick; in a friendly smile from a stranger. We expect love, truth, goodness, joy and hope from our nearest and dearest, but it is at its most powerful when shown by strangers or those we hardly know.

Everyday life is full of love, truth, goodness, joy and hope in the most unexpected places when someone takes time with you. When another person asks how you are and when another looks out for you. This can come from many places, especially work colleagues and those we have dealings with every day. Conversations that start with caring and sharing are happening all the time in life in general.

When a homeless person says, 'God bless you'.

Everywhere – as a disabled man, people are so kind and helpful.

Bus – common places where we interact with each other.

D. Link to Spirituality

'For me it is people and their lives that matter, and the discovery of the presence of God in each and every life.'

A number of people drew links between their experience of family and friends and spirituality. Few were as explicit - or as detailed - as the following:

Trying to get to a real tangible truth never ends. I keep searching we are all striving to identify real truth. From what Christ said, 'I am the Way, the life, and the Truth'. I am fortunate in that my wife is truth. My three daughters have love, joy, and sincerity. My two sons have integrity and justice. A true marriage is a wonderful vocation that takes time to nourish like the making of an excellent wine. Pray and when you finish praying ... pray more!

A more succinct response linked the experience of family life to traditional Catholic teaching on marriage:

[I find joy etc. in] family life rooted in the enduring truth of Christ's own Covenant.

While another highlighted the role that a shared faith plays in their married life:

The fact that my wife and I support each other. As we are both Catholics we pull in the same direction.

Several spoke about experiencing God through or in others - and indeed, more broadly still:

In the relationships I have. In the depth of sharing I experience and in the sharing of deep inner life.

Initially love, truth, goodness, joy and hope are the God who calls me. I find God mirrored in my family, my dog, my friends, the people I meet, the local environment, in nature and in silence.

2. Faith and Religious Activity

‘Hope and optimism that there are still people dedicated to a faithful future for the Church.’

Alongside 'people', a very large number of participants spoke of their faith and their participation in religious activity as a source of love, truth, goodness, hope and joy. The principal findings of the analysis of the data are presented under the following sub-headings:

- A. Relationship with God
- B. The Liturgy: Positive Experiences
- C. The Liturgy: Mixed Experiences
- D. Pilgrimage
- E. Church Activities

A. Relationship with God

‘When I put God at the centre of my day, love, truth, goodness, joy and hope are easier to find.’

Many people spoke of their experience of love, joy, etc., in terms of their relationship with God. The closest identification was found in the following response:

The words 'love, truth, goodness, joy and hope' mean God to me. I meet and see God in the faces of people I see each day. I see it in the actions of the working groups within my parish community.

Numerous participants spoke in this context of their practice of prayer; the following offer a sample range of responses:

By communicating with God in quiet prayer and just chatting to him while doing chores etc.

Reviewing the day before sleeping and realising that I have often got through the day – especially a day of problems - with the help of God.

Praying to God. Consciously giving gratitude for at least 5 things every day brings goodness, truth and joy.

Gazing at a candle - a sense of the Holy Spirit among us.

On my prayer mat.

Some included the reflection on the Scriptures within their devotional life:

I experience the above in my receiving of the sacraments and in my prayer life. In particular through prayerful reflection on the Scriptures.

In reflecting on the Scriptures, I see the truth about Jesus Christ and how we live out his teachings in the Church.

The psalms - written so long ago, but very relevant today.

Within my family, particularly my wife, whose evangelistic background has led me to read the Bible - particularly the New Testament - and to form a personal relationship with Jesus (as he frequently advised) - and to use the talents and my personal experiences to seek his help and live a more useful life.

Others highlighted the role played by Our Blessed Lady in their life of prayer:

Through consecration to Jesus through Our Lady.

In the intercession of Our Blessed Mother.

To give my day to the Lord and his Mother. Try to receive him in Holy Mass.

Some people described how this relationship with God flowed out into the rest of their lives:

The moments when God's truth has overwhelmed me, has become the bedrock of my life.

In trying to embrace life as a Christian as Our Heavenly Father would want us to do. And, therefore, trying to be as close to Our Heavenly Father as I can.

Through the steps of my becoming a Catholic, I have discerned the presence of the Holy Spirit in my life which has brought me to a different way of experiencing truth, goodness and hope.

Coming to church each Sunday, singing and praying together, recharges my batteries for the week ahead and the doom and gloom of stabbings, bombs we hear about every day.

While for others, the experiences of life reinforced their faith:

We have three children in our care, all with problems which need to be overcome. We also keep in touch with our large family, including ten grandchildren. Every day there are new achievements to celebrate, smiles to share and experiences to remember and savour. This helps me to live my faith.

Several respondents highlighted the significance of their relationship with God as they faced difficulties in life. Thus, a woman, caring for a husband with Alzheimer's disease, wrote:

I experience love through my relationship with God, with my husband, friends, and in the parish with which I am involved. My relationship with God provides me with truth, goodness, joy and is the only aspect of my life that gives me hope.

A housebound older adult spoke eloquently of the manner in which her relationship with the spiritual realm pervades her entire daily routine:

I am 83 years old and very wobbly on my feet. In my everyday life it is God the Father, Jesus, Mary, Joseph, St Peter, St Paul, St Anthony, St Jude and my Guardian Angel who help me to get up in the morning, get washed and dressed, say my prayers and tidy my flat and for all this love and care, I am truly thankful. I am so grateful when Jesus comes on a Wednesday morning to bless and strengthen me, and I thank [my Eucharistic Minister].

Two respondents introduced the perspective of deaf people:

As a person who has been Deaf since birth (could not communicate with parents) but I have always been able to communicate with God; when I am sad, happy then God is my Joy and Hope.

...as a child, I developed my relationship with God through silence, and I didn't understand Church, I didn't understand the priest. So, I went into an imaginary world, and I know my relationship with God is not the same as yours, as hearing people. My relationship with God is different.

An elderly man expressed the significance of prayer in the face of declining health:

Most important (I am of an age where I have some serious health problems) is just saying 'Help me Lord'. Great moments of Grace have occurred in times of stress when mere Faith has been transformed for a while into cast iron certain knowledge. Love, truth, goodness and hope, but not so much joy as peace. I do not believe that I am at all unusual in this experience of God making Himself known to me.

Others, caring for elderly relatives, also found their faith to be a personal support in their lives:

I support elderly parents and an in law. I volunteer in groups also. I have a family. I could not take part in these activities without love truth, goodness, hope and joy. It is because I try each day to follow Jesus teaching that I can be of support to all of the people I deal with each day. Each day is a challenge and without my faith I would not be able to help anyone.

Finally, two people starkly highlighted the reality that some people find it difficult to experience the positive emotions expressed in the question:

I think the only time I feel hope is when I pray the Rosary. Love joy truth goodness I struggle with.

[I experience love, joy, etc] when I am close in thought to Jesus in thought and prayer. When I remember my loved ones especially those who have passed away and gone on to heaven. When I hold onto the promises made to us by Jesus. As I get older, I am very aware that faith is a gift not given to everyone. I am privileged to have been chosen, though my life has been one of many hurts and tragedies. Love, truth, goodness, joy and hope are becoming increasingly difficult to experience in this world of ours.

B. The Liturgy: Positive Experiences

'I've never met a Catholic who didn't think the Mass was the centre of what we're supposed to be doing.'

Many people identified the experience of participating in the celebration of Mass to be a particular source of love, joy, etc, though surprisingly few spelt this out in any detail; expressions such as 'When I go to Mass on Sunday' and 'When I attend Mass' were typical. A small number of participants, nonetheless, did offer a fuller statement. For example:

Going to Mass every Sunday acts as an opportunity to give thanks for the good and ask for help for the bad from God. Mass is also a source of the above [i.e. love, truth, etc.].

One young man wrote, at greater length:

I experience all of those feelings when I pray, and most significantly when I pray the Holy Mass. The moment when heaven and earth kiss. [...] I go to hear Mass to be fed, fed by Sacred Scripture and the Body and Blood of Our Lord. This is when I most experience those feelings. The most intimate moment of my entire day is when I receive Jesus Christ, in the form of the Eucharist.

Two respondents identified the Sunday Mass as a setting of personal reflection on life:

[...] there have been moments of hope, whilst in prayer in church, when I have been empowered to face the week ahead. Often with the intention of being more truthful, caring and forgiving - however, I frequently fail to live up to these intentions. Sunday Mass gives me a moment to pause and reflect on my actions and thoughts.

When I attend church, I am more aware of my thoughts and feelings, this is part of the reason I go to church regularly. Participating in Mass enables me to reflect on the week and think about where I have experienced happiness, love and hope.

Another offered a reinforcement of this perspective: the celebration of Mass itself offers order and meaning in a frequently chaotic and troubling world:

It's, kind of, like a rock really, isn't it, against - well, it's like chaos outside, when you think about it and for me, the Mass, as you said, it's kind of like a rock where it holds it together. So, you might be facing unemployment or uncertainties in work, difficulties at home, but if you've got that rock, you've got something to cling on to.

Another Focus Group member expanded on this idea - in the midst of a chaotic world, the very form of the Tridentine Mass was for him an expression of order:

...what struck me about the traditional Mass was the orderliness of it, kind of thing. So, it's structured in a particular way. And it just seems very perfect to me, you know, the way it's set out, specifically, the traditional Mass. As well, what was said about the silence as well, that's something that I need, really, to kind of appreciate the mystery and that really adds to it. Specifically, around the Eucharist. I really valued the silence of it. So, yes, I'd also agree that I've noticed, not just young- not just men, but young men are particularly attracted to this form of the Mass. And for me, it is probably the orderliness of it.

On the other hand, one of the priests eschewed differentiating between forms of celebrating the Mass when he spoke about it as a source of joy for him:

It sounds incredibly pious to say this, but it is the place where I get joy. The Mass, for me, as a Christian, as a Catholic Christian, and as a priest, is the centre of what keeps me sane, engaged, it's truly where I find my joy, hope and motivation for what I do. I think we're invited to try to centre our lives on the mass and I think, if we do, then that's where we will actually find what we're looking for. I don't necessarily think there has to be any particular way that it's celebrated that it makes it more or less meaningful for people, I think we have a broad range of perspectives. The wonderful thing about being a Catholic for me is that, in whatever way we celebrate the Mass, we're celebrating Mass and we share that in common, it's the centre of what we do. When you meet other Catholics of whatever persuasion, it's what unites us more than anything.

Another priest amplified the sense of the Mass as a source of joy by including the response of his parishioners:

The morning Mass is a thing that really just gives me joy and also, I'm always, almost, in awe of people who come every morning, you know nine o'clock and also the kindness of people, the absolute kindness. They'll forgive you most things, really. They ask about you and they're genuinely concerned. Whether that be a weekday Mass or a Sunday Mass, that gives me real joy.

The other side of this coin - the gratitude of people to the priests who celebrate Mass - was expressed by a religious sister:

In the love and care from the people who work for us; in the generosity of retired priests who say Mass for us, so I say with St Julie, 'How good God is!'

In continuity with long-standing Catholic devotional practice, the Church building itself is experienced by some as a special place in which the emotions of joy, love, etc can be experienced:

Simple for me. In church: truly no other place I want to be, I feel so blessed for what I have.

I experience love as soon as I enter the church I feel at home. God loves us, he died for us we are part of his family, why shouldn't we feel loved.

The church is my refuge. I feel calm and happy when I leave because I feel a presence of Our Lord.

This is particularly because of the location there of the Blessed Sacrament:

I am lucky to work near a church and am grateful for being able to call in and pray in front of the Blessed Sacrament.

Several children, however, expressed a sense of disquiet within the church building; one said, 'I find it a scary place, and it makes me nervous.' Others identified realistic representations of Christ's death in the crucifix and the images found in stained glass windows as making them uneasy. On the other hand, one child said, 'When the light shines through the coloured windows it's really pretty with rainbows everywhere.'

An example of the gratitude by the housebound towards Extraordinary Ministers of the Eucharist has already been given. This was by no means unique; but we were also offered it from the perspective of a minister herself:

When I visit our local hospital, as a Eucharistic minister, the love, hope and joy of the patients when I either gives blessing or offer them the Body of Christ, fills me with love and hope that together we will all share in the Love of Christ, irrespective of their individual faith.

Widening out the range of sacraments, several people spoke of Confession as an experience of love, joy, etc. One of these spelled out more fully the emotional dimension:

Confession is also a profoundly emotional experience when I am reconciled with the Father and His Love is so tangible, particularly during the words of absolution.

The positive dimension of the confessional experience was also described by a priest:

Every now and again ... somebody comes and receives the sacrament of reconciliation and has been carrying something for so long and you can see that burden being lifted, I'm just completely and utterly humbled by that. It actually does affect me because I'm thinking, 'Me, a sinner as well,' but you can see some of the people have carried for years and have

been away from the sacrament for many years. That is incredibly powerful, I find, and it's always the times when I don't want to go and hear confessions that it happens. I think that's just an incredible privilege, but I find it incredibly powerful and life-giving because, again, it reminds me why I'm doing what I'm doing, it's for other people, you know?

Two priests further extended the range of sacraments under consideration as they spoke of the joy they received in ministering to the sick in hospital:

When you see it from the other side and you see the impact the sacraments have on people, on individuals... You know, I go into hospital tending to the sick, and the comfort and the graces that you receive, and they receive from- that gives me huge joy. Even the saddest times, it's a huge joy that I can be part of that.

I think, in the hospital ministry as well, when you go into a room, you become a part of the family. It's strange, you become part of the family. It's not about filling the space with words, it's about your presence, and it's incredible, absolutely incredible.

C. The Liturgy: Mixed Experiences.

'I have lived in my parish nearly 30 years and still do not feel welcome or part of the parish.'

However, several people included caveats in their discussion of the liturgy - that it was only sometimes a positive experience, or that it was no longer as fulfilling as it had been. For some, this related to the style of celebration:

Often for me, Mass feels perfunctory and seems perfunctory for the celebrant. We all know the prayers off by heart, we say them (almost) by rote. The bidding prayers too, seem detached and a box ticking exercise. When there's a celebration that comes 'off-script' so to speak and feels heartfelt, that's when it's joyful and meaningful for me.

For others, the celebration of Mass accentuated a sense that an authentic community dimension was lacking:

I experience love, hope and goodness in my encounters with people. Sadly, I have to say that these are almost always outside of the church building walls. It can be with families at times of catechesis or just chatting with people at a supermarket or in a queue or in a coffee shop. I do feel I encounter Christ in these encounters and just 'being'. Conversation and basic hello are key to joy and the more this happens it fills me with hope. I do feel that these are genuine moments of hope and love, more so than the feeling of forced 'welcome' or tick box exercise of inside church of 'all are welcome'. As a divorced single parent, I feel more joy and hope in everyday life than in experiences of liturgy or service where there appears to be performance and faff rather than the meeting of community.

This sense of a lack of community might also extend to questioning whether what was being manifested and celebrated at Mass was, indeed, a shared faith:

When at Mass or confession, however there is not much of a true community even in Sunday Mass-goers since there is a huge variation of beliefs as people seem to lack direction and knowledge of the faith so there is no true family. Many people have their own belief systems that are contrary to Church teachings but do not understand or know about the precepts of

the Church and so there is a great disunity and discontent. It is hard to speak about many teachings even in Church circles as many in positions of authority or privilege do not agree with them. People do not understand what the Catholic faith is and being Catholic has become an empty tradition rather than a true living faith for many.

As one Listening Group participant noted, 'Mass can be alien to what Mass is as I understand it. Mass should be Mass - shouldn't rely on the whim of the priest. This sows confusion.' On the other hand, a mother wrote, expressing her concern for her child and his participation in the Liturgy, and pleading for a more flexible approach:

The world in which my child is growing up in. My desire is for my child to continue his relationship with God in a Church that is spirit filled and outward Focused. I want my child to access worship in a way that is appropriate to him and in a way he will continue to worship God in spirit and in truth. I want my child to feel, safe and loved in a Church that will meet his needs in 2020 and beyond. I love tradition; however, it is only a small part of being a Christian. We serve a God who is the same yesterday, today and forever, however we are also in changing times and God is more than able to meet our children where they are at. We need to let go of our control and let God to do the rest. I want my child to have the support of youth pastors/leaders so he can be all that God has created him to be. I want him to develop his own personal faith and show God's love through his daily choices and actions.

D. Pilgrimage

'I only ever experienced this in Lourdes'

The theme of pilgrimage particularly emerged during the Focus and Listening Groups, two of which were conducted with young people during the annual archdiocesan pilgrimage to Lourdes. It was evident that a number of adults who played a role in the Church had experienced the Lourdes pilgrimage as a formative experience in their youth:

We can have people who are absolutely petrified and really introverted, and by the end of it, they're singing in the streets and they can't wait to come back and get involved. They want to help people, and seeing the young people working with the elderly and sick pilgrims is an incredible thing to see them go through that change. In a one-off experience, that gives me hope every year, seeing how young people go through that, but in my job, I think working with the young people gives me hope for the future in that respect.

The impact of the Lourdes pilgrimage on young people was noted:

I find the most hope in witnessing the energy, love and faith in our young people following their experience of events like the Lourdes Youth pilgrimage and wish we had ways to help them experience this through church more often throughout the year.

Another Focus Group member identified the opportunity that pilgrimages offered to engage with the 'broader Church' as significant:

I think we've had a couple of pilgrimages through church, haven't we? And those have been inspiring for our own faith. Because of the leader that we took with us, the people that we spent the time with, the places we went to. We saw people from all over the world with a common purpose of being there -I think being part of that bigger picture is a hopeful sign.

That maybe while we're at home we don't see as much enthusiasm for the faith, but there are lots and lots of people all over the world who have something to teach us.

Several members of the LGBTQ+ Focus Group spoke of the significance of the Lourdes pilgrimage in affirming their place within the Catholic community:

Yes, I guess for me, I find a lot of love, hope and faith within my family, and also within my friends, and I have a good wide-ranging circle of friends. I think growing up as a Catholic, I've had lots of opportunities to really affirm my own sexuality and my own faith. You know, I've had a lot of good people around me. They've, kind of, come just through natural relationships which have been forged over the years. Lourdes has been a big key within that, but within my work as well.

Perhaps not surprisingly, the young people's Focus Groups held during the archdiocesan Lourdes pilgrimage raised positive comments about the experience - but they also conveyed a sense that the reality of parish life was very different:

Young people having a positive experience of Lourdes but different in parish.

Some young people suggested ways in which that might be replicated back home:

Encourage younger generations with Lourdes-type experience back in Liverpool – services that are joyful and where people want to be there instead of going out of duty/obligation. Services and Masses specifically for younger people so we feel like we belong.

One young person recognised that this might involve shaking-up the existing order:

Bring what it feels like to be a Catholic in Lourdes back to Liverpool – be disruptive and reach out to young people.

E. Participating in Church Activities

'I find hope in the Church working together.'

A number of people highlighted the Church's activity beyond the liturgy as a source of joy, hope, etc.

The energy of the churches in commenting on issues of social justice often corporately. The disproportionately high engagement of practising Christians in politics, volunteering, world development and social action.

Our parish has a thriving fund-raising committee and when I watch these women give their time and immense energy, I'm reminded that there is still goodness in the world.

Ecumenical activities were also highlighted:

In the inclusiveness and variety of pastoral work that goes on in my parish, and the wider ecumenical Church family.

As was the Church's engagement with people of other faiths

Truth - in the Gospels, people I meet, people of the Christian and other faiths - especially those I know through the Justice and Peace movement (including some ordained). Goodness - many ordinary people of all faiths and none. People who give of their time and efforts to make this a better world.

3. Secular Work

'At my place of work in all my colleagues, regardless of their religious background, or lack of any religion.'

Many people mentioned secular work (with many of those self-identifying as school or healthcare workers.) For almost all of these it was their co-workers or the people they encountered in work that made it the positive experience:

My work which is vocational as a midwife, working with the students I teach, communication with the women and families whom I care for.

Working with people with learning difficulties, I see people who hope and trust in your care and have a simple and good way of living without expecting too much. In the staff that work with these people I see great work practices that promote love, care and goodness to those they care for also commitment and self-sacrifice to do their best whenever they can.

In terms of what gives me hope more broadly, it's just working with vulnerable people and helping them to find hope. You know, that can be powerful to watch the transformation in the life of someone who feels like they've got nothing left, or literally has nothing, to help them see that it can get better.

As a music teacher I see the joy and goodness and the hope that comes through being able to make music.

I work in a hospital and I experience this in nursing patients.

Children who cross at my lollipop crossing.

I also experience a lot of these things through my work. I work for a charity that aims to accompany, serve and advocate on behalf of individuals detained in immigration detention and made destitute by the asylum process. Not only is there a lot of joy in this work but also my work is very people focussed. This again emphasises the human connection between individuals. The context in which we work can often appear a very hopeless situation, however the relationships that are built, the stories that are shared and the connection that can be created between strangers is a real source of hope. This is also encouraged by working with so many other wonderful people and in a sector where I am surrounded by inspiring, hard-working and compassionate people.

For others, it is through voluntary work:

I volunteer to help the Asylum seekers and Refugees and feel very humble in their presence. In spite of the terrible conditions they have fled from they are so loving, helpful and joyful for the support they receive.

Goodness - in everything. I am an optimist. I volunteer at the foodbank and see many generous people, offering time and goods, and goodness in all those who are seeking help (some who admit being at the point of considering suicide).

Particularly striking was the large number of responses under this category that were submitted by staff and governors in both state and (notably) Catholic Schools:

Through the work that I do as a Headteacher of a Catholic primary school. This enables me to share my faith and respond to the different phases of faith that make up the community. It is only through personal encounters that we experience all of the above.

At work from colleagues and the children. (I'm a teaching assistant in a reception class)

The Listening Groups held with school staff gave further insights into the positive experiences of those who work there. One primary school staff offered the following list:

- Through Collective Worship.
- Talking to our children/ their interactions.
- Time during school Masses.
- Class Kindness bucket.
- At our Celebration Assemblies.
- Come and See Programme.
- Moments of reconciliation.
- Church/school projects.
- Retreats at church.
- See children live the Gospel values.
- Hymns and music.
- Circle time.
- Children's interaction.
- Prayer.

In another school, staff offered a slightly different list:

- The wonder of young children and what they say.
- The feeling of enormous trust from the children towards their teachers and school staff.
- Unconditional love and affection.
- Friendships and innocence.
- Forgiveness.
- Inclusion for all.
- Children are so truthful and honest in responses.
- Children reaching milestones, showing excitement. Children cheer the hearts of adults.
- Hopeful that our children enjoy every day of school.
- Children's responses in discussion and actions.
- Observations of pupils at play/working hard/helping each other and playing together.
- Pupils using the buddy bench, singing hymns and songs, praying together, following our school
- Code of Conduct, remembering and referring to our school Mission Statement.
- Teamwork among staff particularly at difficult times and caring attitude.
- Children showing happiness when their friends achieve something.
- Children sharing their hopes and dreams for the future.

Staff in other schools pointed to the school playground and 'the happy sound of children's laughter', and 'making a difference to vulnerable children'.

The Listening Groups held with Heads of RE yielded slightly fuller responses:

It is a privilege being a curriculum leader for RE in our Catholic schools. It is so rewarding, difficult at times, but we are the Church for our young people, many of whom never go to church.

It is our ethos – these qualities are embedded in our every-day relationships with all stakeholders.

The joy of being religious educators. The trust, hope and joy the students bring to teachers makes it all worthwhile.

Similarly, a Listening Group of Secondary Headteachers pointed to the children in their own schools as ‘a mirror and vessel of hope, love, truth, goodness, joy’.

4. Home

‘At home, asleep in bed’

The notion of home is, of course, closely related to that of family, and in many cases it was difficult to differentiate between the two. However, in a small number of responses, the distinct quality of ‘home’ as a physical space emerges:

I feel love in my house and my mum and stepdad make me happy.

There is love in our home. Lots of love is given in our family home. There is lots of joy when we go to dog training. There is happiness when we are all together in our home. We feel joy and happiness when we are out in the countryside, walking with our dog.

Only one adult survey respondent elaborated on the notion of home, by stating ‘in the security of my own home’. This may, however, be reflected in the response of a primary school child, who stated, ‘Being at home in my own comfort zone’. The note of home as a safe place was further echoed - at least in part - by a recurring common response from the Archdiocese’s engagement with young people, given at the head of this section: ‘At home, asleep in bed’. This response, however, may not be entirely positive: we cannot discount the possibility that the response may reflect anxieties and insecurities experienced whilst awake and in the presence of others.

5. Nature

*‘I feel joy when I am out walking by the sea and I experience
what a beautiful world we live in.’*

The theme of nature as a positive source of joy etc. emerged particularly among older adults, among whom a sense of wonder at the natural world assumed an almost contemplative dimension. Young people, on the other hand, tended to raise the subject of the natural world in response to Synod Question Two and in the context of environmental concerns. (see below).

Being able to enjoy nature in all its glory as the seasons change.

I see and feel such joy when the birds gather in our garden to be fed, and the robin waits patiently for his breakfast.

I also find truth, joy and hope in the wonder of God's creation. This amazing world in which we live and all the creatures and the places on the Earth and in God's universe that we cannot yet, in our temporal life see and fully understand.

In nature, in our beautiful island, the trees, the sea, the flowers, the vegetation. In the weather, good and bad. In the sun that lights the first of the morning and the stars the last of its evening. In song, hymns or music to dance to. In the faces of children, in the eyes of the old.

As I get older a lot of joy comes through enjoying the simple things in life that in the past I may have taken for granted e.g. the natural world and trying to take care of it.

6. Leisure Activities

'Joy - my dog, ballet, music, comedy'

A number of respondents mentioned leisure activities (music, art, sport, holidaying)

Walking is one of the times when I will often pray and reflect on how blessed I am to have such a good close family.

Doing activities that make me feel relaxed and happy such as rugby – it's like being in a bubble, when I don't have to think about anything else.

In my dancing school.

When I go for breakfast in a cafe.

Our wonderful cathedral, Philharmonic Hall and Bridgewater Hall.

One participant, as well as the standard relationship elements, mentioned 'art, literature, mathematics' as well as being 'Lucky to have enough money not to have to worry about everyday expenditure. Fortunate to have good health'. Another focussed on the ordinary, 'In the small details of everyday life, in the lives of people who do good and bring hope, in prayer, liturgy and the life of my parish'.

Surprisingly, mention of football allegiances were rare: a supporter shows his colours in two words embedded in this rich survey response:

In life I receive love from my wife, family and friends. I see goodness in all and believe all have the potential to be good. That is down from the children I teach, (secular state school), my family and friends. Joy, Liverpool scoring, buying and giving gifts, children experiencing and learning a new concept, sharing with family and friends. Hope, in my work that I will make a difference as a teacher, hope that more will return to church and hope that there are more good people than those who mean harm.

For the sake of balance, one Listening Group participant said, 'Goodison, sometimes!', and a Year 6 child spoke in terms that could be appreciated by fans of all teams when they said, 'Football matches - coming together to support the team I love'.

Surprisingly, perhaps, only one survey respondent wrote, 'In the pub', though the Listening Group participant who responded, 'In having a bevvie' may have intended the same context.

7. Other

'Having the knowledge that we are children of the Stars. A star has to collapse and distribute throughout the universe to enable Life.'

Small numbers of other participants talked about good things in society, animals, the media, their own self, personal time or quiet reflection, daily successes. Good things happening in society or acts of kindness was mentioned by many:

Goodness is in all the people who work tirelessly for others and do not seek reward. People working with the poor, the sick and underprivileged and disadvantaged throughout the world. [...] Hope -I have hope when I see the young people of our world being given the opportunity to get a job and go out and see them do good work among their families, friends and the world in general. I see hope as the medical world make new life saving discoveries to save people's lives.

For some their own actions towards others were a source of joy:

I experience it through speaking to my loved ones, and always doing something kind at least once a day. Whether that be complimenting someone, treating them to something or otherwise, to help carry out the works of the Lord.

Going on the streets, helping the homeless and drug addicts.

When I do something that makes someone else smile or feel good.

Buying the 'Big Issue'.

Other more contemplative answers were given:

Everywhere - in the home, in my place of work, amongst friends and in the Church community (but the reverse is also true - society and the places I visit I see anger, cheating, theft, drunkenness and violence).

Forgiveness, that in some way is keeping me from bad thoughts and if something is not going my way, in the end is better for me.

Another gave a fuller response:

Hopefully in the everyday life I lead, and the contact with both strangers and my family. The virtues you list are rarely found in the searching for them, they are all around us, and the pursuit of joy, hope and love will almost certainly mean you are looking in the wrong places. Life is well capable of providing you with overwhelming moments of love and joy, in the most unlikely times and places, and goodness is not always brought to you by saints. By its very wording the question suggests we know all these virtues when we fall over them or see them

close at hand. So untrue, we do not, it is so often we recognise them on reflection later, or when we are at prayer. Joy and love are so like butterfly catching, chase it and it eludes you always, sit still and it will land on your shoulder.

One Listening Group identified the experience of self-fulfilment, and highlighted the following four dimensions:

- A plan progressing.
- The silence and tranquillity of one's own company.
- The freedom to be who I am.
- People's yearning for freedom.

Hope, joy etc, could also emerge as participants struggled with negative dimensions of their experience of life - three Listening Group participants spoke here about the 'fellowship of the 12-step programme.'

One survey respondent wrote of her gratitude for God's action in her own life:

I experience love and joy awaking each day, appreciating my family, my home, knowing that I have a job to go to, food to eat. I thank God for all the blessings he has bestowed upon me.

This sense of gratitude was further concretized by Listening Group participants from a parish that over a number of years has offered a free Sunday lunch to some of the poorest in society:

Talking to the guests at the Sunday lunch who bear the brunt of the government's austerity policies. Although not churchgoers, they often show us, through their stories of hardship and struggle, what trust and sharing really mean. They help us appreciate the blessings we enjoy and often take for granted.

Several mentioned their companion animals as well as wild animals (though only one high school Listening Group mentioned penguins).

FINALLY, one Listening Group response turned the question on its head, and invite us to end this section of the Report with a challenge:

I do not look for these things from others - instead I think it is more important that I try to give these things to others.

SYNOD QUESTION 2: When you reflect on your life now, and as you look to the future, what causes you concern or worry?

'I worry that my children will suffer from the reckless, impulsive, destructive nature and behaviours of those before them. I worry that the world is becoming so frightening and overwhelming that no amount of praying, family support, encouragement or community aid is going to make any difference.'

The responses to this question fell under six broad headings:

1. Society and other people
2. Religion
3. Global issues
4. Respondents' own lives
5. Technology
6. Don't worry

The responses in each of these broad areas were then organised according to a series of sub-headings, as noted below.

1. Society and other People

The answers to the second Synod Question mirrored the responses to the first; here, too, the outstanding issues were social and religious. Turning first to the social, analysis of the data generated the following sub-headings:

- A. Young people
- B. Breakdown in family life
- C. Changing social values
- D. Mental health
- E. Crime
- F. Politics (and Brexit)

A. Young People

'I worry about my children growing up in a world that seems to be losing sight of caring and loving each other.'

A persistent theme was concern for the respondents' own children and grandchildren:

I worry about the future for my daughter and grandson in a world which is trying to live without God.

I worry about what life will be like for our children and grandchildren; in an increasingly divided society, where compassion and integrity are being devalued what will be the strongest influences on them?

Several participants expressed their personal pain at the direction their children's lives had taken:

My son who is 26 says he is an atheist; he lost his belief when he was 12 after seeing his grandfather die suddenly in front of him. He won't go to church and is marrying a lovely lady in a hotel. He's an honest man and lives his life well, but he has lost God. My daughter is marrying a Hindu man, she is having a Hindu marriage ceremony. I worry about her and any future grandchildren.

It's very tragic to see all my children, that I tried to bring up Catholics, leave the Church. And then divorce and go off and commit adultery. And you've got St. Paul, and every other chapter is about adultery. Heaven help us – hell, here we come.

The impact on the young of a changing society on the ground was a concrete concern:

My worry is what the younger generation are going to like as they do not have respect for themselves. parents, teachers or the general public. They seem to think violence with guns, knives. kicking and fist are the norm and I worry when my grandchildren go out due to the violence and drugs that seem in plentiful supply in the Northwest. I can believe these young people just laugh at religion, especially ethnic minorities.

Others looked beyond their families, and spoke about young people more generally:

My life has been well blessed, having a loving family who passed on their Catholic faith to me, from my early childhood taught and guided me throughout my life. I feel that many, many children have a lot of other things to cope with today. Peer groups, media, the materialistic world, crowds their life. They don't seem to have time to stop. Church, the centre of my early childhood, is not considered that important. The school environment sometimes helps them to reject religion (through the peer pressure). I know that our teachers do their best. Parents don't always pass on their faith, if they have one still. Morning and night prayers, grace before meals, are not always remembered. However, it is so easy to criticise busy lives. I feel we should remember ourselves to pray for the young.

One respondent offered a particularly thoughtful analysis of childhood in the modern world:

I look at the young people and wonder what they have. What memories will they have. All they seem to do is go online. Do they skip, play, make up adventures? Oh, the fun we had as children. What do the children of today have to remember? It's such a sad world for our young people and the religious education and structure seems lacking in our schools. It concerns me that young people are stressed, worried, even young parents get stressed and

worried. We have food banks and homeless, and it's a sad world that we are developing. There is hunger, poverty and homelessness all around there needn't be but there is. That's what concerns me, human nature, human life, all life from cradle to grave. The babe in arms to the elderly in the nursing homes. All life is precious.

One thought that the blame lay with young people, however:

I am concerned that many young people expect the future to be provided by others and they feel they are not responsible for contributing to the Church and the wider community.

Another linked a lack of interest in the faith on the part of young people to broader developments within the Church and education:

My concern for the future within the Church is that young people do not seem to value the sacraments or even understand their faith. Is this due to the poor education within our schools and the lack of interest from parents or that the church has changed so dramatically? I wonder if priests have also lost their way and need to 'fall in love' with the Lord and live a more prayerful life rather than being so busy with 'the business Church?'

If we turn to the responses of young people themselves as given in the Lourdes Listening Groups, we find that their concerns were chiefly focused on the changes that lie ahead of them. For some it is going to a new place – surrounded by strangers and not being accepted, whether at University or a new town:

The thing that causes me concern or worry is not being accepted by society at University. This is due to massive changes, moving away from home and the people I know.

I'm also worried that a new church/parish may not be the right place for me, and my faith and love of Jesus may drop/decline if I do not feel as if I belong or wanted in a new parish.

They worry about their future career prospects - particularly as potentially they impact on their experience of love, hope, etc:

Worried that I won't be able to work in a role that gives me access to opportunities for experiencing the above [love, truth, etc].

Future health issues - and whether they will be looked after, and current mental health concerns also played out - as did financial concerns about the cost of going to University. One of the fullest responses raised concerns about the future across a spectrum of potential (and real) issues:

I am worried that I won't be free in the future. Like I will be tied down to responsibility, a job and a house. I dream of moving about but money, career will stop my freedom. I also worry about how I should bring up my children. I love Jesus. He was kind to all, and he taught me how to love through my Mum. However, there is conflict between me and my Mum now due to different beliefs. I side with Jesus whilst my Mum sides with Church teaching.

B. Breakdown in Family Life

'I worry that my mummy will leave because my auntie left her kids.'

Participants repeatedly raised the problems faced by families today. Anxieties about family breakdown were to the fore:

[I worry about] the total breakdown of so many families who suffer from all sorts of problems with lack of work being the tip of the iceberg.

The brokenness of family life is a huge concern as the youngsters are deeply hurt and badly affected.

A number suggested that poor parenting was at fault:

I worry that there is little respect in some communities and that parents don't teach their children to respect others.

Family life going out of Control through Bad Parenting.

Perhaps not surprisingly, therefore, those who had experienced family breakdown were anxious about the response of others in the Church:

I divorced recently because of my husband's behaviour and I worry about what people think of me and the impact on my children.

The financial - and emotional - impact of divorce was also noted:

I have concerns for my retirement from a financial aspect. I recently went through a divorce and have lost a major financial partnership besides the emotional one. Also due to the divorce I expect to have a lonely old age now.

Even within ongoing relationships, people expressed concerns for the future:

I also worry about the state of my relationship and whether we have longevity, sticking power, and whether we made the right decision in being together or not.

Personally, I am worried about my financial situation (especially student loan debt) and my relationship with my husband due to our religious differences (he is an atheist).

Judgement by others was also feared by those who were not in a relationship. A young woman wrote,

I'm also concerned that as I have never been in a relationship, that my friends are judgemental of me, or that I will never be in a relationship.

Children, too, expressed their concerns about the impact of family formation (and re-formation) on themselves. A Year Nine student said, 'I worry that I will lose another dad if my mum gets with someone'. Another identified 'the difficulties of living in two different homes' following parental divorce. And it is alarming to speculate what situation might lie behind the response of one child: 'My Dad, and what he might do to our family'.

Meanwhile, the acrimony that may follow on from divorce can be heard in two comments:

[I worry about the] manipulation of my 9-year-old son by my ex-partner of which I have little control (and abuse of the inadequate system for her personal financial gain).

Lack of men's attitudes walking away from wives, splitting the family. Leaving ex-wives financially in trouble ... forcing them to work full time!!

C. Changing Social Values

'[I worry about the] anger and hatred in the world that is encouraged by those in power.'

A breakdown (or merely change) of social values was highlighted as a cause for concern by many people. Most were concerned with an increasing individualism or selfishness in society, an intolerance towards others, and a materialistic outlook.

A culture of individualism and personal success was criticized as contributing to the breakdown of community life:

I worry that the world becomes ever more centred around individual gain rather than looking at communities as a whole. Whilst social media is on the rise, individuals connecting at a personal level are becoming increasingly rare, and altruistic actions are less common than they were. Volunteering, community service etc are all under threat.

In general, I am concerned at the culture of success which leads to people not being valued for what they do, not for who they are. Children are talking about wanting to make their parents/families proud of them and even parents are talking about wanting to make their children proud. Parents talk of being proud of their children when they achieve. This does not help children to believe in God's gratuitous and unconditional love.

Some related this growing individualism to other perceived evils in society:

I do worry about society as a whole and our country and the Church's role in the future. In society people appear to be getting more selfish, they want to claim for everything that hurts them, they blame immigration and migrants for all society's ills, but don't accept responsibility for their part of any situation. Our Church tends to say the right things but then is very slow to do something practical about resolving the issues.

A number of people pointed to polarizing trends in society; a particularly carefully thought though response expressed this well:

I have a strong sense that in the UK, and across the world, society is being dragged in polarizing directions over a number of topics. It feels that there is so much that now divides us that it prevents us from seeing any sense of shared humanity or common ground. We are encouraged by politicians, by the media and by those who influence society to 'pick sides' and to vilify those who oppose our opinions. Although it has always been present in some regard, it seems that the atmosphere has become so charged and violent in the aftermath of the Brexit vote, such that we are becoming a society divided in hate.

I think this is particularly concerning, not only because of the division but that it leaves certain groups who are already marginalised being pushed further to the fringes. Many news stories have made it seem that blatant hate towards these groups of people is acceptable. We have seen a lot of abuse, sometimes physical, aimed at migrants, refugees, LGBT+ individuals and members of other religions such that it seems to be becoming the norm. Much of this division and hatred of 'the other' seems to be the result of people feeling that their identity is threatened.

Many people talked about the violence that can result from the divisions in society:

The way the world is going. The violence, young people being stabbed. Homelessness particularly of our armed forces. I feel there is too much cultural change. This is not the country I knew growing up. It does not feel like England any more. Worry about the animosity between faiths.

Global insecurity, a lack of belonging and a lack of 'life making sense' to so many - this feeling leaches into everything and is making everyone worried, uncomfortable, lonely and sad. It is hard to see how this is going to change, at least in the near term - how will our children be safe and happy and feel secure in this hostile, judgmental world?

One person suggested a politico-economic cause for all this:

The global capitalist system which seems to exacerbate inequality worldwide, contributing to so many problems faced by so many people around the world, is a great worry as it seems fundamental to our modern world but fundamentally flawed at the same time.

A few people did mention, in various ways, a dissatisfaction that the Church was not speaking out against the falling moral standards in society; some even contrasting the Church unfavourably with Muslim leaders who, in their perception, are more ready to condemn:

Good credit to the Muslims for standing up for what is right.

To speak aloud - the Catholic Church has hidden and not spoken out. Islam speaks out - if it is perceived to be beyond the priests / bishops / archbishops etc. remit them employ someone else - PR - someone that can.

The practical impact of such societal change on the elderly and marginalised in society was noted:

Ordinary people are poorer. There is less certainty about education and welfare. Instead of being a caring society, intent on helping the needy, there is an emphasis on the individual and looking after yourself and yours. There is a big issue on the future of the health service for future generations. Who is going to care for the elderly and sick? I would like to see a fairer society for my children and a robust health service accessible for all.

Poverty and particular child poverty, food poverty in the community I live in is a real worry for the future. How has this happened, no easy solutions seem to be emerging to raise people's standards of living.

Some blamed the impact of a policy of austerity pursued by successive governments:

Government policy has brought about divisions in our country. The poorest have been left behind after 10 years of austerity. The heaviest of burdens have been placed on the shoulders of those least able to carry them. Food banks increase, children attend school without food, working parents find it hard to feed and clothe their children. This must change.

D. Mental Health

'I also worry about my mental health and how things have impacted on it.'

Many people raised the issue of mental health, often with regard to young people:

Poor mental health is rising and becoming more evident in younger and younger children. Adults under pressure and suffering themselves to manage their own mental health are struggling to care for their children and this is on the rise.

What causes me concern and worry? There are so many people out there who do not consider themselves to be lovable. If one does not consider oneself to be lovable, people have a tendency to engage in practices that reinforce a predetermined belief i.e. destructive behaviours, risk taking behaviours, harm of self and other types of behaviours. Any institution that upholds a system that reinforces this will only increase that internalisation of negativity which translates into feelings of hurt and anger.

Mental health seems to be a problem particularly for the young who are under so much pressure. Linked to that is misuse of IT and social media/bullying.

One Listening Group starkly identified a frequently related problem:

Number of suicides among young people.

Young people themselves voiced their own concerns about mental health - either naming it in generic terms, or identifying particular issues, such as 'body shaming/self-esteem.'

Several of the above linked mental health issues to the pace and pressures of modern life, and social media, which itself garnered a number of comments:

Mental health problems with the young and elderly Men who feel socially excluded and also experience mental distress.

The pressure put upon children and adolescents causing increase in mental health problems especially in the young. The fast pace of life where we don't have time for each other. How materialistic we have become. No work life balance. The great divide between those who have and those who have not.

One person linked mental health explicitly with the rise in secularism:

Increasing secularisation of society especially attempts to 'downgrade' Sunday or Easter, e.g. Mass commercialisation with Sunday shopping and Sunday football. The evil influence of social media in making bullying and persecution normalised, creating a mentality that smacks of the Roman era. As a teacher, I see the devastating effects this is having on our young people with a sharp increase in mental health and anxiety issues.

E. Crime

'Other children or people carrying guns or knives, I might get shot'
(Year 4 School Listening Group.)

Another societal issue identified by participants was crime. One Listening Group synthesized the concerns that were voiced by many others:

We worry about the world we are raising our children in and the increasing dangers that come with today's world we live in. Online danger from people targeting and preying on children, plus these things are a worry in everyday life – you worry about strangers, drugs, the rise of knife crime for example. All horrible issues are on the increase nowadays which only seem to be getting worse as time goes on.

Here we find the single respondent who explicitly linked crime and race:

There is too much crime in this country which has been instigated by foreigners allowed to live here - to quote one example the number of Pakistani immigrants who are being goaled each month for the rape and grooming of teenage girls. Once upon a time a British person could speak out about any matter he thought worthy of being brought to the attention of the nation - now he is dismissed as a troublemaker by all the self-elected do-gooders of which there are far too many. In general, the country is going in the wrong direction altogether and I fear for the future of our young people and their offspring. If they are not able to speak for themselves who will speak up for them?

The comment about perceived restrictions on free speech were echoed by a few others who blamed 'political correctness', as well as one Listening Group participant who was disturbed by, 'the forceful nature of the promotion of the New Gender Ideology'. On the other hand, rather more respondents voiced their concerns over bigotry and intolerance:

Lack of tolerance and understanding. Lack of integrity and honesty. A world emerging where everyone seems to feel they have the rights to express their opinions in a public forum and that to ridicule or vilify those with a faith seems acceptable and the norm. Despite increased access to education there seems to be decreased tolerance, love and care for your neighbour. In this disposable world where we are destroying our planet with our throw away lifestyle. People seem to be becoming a disposable commodity too.

I worry about how secular the UK is and how there is so much anti-religious feeling especially towards the Muslim community.

Attitudes to asylum seekers, refugees, Muslims and Jews here and Christians all over is worrying.

More than one participant tied these issues into the absence of Church influence as part of a wider narrative about the breakdown of society:

The lack of spirituality and commitment to the Catholic faith in the younger generation who were baptised and brought up in the faith but no longer practise-leading to dissatisfaction, lack of meaning and purpose to life, also mental health problems.

I fear that the UK is becoming more secular, excluding God from laws and institutions e.g. same sex marriage, gender change, LGBT issues. God never imposes on us, so we will find ourselves and our country in a downward spiral away from God, towards paganism. Christians will find it more and more difficult to live in such a society. Catholic hierarchy leaders must defend the Catholic Faith and its teachings and give a lead to their flocks. Or be answerable to God for souls lost because of their dereliction of duty of care.

F. Politics (and Brexit)

'My wife is an EU national, so I am concerned about her position after Brexit. Also, where she stands if I die before her.'

Very many people mentioned UK politics. Politicians (among other leaders) caught significant flak – one respondent writing,

I am concerned at the state of our nation, where government seems out of touch with the harsh reality of life faced by many people, and the official channels seem so incapable of providing timely support to those who ask for help.

However, the majority of responses within this category were concerned with Brexit:

I am worried about divisions among people and find Brexit really soul crushing because it divides rather than unites people. I always thought of the world as getting closer together but so many politicians and ordinary people seem to want to divide and drive us further apart.

Brexit-ostensibly about the financial future but really the rise of a new fascism.

Brexit and its impact on us a concern and the future of my children in this country.

The increase in xenophobia which has been on the rise particularly since Brexit.

I am anxious about toxic government policies including Brexit which increase poverty, marginalise people and feed a narrative which is selfish and increasingly racist.

Not everyone felt the same though:

As a Brexiteer, I worry we won't leave the EU.

Brexit, I worry for my children and grandchildren's future if we do not leave a corrupt, self-serving, unelected conglomerate. We do not need to be told how to run our country by unelected, overpaid bureaucrats.

In this case it is worth noting that many survey respondents simply wrote 'Brexit' or similar. In several cases they articulated a concern about the impacts of Brexit (whether the referendum, or the eventual outcome) and the effects this would have on the fabric of British society. However, as noted above, two respondents stated they were concerned that Brexit might *not* happen. This suggests that not all respondents who gave single word answers had the same perspective on the issue they mentioned. If some who wrote 'Brexit' were in fact concerned, for example, about the slowness of the parliamentary debate and the possibility of MPs scuppering the referendum. Therefore, we should not jump to conclusions about an overall opinion within the Archdiocese, despite the fact that they share a focal issue. This insight also guided the analysis of other responses, especially those in the final section: many respondents mentioned 'Married clergy' and 'Female priests' for example, and only in some cases did they articulate exactly what their feelings were about the issue. Therefore, it was judged best practice to include them together, as they all thought the matter needed examination, regardless of their preferred outcome.

2. Religion

Strong and very varied concerns of a religious nature were expressed through the listening process. Here the divergences of opinion were particularly marked. The following sub-headings have been used to organise this data:

- A. Secularization
- B. Decline in church attendance
- C. The current direction of the Church
- D. The clergy

- E. The impact of the child abuse scandals
- F. Failings of the Church
- G. Catholic schools

A. Secularization

'A very secular world has to grapple with a future without the faith in God to sustain them in the face of climate change and violence that is so prevalent in society.'

'Secularization' is the process by which a society that gradually abandons a religious way of understanding the world. Secularization affects almost all aspects of society. In England, for centuries we have based many of our laws and the ethics of our society on a biblical understanding of the world and of humanity. But, as a religious perspective on things becomes less and less part of the way society thinks and acts, then those laws and ethics are re-drawn in a way that departs from the traditional Christian viewpoint. Therefore, for example, the use of the Bible as a reference point for making medical and ethical decisions gradually diminishes in decisions about the beginning and end of life. One way in which the churches experience the Impact of secularization is that fewer and fewer people attend Sunday worship: put simply, they no longer regard it as part of their lives and their world. Not surprisingly, therefore, many people spoke about secularism during our Listening process. Of course, there were many different ideas about how secularism had spread, what should be done, and finger-pointing - as well as concern for the coming generations who will live without the Church (or any other spiritual institution/motive) being a part of their lives.

People identified secularization as an ongoing and relentless phenomenon:

Society's relentless downward spiral into a secular society which is fundamentally greed driven and relativistic in nature.

This was manifested as a decline in faith within society:

The frightening lack of spirituality in our Nation [and] absence of faith generally.

My greatest concern is not love as love is there in most people I see and I see them showing it in all forms, however faith in God has but almost disappeared in everyone's life , and can the world exist on love alone without faith I personally think not.

And as impacting negatively on morality:

It causes me concern that people don't seem to have any morals. That people don't seem to stand up for what they believe in and that people are afraid to say that they are a Christian. Time and time again I hear people say that it is the way it is these days. Just because it is that way it doesn't mean it is right. It causes mean concern that people don't stand up for their beliefs because they are afraid to speak out because they are in the minority. There are many times when I feel odd because of my beliefs. I also try to respect people's view but often I don't think we as Catholics are respected.

For some, this lack of respect was experienced as a form of discrimination, and even persecution:

[I worry about] secularism. Those of faith being branded as deluded. Being persecuted/discriminated against for being Christian.

I see a broken society with many people hurting, angry, confused, lost. I see my country moving further and further away from Christian values and sadly promoting harmful ideas and ideology. I am concerned about our young people who no longer hear the Gospel message and do not know Jesus; who do not know right from wrong but sadly do experience evil and sometimes goodness.

One Listening Group participant differentiated between actual anti-Christian attack and popular humour, though their words suggest more than a slight hint that even on the humour front things have declined:

The fact that Christianity is under attack in society. This is different from me accepting that we should be able to laugh at ourselves and not be offended by every Pope joke - some are quite funny, if they don't go too far. Fr. Ted seems very innocent now.

To some, the best response was a clear restatement of traditional faith in the face of society:

We need to get a message across to the Nation about behaviour in all aspects of Society which has thrown out/discredited Religion and in so doing has thrown out the Rule Book- the 10 Commandments. They make their own Rules up and it starts with I want... Today's world is dominated by Media and it is anti-Religion, fully supported by Conflict in the Middle East, Northern Ireland, Africa etc. I believe that the Church needs to find a way of communicating with people who don't understand what we stand for. How do we bring back Morality into Society?

The decline in numbers of those (especially young people) attending Church was related to secularization:

The age profile of people who profess to being Christians and are prepared to show commitment to their beliefs. Within 20 years the parishes across the UK will be small, elderly and conservative. There are fewer and fewer people with the time and talents and training to give support and nurture beginner Christians, especially for nurturing young people. this includes on-going adult formation too. This can be seen in some parishes but not in most parishes across the UK.

One woman expressed how this impacted on members of her own family:

[I worry about] The future for my nephews and nieces. They have all decided that being a Catholic is not for them (ages range from 14 to 25) and are very much influenced by social media and very secular thinking. The scary thing is that they all see themselves as enlightened and socially aware and yet they don't actually do anything that involves giving up their time to help others.

Meanwhile, there was a sense that Church had been partly responsible for creating the current situation:

I'm concerned that we live in a secular society where the Church is not respected, but sadly the Church has brought that on itself. Many seem to mock faith, but it is hard to respond given the failings of the Church in dealing with many issues.

B. Decline in Church Attendance

'My children no longer attend Mass which makes me feel a failure.'

For practising Catholics, the practical impact of the issues that fall under the 'secularization' heading is felt when they translate into reducing numbers of people attending Church. For many this can be a cause of considerable personal pain, as it is their own children and grandchildren who no longer attend. One participant neatly summarized the scale of the problem:

In the Church we seem to have 'lost' two or three generations. So few people attend Mass, not only young people, it seems to be right across the board. I know the abuse scandal has not helped in this, but I feel that there is more to it than that. Mass does not seem to be 'relevant' today. Yet the generosity of young people never ceases to amaze me. They will get their hands dirty in doing all sorts of things to help others. 'Faith in Action' - that is the religion of our young people today. Have they got it right? Maybe!

If two generations had been 'lost', another person suggested that it would take at least as long again to address the issues that he saw as lying behind the Church's current decline in numbers:

As an organisation [the Church] is broken and lost all meaningful credibility. Once those over 60/70 have gone it is difficult to see how churches will be filled. At least half will need to be closed down. We keep on hearing how we should attract younger people but even older people like myself feel further away from the Church than at any time in our life. As Pope Francis says the Church needs to follow the Gospel more instead of trying to cover up its own inadequacies. We keep on hearing about the shortage of priests, but the percentage of Mass attendance has fallen well below that of priests. It's not the shortage of priests that's the problem but the quality. There appears to be no accountability. Besides the widely known historical abuses we have serving priests driving people away from the Church with the knowledge of the Church hierarchy. This is not the faith I was brought up in. I'm afraid it will take generations to repair.

One person contrasted over-subscription to archdiocesan schools with non-attendance by the children and their families at Mass:

The Church as I knew it growing up was instrumental in helping me develop resilience and a positive mind set. I am afraid the Church today does not appeal to the youth of today, either to the parents of today or to their children and in the fullness of time children will not have the necessary mindset or resilience to face the modern-day challenges. I am afraid the Church as we know it in Liverpool Archdiocese will fade out or become a select group. Catholic schools primary and secondary are oversubscribed and parents on occasion will move house to endeavour to get their children into specific schools but choose NOT to go to Church. Why not? In addition to talking and listening to the already converted, let us reach out to those parents and seek their views - Why do they choose not to go to church? By going to church they would be helping their children.

Another person worried that failure to attend Mass was a result of a non-recognition of the possibility of eternal punishment:

The diminishing presence of people in a Church and to see the empty pews is a concern. I do believe that there is a serious lack of knowledge in people of the existence of hell in the

Church's teaching. People seem to think it does not exist and therefore do not bother to attend Mass anymore. God's Word expresses the existence of hell and we need to emphatically teach that non-believers will enter into that existence after passing away from the earth. (Revelation 21:8).

One survey respondent thought the Church should be more encouraging:

The lack of young people going to Mass. We have fewer priests and should be doing more to promote this sacrament. In the 80s and early 90s growing up in Liverpool most churches were open. Very few churches are open during the day/early evening, if we want people to come back to church/Mass. If we want people to experience the beauty of Christ in our churches how can we justify locking the doors most of the day every day of the week. We need to offer more liturgy, we need holy hour, benediction a Mass in the evening so people who work can attend, my church, apart from Mass, has nothing else to offer. It doesn't matter if you get 2-3 people, I'm sure our Lord doesn't mind! The laity feel starved: Mass and a least one holy hour per month in every church can't be something difficult to ask for. This is a major worry.

A number of people felt that a perceived lack of inclusivity on the part of the Church was a contributing factor to people choosing not to attend church.

I am concerned at falling Church numbers and the Church demographic - some young families and a lot of retired people - the Church doesn't seem to have relevance to the age range from 12 to 60. I think the rigid stance of the Church on contraception, re-marriage, and LGBT issues is very damaging to the Church. Given the dangers of overpopulation, climate change, and (in some areas) risk of AIDS it seems irresponsible to insist that contraception is wrong. It seems also poor that Priests can't be married, and in this day and age why Women can't be Priests. We also have a duty to look after the World God has given us - Climate Change is an imminent and serious issue.

Some people were drawn to this position through their own experience:

As a gay man with a partner of 40 years the feeling of being an outsider with the Church, having to justify myself. I look forward to when the Church is inclusive with all mankind and as Sons of God we will be accepted.

Another gay man described in some detail his reasons for leaving the Catholic Church. Speaking about the 'mixed' messages he had received in the Catholic community, he said:

I'd even go so far sometimes as to describe it as like an abusive relationship, where sometimes, you get the impression that, actually, it's all okay, and that promotes trust. So, you take a step in trust, and then you're knocked back again. It's those mixed messages that, for me, are partly why I decided to no longer identify as Roman Catholic, and why there is one single Anglican parish in Liverpool that is the only place I can say I feel safe as a gay Christian, and safe to be both... physically safe, emotionally safe, mentally safe. Everything, right, I can go around as a gay man, participate, minister, whatever, and not only do people not mind, they actually encourage it in a good way. I don't get that sense in other places.

A mother spoke of the experience of members of her own family, who felt excluded from the Church:

My daughters no longer go to church, and I have family and friends who feel excluded because of their circumstances, which causes great pain. The Catholic Church can appear to be unchristian because of some man-made rules. I would love to see greater unity among Christians. The future of the Church if our young people do not want to be active members; we must look to nurturing the younger generation.

A member of the deaf community spoke about a different kind of exclusion:

For a full active participation to occur, every word must be signed, even a short welcome introduction at the beginning of the Mass. Not only that, Deaf themselves must have the opportunity to participate as servers, welcomers, readers/signers, ministers of the Eucharist etc.; in an integrated Mass this rarely happens.

A mother looked to her children's future within the Church with some apprehension:

[I am worried] that my children may not be able to 'stay' and receive communion because they are not the 'right' people (either because they are gay or divorced and remarried).

A call for the equality of women within the Church was also voiced in this context:

The hierarchical Church which continues to operate a top down way of doing things. I believe we are all equal in the eyes of God. Women need more recognition not just cleaning parish houses FOR NOTHING. People deserve a living wage. The Clergy should be in the forefront of justice.

The lack of appreciation of the talents of women, and their ability to contribute at the highest levels of the Church.

Concern that our Church is not inclusive enough, and that our faith is not always inclusive.

The young people who took part in the Lourdes pilgrimage Listening Groups also felt these issues keenly

The Church's attitude to equality, sexuality, and gender will drive young people away from the Church – both those who are navigating these issues and their friends.

The Church needs to start to make changes so that people feel welcomed or judged. There needs to be more youth events like Flame because I feel that youth leave the Church because they feel like they don't belong.

Also, I feel like there needs to be a clear message from the Church about the major problems and give their view on LGBT+ and women having more of a say/power in the Church because people need to feel like they are wanted.

Moreover, one expressed the opinion that it was, in fact, older generations who excluded young people:

The Church excludes young people due to the traditions of the older generations. If there were youth Masses separate where everyone could worship in a new exciting way like in Lourdes, I think more young people would take an interest in the Church and be more involved.

For the sake of completeness, and perhaps by way of response, the openness of one older respondent should be noted:

My concern would be the issue of how truly to allow the Holy Spirit the space to let him bring people to God. There seems to me to be no set formula to achieve this end. Rather we need to build a culture in which God is real to those who belong to this culture. The culture we live in is un-Godly and that is a real barrier. It is worse as it is in the main an indifference to the things of God. We need to learn how to do things and speak to people that would interest them but not use the traditional structures, language and much else besides. As the Synod prayer says, 'we need to find new ways to bring God's love to our sisters and brothers'.

Finally, another older person offered a reflective perspective that invited a degree of self-criticism in the face of current decline:

Those of us who are practising Catholics must not look disappointed at those who haven't yet signed up to the full package. I know we say that we shouldn't be advocating pick'n mix Christianity, but don't we do this in our own lives also? There aren't many regular Mass-goers who have eschewed all the trappings of modern life, who don't decide which of the Church's rules are less important. The world is a very different place from when I grew up and even more since Vatican II.

C. The current direction of the Church

'[I am concerned] That the Church will be polarised between being inclusive of people and views and demanding that there is a "right way" of being a Catholic.'

There was a strong sense in some of the responses that people were perceiving an increasing polarization within the Church, between what might (very roughly) be described as 'traditionalist' and 'progressive' positions. Heartfelt emotions were expressed across the spectrum, and people wrote with conviction and sincerity. A pair of responses, which touch on many of the same issues but from diametrically differing perspectives, illustrate the breadth of the divide:

There is a need for the preservation of Discipline and Dignity in the practice of our noble faith. Laxity has crept in, seemingly because we have tried to make things too easy. This applies to priests, deacons, lay ministers and lay people. I feel that there is a need for knowledge of and adherence to the Rubrics in Missals, Lectionaries and other official Rites of Service, etc. There is a need for gentle persistent persuasion 'from the pulpit,' just to highlight our concerns. Maybe 3 or 4 minutes at the end of a homily, to address as many parishioners as possible. Meetings only 'preach to the converted'. Deacons are not priests; lay people should not give Blessings, and priests should follow the Mass as it is written.

I am largely happy now but have concerns for my grandchildren and what the priests in the Catholic Church will be teaching them about Jesus, love, equality and respect for all faiths, cultures and genders: I have heard recently that priests coming out of training follow Pre Vatican II teaching/beliefs? Women not involved as readers, Eucharistic Ministers etc but allowed to clean the church? I do hope this is not true. Such a change is a backwards step and worrying for the future. Also, currently in our parish, children who wish to make their First Communion must show they have attended Sunday Mass by having a 'card' signed by the Parish Priest. They are also expected to attend the full Triduum Services. This 'jumping through hoops' is surely not what Jesus taught or expects?

One person sought to propose a *via media*:

Honour the tradition but expand the understanding'. [I am concerned] that we are so attached to our image/identity of being parishioners of church x going to Mass at x am/pm that we will not quickly readjust to the new realities with flexibility, patience and humour. 'Grace is the ability to redefine the boundaries of possibility.

But another person asked whether a *via media* was even possible:

Uncertainty over how Church will look when I'm older.

Particularly striking were the survey responses of four young men, who opposed what they perceived as a relativism pervading society:

What I do worry about is the battle between liberal and traditional teaching. I feel that there is no space for those of us who find ourselves in the middle ground. The majority of the laity are quite liberal. A lot of the men going into seminary are quite traditional (and quite vocal about it). This disparity is going to lead to a lot of problems, and it will become harder to bring people into the Church. I want our Church to be firm in its teachings but liberal in the love that it shows to all people. I feel lost in the middle of a battle which is becoming more and more polarised. The laity are in general very poorly catechised - I don't know what the answer to this is, or indeed whether there is one. We need meaningful lifelong education. If we look at Muslims, Jews, Protestants, they know their faith inside out. If you asked your average Mass-going Catholic to explain an aspect of doctrine, they might struggle.

I believe that the Church should guard moral standards of its faithful and promote in a meaningful way moral uprightness. I worry that certain new 'trends' in our culture, and moral relativism can diminish truth and the essence of moral teachings of Christ.

One thought any indulgence in politics was an error:

We have brought politics into the Church, which is a big No-No, in my view. Politics and religion are like oil and water. We need to stop diluting the words of God. Spread the word of God and do good deeds but if we are ignored, we must shake the dust from our shoes. We will not capture everyone, and we will have people who will use vile and oppressive language against us. They will also use the law of the land to protect their rights. We need to have our own specialist Catholic schools and ignore OFSTED and other government bodies that try to tell us what to teach or influence our beliefs.

One held the local clergy responsible:

The fact that a large proportion of the priests of the Archdiocese of Liverpool hold and teach heretical beliefs. Like a lot of practicing Catholics, I have spoken to (mainly older than me) I am worried that Catholic education in the Archdiocese has completely disappeared. Going through Catholic schools, I learned absolutely nothing. All we did was talk about 'communities' and 'special events' (rather than specifically Catholic things). It is no wonder that no young people go to Church; everyone thinks that Catholicism is childish, irrational and boring because the general level of teaching doesn't ever get beyond primary school level. The only thing I remember being told in Confirmation preparation was that contraception was fine, so that's just great isn't it? So, in conclusion, I'm worried that a lot of priests are coming out with unchallenging platitudes, if not outright mistakes. That, and Catholic schools aren't teaching Catholicism.

Another pointed the finger at the hierarchy:

I worry for the Church; I feel as though her leaders on earth often follow their own desires rather than those of the Lord. We are human beings made by God for God's love, our task in life is to make our own hearts a pure receptacle of nothing but God's love, only through this can we translate it to others. I have grave concern that the Church has its ears closed and instead it seeks not God but its leader's entertainment. Christ was nailed to the cross to get his bride to Heaven, the successors of the Apostles must live this and carry this cross.

An older man, meanwhile, laid the blame at the door of the highest possible authority in the Church:

[I am concerned about] The state of the Church under Pope Francis, who has already undermined the sanctity of matrimony with his *Amoris Laetitia* exhortation. His refusal to

defend, uphold and teach the faith that has been handed down from the Apostles, in clear unambiguous language is an abnegation of the sacred office he holds.

Within this perception of the Church, the net effect of the failings outlined above is, as one woman put it, 'No-one knows what it is to be Catholic, there is so much confusion'.

Such concern over that the Church was proving untrue to its traditions recurred across the listening process. So, too, did concern about a perceived tendency to turn back the clock. For example, one person criticized the 'tendency of the Church to retreat into itself and its past traditions and structures in the hope that that will solve current problems'. Several expressed concern about what one participant described as, 'the rise of clerical traditionalism (restorationism) within the younger clergy'. 'The resulting 'styles of liturgy', another person said, 'are a turn off for many adults and the young who know nothing of the Latin Mass'. Meanwhile, a retired priest wrote,

I wonder where we are going to get the right vocations from. In the young priests of today I see so much clericalism in their dress and how they almost demand authority. As a late vocation and a VAT II priest I find their view of Church disturbing. I think the model they appear to aspire too is not life giving to the majority of people. I was on the doorstep of the Church pre-VAT II ready to turn my back on it. VAT II revived my life and subsequently gave me a vocation which I love. The church needs a new structure in choice and training of future priests.

Others expressed concern that the inspiration that they had received from Vatican II had been progressively undermined by the Church's leadership:

Vatican II inspired us some 50 years ago and gave hope for the future, but sadly this has been dashed by conservative leadership with a determination to tell but not to listen, concerned with its own security, lecturing the world on matters spiritual and moral whilst behaving in a manner which in no way reflects the life and teachings of Jesus.

Yet, from inside the other perspective, a young man claimed the right to be taken seriously:

I am concerned that some people wish to reduce the Church to a mere social outreach organisation. I am also concerned, as a young person, that more often than not older, more socially privileged people tend to appreciate my presence in the Church as a mere tokenism. They very often assume what I as young people desire, claiming to speak for me. This in my view is a great worry. I can say with great certainty that, contrary to what people may think, I do not see Church teaching on various controversial social issues as a stimulus of anxiety, in fact I embrace them, because they are Catholic and therefore true.

Similar voices emerged in the Extraordinary Form Focus Group, where a further, interesting discourse was stated, namely linking the Tridentine Mass to masculinity:

With the old Mass, it's very, very precise and clear that it is a sacrifice, and that's something that is, I think, a little bit ambiguous, maybe in the new Mass. [...] And maybe, as well, that links back to the masculinity thing, the sense of sacrifice, and that's the focal point of it. The whole thing seems to kind of lead to that monumental sacrifice in a way that is difficult to kind of miss. ... I suppose it's a kind of masculine trait, in a way, to want to sacrifice. Or it's something inherent in men, I suppose, to sacrifice something. Whether it's a father, sacrificing their time or whatever, for their children.... And I think that is why men like the old rite Mass, because it is masculine, it is Christ on the cross, it is suffering, it is being a father and bringing up your boys and everything else and caring for your wife.

Finally, one respondent sought to identify the underlying causes of polarization in the Church. They suggested that such polarization was a response to the forces of secularization in society:

As we become a more secular society, identifying as Catholic is often met with scepticism and sometimes disdain. In response, certain groups within the church are becoming more traditional in their view of their religion. Now a traditional view of religion is up to the individual, but I feel that these groups of people are becoming very closed off in their views and unwilling to engage with individuals who do not share their views; at times being outspokenly hateful to others. In a religion which should be welcoming to all people, and loving of all people no matter who they are or what their background, it could be dangerous for us to become more fundamental and closed off because we feel we are ourselves 'under threat' for being Catholic.

D. The Clergy

The Focus Group of priests expressed concern lest a strong anticlerical note should enter into the discussions. One member of the Focus Group had been following various Facebook threads related to the Synod, and he picked up a strongly negative note:

There was this sense of real anti-clericalism that this was just this long thread of comments and comments about, 'It's all very well and good but will the "men in black" actually listen?' They've chosen the reps, so they've chosen the reps who will agree with what they want.

It was just this whole thread on social media about... I just thought, 'Anybody who reads that will just think, "What's the point of this?"' The thing is, with social media, it's not contained. That will spread to every person that person knows. I didn't comment, but the minute you comment on it, everybody who you know can see that and it was just this thing...

What I'm hearing a lot of is it's all against the priests, it's always against 'the men in black'.

In the event, criticism of the clergy was relatively limited. When clergy were mentioned, it was primarily with regard to the shortage of priests, and many people expressed concern for the welfare of clergy. Nonetheless, actual criticism of clergy attitudes or behaviour was made, and in some of the strongest terms encountered during the listening process. This may be because there were in some cases powerful negative personal experiences at the root of the complaint.

This material is presented under three sub-headings:

- (a) Shortage of clergy and church closures
- (b) Concern for the welfare of priests
- (c) Criticism of clergy

(a) Shortage of clergy and church closures

'I face a lonely, sacramentally-starved old age!'

A concern that a shortage in the number of priests would have a profound impact on the life of the Catholic community - not least in its sacramental dimension - was explicitly expressed through all the strands of the process. The Listening Groups repeatedly indicated this as a concern, whilst the online survey yielded 121 references to this issue alone; the following are representative:

I fear that, unless it changes, the Catholic Church will not be around much longer - few 'priests' means smaller Church and no 'priests' means no Church.

I worry how the Catholic Church is going to continue with less and less priests available. It's too big a job for one priest in a parish, even with lay support.

I worry that as a consequence of fewer priests, and fewer parishes - and parishioners - that I will not be able to benefit from having a community of faith around me to support and challenge.

As I enter the end part of my life and with no family, will I be able to answer God's call to use the wisdom I have been taught. Will my Church be there for me and others who are alone and have needs – emotional, personal and physical?

I am greatly worried that, in the not too distant future, due to the shortage of priests, there will be no catholic church for my grandchildren and the ones who come afterwards to attend. That all will be lost unless something radical is done very soon. We need to allow priests to marry. I truly believe that this is God's will.

Several respondents noted that the closure of their local Church would impact directly upon their own spiritual life:

If the church I go to closes I would lose contact with the people who support me and whom I care about, losing my priest who I love and care about. Most churches are closed after Mass and should be opening for private prayer and access for people to use.

Will I get to fulfil my daily norms of piety? Will I get daily Mass? Will I be able to make a visit to the Blessed Sacrament, even if it is through a locked door?

A sense of concern for the future spiritual life respondents' children and grandchildren fed into the focus on this issue:

My main concern is that with the lack of priests my church could be closed, thus denying the community experience to my children and grandchildren.

As I get older, I worry about the accessibility and availability of Catholic priests, especially at times of ill-health and need. Closing of churches fill me with concern ... Will my descendants even have access to the Catholic Church at all considering the rate of decline in both numbers of priests and churches.

One Listening Group raised the question of the ecological impact of church closures and invited the Archdiocese to consider the implications for its carbon-footprint of longer journeys to the reduced number of open churches.

The pastoral impact of an over-stretched, semi-peripatetic clergy was drawn out in another response:

An elderly friend died recently, he had been involved in our parish, from the beginning, collecting newspapers, etc. - his wife started the piety stall. Both worked in our parish, into their eighties, when through age and failing health, they became housebound. His wife died many years ago and when he died, the priest who was present at the burial of his ashes simply said, 'I don't know him'. My concern is, that our priests are becoming so far removed from the people they serve, that none of us will mean anything once we step back from being active members of our parish.

A similar perspective was expressed by other people:

So many elderly now get forgotten when they can no longer get to Mass, leaving the onus on Eucharistic Ministers to visit. Many have attended Mass and supported the Church their whole lives but are lucky to receive a visit from a priest when they become housebound or go into nursing care.

I worry about former stalwart parishioners being overlooked when they are unable to continue to attend church through illness, infirmity or going into nursing homes.

The shortage of clergy featured only slightly at the Listening Groups conducted with children and young people and in the Youth On-line survey. One Year Three group (children aged 7-8) offered the following concerns:

Not many priests.

Don't want churches to shut down.

If people die they won't have places to go if churches shut down.

If people stop going it might have to shut down.

The priest may leave and move on.

A Year Four group (aged 8-9) in a different school offered the following:

If no one looks after the church building it might fall down.

It may get abandoned if no-one wants to be a priest.

Respondents repeatedly proposed the ordination of married men - and of women - as a solution to the problem. These issues were raised again, and in greater detail in response to Question Four; the following are typical: of the comments included under this, second Question:

Re. the Church - ageing population, few new priests, what will be left by the time I am the age of the majority of parishioners, never mind my children. I understand that allowing married priests/ and the development of the role of women in the church is more of an issue for the Church as a whole, if these issues are not addressed in this country, then the future looks bleak.

It is time to allow married clergy, many C of E vicars have been allowed to carry on their ministry, having lived down south for a number of years, one of the priests was a former C of E vicar. And the other topic, women priests. It is time for change!

I am also concerned about the reluctance of the Vatican to change the celibacy ruling for priests - it is not God's law, but church law! If priests were allowed to marry, it might ease the shortage of priests and give them a more fulfilled life.

Another fear is the lack of priests. We cannot raise our families without our priests. Personally, if I ever had the chance to speak to Pope Francis, I would ask him if he is aware of the main reason of the lack of priests and how big impact is having on us as parishioners. Priests should be allowed to have their own families which would lead to a better understanding of us as parishioners with our own families.

A young person made a particularly passionate appeal in this regard:

If the Church would like to go forward into the future with a strong and inclusive community, it is fact that some radical changes need to be made. I would especially like to see priests being allowed to marry and have relationships. This would mean more could train to be a

priest without having to experience an unnecessary burden. This is a matter my parish priests, family, friends, and their family all agree with. PLEASE CHANGE FOR OUR FUTURE.

Yet, despite the appeals for change, several people held an underlying concern that the Synod process would not mark a change in direction for pastoral planning in the Archdiocese:

At the end of Synod 2020, nothing will change except the closure of lots and lots of churches.

(b) Concern for the welfare of priests:

‘Priests are being expected to do too much.’

Concern for the welfare of the priests as they faced reducing numbers and increased workloads was expressed.

I worry about the pressure on priests, when numbers are small, and they take on more and more churches.

When I look around the church congregation, I worry that the average age is very high and that we’re not attracting the younger generation in numbers enough to sustain the current amount of churches and that our current clergy are becoming overworked and taking on greater workloads.

Priests in their 60’s in the Archdiocese are having strokes at an age when the rest of us will hope to be enjoying the early stages of retirement.

Several priests voiced their own anxieties:

Workload and the continuing pain and challenge of change. The loneliness of carrying and leading a community. Work life balance. The lack of support and interest from the diocese in its priests and duty of care for them.

Fatigue is creeping in, I feel I am approaching a tipping point, support is waning and there is a strong sense of hopelessness among the people we serve.

Balance between wanting to do the right thing and letting anything go so as to look after oneself

Some priests reinforced these concerns by expressing their perception that the Archdiocese failed adequately to support them:

The lack of a pro-active care given to the Ordained in their Ministry for the good of the Diocese.

The absolute frustration of delay and postponement of LACE to support us. Act in a supportive way to parishes and their needs.

Frustration with the diocesan bureaucracy that is stifling development.

Rectify the appalling lack of communication between Archbishop’s House/LACE and the clergy. It is often impossible to get a reply. Clergy are treated by LACE as ill-educated underlings.

A parish deacon eloquently expressed the practicalities of engaging with an elderly priest:

We have a very elderly priest in our parish who quite clearly is struggling. I mean, he literally fell on the sanctuary the other week and had to be helped up, and you're holding your breath, stood at the side of him every Mass, hoping that he's going to get through it. I think he has gotten past the stage where he can decide for himself, almost, and I wonder what support is offered through the Archdiocese. He doesn't want us to say anything to anybody. He's too proud, and he'll come out with some excuses like, 'Oh, I can't leave the dog,' and that sort of thing. At the same time, the parishioners are feeling it for him.

Younger priests fear for themselves, expressing anxiety that they face an overburdened old age. One, who had struggled to manage several parishes at a previous time, foresaw a return to a similar situation in his future:

Well, one of the things that I've already been through, and it's my fear that it's going to happen to me again and I'll just be older, is that ending up with what was, at one time, eight parishes but, by the time I'd taken over what was four parishes, three churches, three primary schools, and the expectations that were placed upon me. As I say, at the moment I'm in clover, one church, one parish, one school. But in the next little while, I'll end up with two. It will be two parishes, two schools. By the time I reach 70, the likelihood is I will be back to three churches, three schools, and I'll be 70 and I only just managed for a little while when I was 55. I'm just worried. That's why, to me, if the Synod gets this wrong, I'm snookered because I know I won't be able to cope in the structure that I coped with from 8 years to 13 years. ... I know I won't be able to do that when I'm 70.

Faced with these prospects, some priests are anxious about whatever decisions are made as a result of the Synod:

I think there are some concerns about what happens after the Synod in the future. I suppose the Synod's focussing everyone's mind, not particularly for me, but I have heard priests say that if it goes in some way that they don't feel they'd like or can cope with, whatever that might be, they just, 'Could I take early retirement because I don't want to be looking after 16 parishes or whatever it is?'

Is there already an agenda, and the whole Synod is purely an academic exercise that can be manipulated by its organisers?

Yet, perhaps a parallel concern was expressed by a Listening Group:

Since many of the priests don't yet put into practice the teaching of Vatican II, can we hope they will implement the outcome of the Synod?

(c) Criticism of clergy

'We don't need more priests but better priests'

The pastoral impact of the changing patterns of priestly ministry has already been noted. For one Listening Group participant that change became a cause of complaint against the priests themselves:

Now the priests rarely leave the house, come to the door, or choose to interact with the local people, they expect people to go to church to meet the priest which isn't going to happen, so we end up with empty pews. I am sure I shouldn't worry about this as church is not a numbers game, but when the clergy judge success by bums in pews, then I think it's that attitude that worries me more than the falling numbers.

One respondent segued from the shortage of priests to a criticism (drawn from experience) of the capacity of some priests to turn away parishioners:

The dwindling congregations offsets the shortage of priests. Indeed, it's not the shortage of priests that is the problem but the quality of them. I have seen first-hand long-standing parishioners being driven away from their church by the incumbent priest. When complaints are made to the hierarchy there is plenty of sympathy but no action. As with the historical abuse scandals and subsequent cover ups, these complaints are brushed under the carpet. The hierarchy, and some lay people, are more concerned about the church's reputation than the people it is serving. There is no accountability.

A mother offered an example of alienation of the laity drawn from her own family:

I have two very highly educated, loving, kind and caring daughters who both believe in God. They have both chosen however to turn to the C of E church because they cannot relate to our Church. They have both sought out churches where the clergy pay more than lip service to their needs as young career minded mothers. They have experienced Catholic priests who can't even remember their names even though he married them. No understanding of the pressures of modern family life and little understanding of the strains on married life. I am a retired catholic RE teacher and cannot keep my own children within our church because I cannot make sufficient excuses for the very poor experiences they have had and continually see.

The source of the problem, suggested one Listening Group participant, was an attitude of professionalism among some clergy:

Secular priests not living their vocation i.e. treating the priesthood as a job and not a vocation. I have experienced those secular priests who do not administer the Sacraments when asked, who go out of their way to bully parishioners, to discourage and chase vulnerable parishioners (or would be parishioners) and treat the children – the future of the church – as anything but important or welcome in parishes, or even go into schools. They are hardly in their parishes as they are always on holiday or 'pilgrimage'. They hardly consider their flock who they only consider as a cash cow for the parish, especially in the most deprived areas of the city. This type of bullying, hypocritical, devious dishonest and egotistical type of clergy, the Archdiocese can well do without and should be rooted out and removed forthwith.

For some lay people, the issue was one of a lack of accountability:

Priests should be accountable for poor pastoral care.

Sack priests who do not do their job - like everyone else who doesn't do their job.

Meanwhile, a relatively young priest suggested that a tendency towards an insulated clericalism played a role in the problem:

I worry about excessive clericalism, a holding onto power, a needing of prestige, a glorying in privilege, among those who people would call conservative or liberal. Some of the most clerical priests don't wear clerical collars I worry about a 'comfortablism' among a middle-class clergy that detaches us from the real struggles of people's lives. It is too easy to be insulated from the real struggles and experiences of love and therefore become hardened to the little ones Jesus calls us to look after most I worry about buildings, that as clergy we can hide in them, or be distracted by them. That they are empty for most of the week, that we spend time and money maintaining buildings that don't truly serve God's mission.

A distance between clergy and laity was viewed by one lay respondent as playing out in parish life and particularly in the art (or otherwise) of preaching:

Church and laity drifting apart. Many clergy not in touch with real life, trying to impose unrealistic views which are not cognisant of modern life Sadly many clergy still living in the past -'I am in charge, whatever I say goes,' and views of parishioners are merely tolerated but not accepted. Few clergy capable/willing of giving meaningful and relevant homilies. Homilies are to be endured rather than listened to - Keep them short and relevant, many Priest seem to think quality of a homily is judged on its length! - keep it short, absolutely no longer than 5 minutes. We live in an age of 'sound-bites' and headlines - that is what today's public are familiar with - Priests must change to meet modern demands. (Being brutally honest these comments apply to most senior members of clergy - Bishops - as well as ordinary clergy.)

There is, however, no agreement on the ideal length of a sermon - not even among the laity:

I ...believe that it will become even harder to keep the young people in our communities whilst our homilies are so long and, at times, seem to be too obscure. SIMPLICITY should be the main factor when preparing a sermon. The homily should NEVER be more than TEN minutes long. Attention spans generally do not cope with longer homilies.

The content of sermons, too, was the subject of critique; a complaint against 'too much football' was made by several, while one person said, 'all sermons should make at least two references to one of the readings.' On this note, it is perhaps useful also to note that some participants expressed their appreciation of the quality of homilies in their parishes. Thus, one spoke of the 'engaging preaching at Mass from a priest who talks to us as one of us.'

Many of these issues were also raised during the priests' Listening Groups. The priests spoke of the 'Church's failure to connect with people's hunger for God 'and attempts to 'hark back to the past (i.e. just before Vat. II).' They acknowledged their own 'fear of lack of connection, relationship, meaningful engagement with the 52% of no faith, no religion,' and noted the 'disconnect between Church and society.' They recognised the 'widening gap between the young, laity and clergy,' and expressed frustration at their 'powerlessness to change some traditions in the Church.' And beneath it all, they expressed again and again their concerns as they faced failing health and increasing age. Meanwhile, one participant in a priests' Listening Group suggested that failings lie not only with the clergy:

My greatest fear or worry or concern is when people come to church on a regular basis not with faith but full of hatred. That is a great obstacle to those who come to church for a good reason and find no point in continuing coming to church since they find not peace only gossips and mistreatment.

A position echoed by a layperson:

I am worried how my other fellow Christians behave in their everyday lives. I get sad when those people you expect the most to act as true Christians fail your expectations. Some people do not practice their faith. To do good or be good completely sometimes is wrong nowadays. This bothers me a lot. Sometimes you notice people who go to Church totally acts different outside of the Church. These are just my observations not my judgement because I too am not perfect.

Several of these themes – most significantly questions of accountability and clericalism re-emerge below when the responses to Question Four are discussed.

E. The impact of the child abuse scandals

[I worry about] 'the possibility of the Church becoming more and more irrelevant in the light of the abuse scandals.'

Not surprisingly, the sexual abuse of children by members of the clergy was raised as an issue of concern:

The terrible damage done to so many lives by Child abuse and the devastating effect on the mission of the Church. So many still do not understand this - clergy and people.

It was the Deacons' Focus Group that most thoroughly discussed the impact of the child abuse scandals. At an institutional level, the problem they highlighted was that of historic widespread cover up:

The problem in the church was the cover-ups. ... The church, I think, naively, has accepted its mission of bringing forgiveness. So, I think that the church, in its naivety in believing that these people are going to be forgiven, and when they've done their contrition and gone to wherever, rather than report it to the authorities. Because, when you think what the seal of confession says, they can't really report it. Let's step back and be realistic, as well.

The Deacons identified two areas in which the entire abuse scandal had impacted on the relationship of the Church with broader society. The first related to its teaching authority:

It has completely undermined the authority of the church. We no longer have any authority to teach anyone anything, in my opinion, and that is a, sort of, worry. Because the situation we're going to end up in is the church won't have authority, so the church will be able to put forward its own view of things, but only on the basis that, okay, this is what the church said. It's up to you what you do, but this is what the church says. That approach, which I think will be inevitable, we won't be able to teach with authority, but we'll just have to throw our sixpence in the pot with all the other idiots, and it will be to the detriment of people's souls, basically. That's what it comes down to, and all because it has been undermined by the sexual abuse scandal. I mean, I think it's quite appalling and there are a lot of clergy and others who have got a massive debt to pay when the time comes for this.

The second was a general mistrust of priests, particularly around children:

It's now the perception of what's going on, because I know people who have said to me, 'Oh, I wouldn't let my kids anywhere near a priest.' Why not? Would you say the same about teachers, social workers, youth workers? I grew up, priests in and out the house all the time. Never ever felt threatened.

A survey respondent outlined the impact of the scandal on the faith life of his own children:

I undertook to raise my children in the faith. One by one they have lapsed. When I have spoken to them about this, they have not cited a disbelief in God but rather a lack of confidence in the Catholic Church as the means to establish a relationship with him. They have suggested that the recent scandals which have rocked the church are a function of its particular outlook and overly patriarchal structures. They find it hard to accept that an organisation which has been the hiding place for so much evil can hope to do good. I have found it hard in all conscience to counter these arguments.

Another person outlined the negative impact on her own faith:

I have been a regularly practising Catholic for most of my life and would want to continue this. But recent revelations concerning sexual abuse within the Church are making this increasingly difficult for me. This has become more so when it transpires that some leaders within the Church have known about abuse but not reported it to the authorities. I am particularly concerned about the way the Church therefore seems to consider itself to be separate from secular authority.

Still another highlighted the hostility that the scandal has provoked towards Catholics in general:

I worry about the future of Christian church especially the RC church. There is so much hatred of the church as a result of the sex abuse scandals and the church's apparent lack of courage to root it out especially the bishops who keep quiet when they know wrong has been done. When you tell people you're a catholic the response can be very hostile.

Meanwhile, mistrust in the Church's response was expressed:

Sexual abuse within the church has always troubled me and I fear that the church is viewed as reacting, somewhat 'politically' rather than pragmatically.

Furthermore, the various cover-ups were judged to be a failure on the part of the Church to behave responsibly to broader society:

The lack of acknowledgement by the church to the world: a) of the really poor mistreatment of children (whether in care or up for adoption) due to limited knowledge/experience of the care givers in the care of children for the children's' greater good in settings that were almost akin to prisons; and b) the failure of those at 'the top' in the church to actively seek out the men who entered the church ministry and abused their position of power in violating the sanctity of the bodies of members of their community. Though will be judged by God, these should still be brought to justice on earth to face allegations before they die.

Finally, one layman raised the issue of falsely accused priests, and set it within his broader concerns for the Church:

I have no concerns for myself. I am at peace with God. Nor do I have concerns for my children. None of them are practising Catholics: two have moved to the religions of their spouses (Christian) and one thinks that religion causes war. However, all would stand four-square behind Catholic Social Teaching. They will go to Heaven and their children with them. What concerns me is the clergy and hierarchy. They are the gateway for the laity to go through and find Christ. Mostly the gate is open. Sometimes it is closed. An organisation so badly managed as the Catholic Church could not have survived for 2000 years without divine intervention and that is our hope. The Gospel of St Luke refers! The present problem is about abuse by the clergy (a very few clergy only). The devil will make a beeline for priests. What closes the gate to Christ for me is the treatment of patently innocent but falsely accused clergy. Their treatment is a scandal.

A concern that the Church should learn from its historic mishandling of sexual abuse surfaced again in many responses to the fourth question (see below)

F. Failings of the Church

‘A dying Church that is failing to walk with people and build and support community.’

Aside from consideration of the sexual abuse scandal, strong opinions were expressed that the Church was failing more generally. Two responses summarize the broad areas considered:

[I worry about] major failures in the Church to train, supervise and support clergy; to involve lay people in the work of the Church; to ensure much greater equality for women in the Church. Failure of the Church to have proper complaints and whistleblowing procedures to deal with Safeguarding and especially borderline Safeguarding issues like abuse of power. Insufficient structures and systems for consultation with lay people in the Church. Totally inadequate education and development for young people in the Church, especially where there are no Catholic Schools. Totally inadequate recognition of local/regional/national differences in developing policy in Church.

I am almost in despair at the state of our Church as I do not think the people with power in the Church really understand what is causing us to lose so many of our younger people. To younger people the church looks dominated by male clerics, misogynistic, secretive, unable to run its affairs in an efficient manner and unable to project how our faith relates to today's world. However, I recognise there are very many good people in the Church living out their faith and we do a great amount of good. Unfortunately, our current public profile is appalling. We do not need to change our faith but how we teach it and how we conduct the life of the Church.

It was notable that criticism of the Church was often voiced across diametrically opposed viewpoints. The authors of the following pair of strongly worded responses, for example, are in agreement that the Church has ‘lost its way/lost the plot’. However, their analysis of the causes suggests that they come from entirely different stables:

The failings of our Catholic Church, through becoming so obsessed with institutionalization. the Vatican has over the centuries... lost the plot! The sex scandals, financial mismanagement mafia styles of operations. Priesthood lost in a time warp! My heart goes out to those hundreds of priests who were and are lost to the real messages of the Gospel I would recommend you read Fr. O’Leary ‘I believe compulsory celibacy is a kind of sin’ - an excellent article taken from *The Tablet*. Our churches are on the decline with ageing population. What also distresses me is the growth of the evangelical movement especially in America the concept that everything is wonderful. Some churches have over 20 thousand people attending complete rubbish.

The Catholic Church has completely lost its way and its confidence. This 'Synod process' is an example of this. It is just Protestantism dressed up as 'progress'. The Anglicans are 'Episcopally led and Synodically Governed'. I can't see why we should follow their lead down that messy rabbit hole which has proven so disastrous for them. This is the first time I have ever questioned whether a validly elected Pope is actually Catholic. I don't see much evidence that Francis is.

Critique of the Church's perceived failures swung between a call for the restoration of the 'strong faith' of the pre-Vatican II age, to positions that go well beyond the Church's traditional teaching:

Most things we took for granted in the past are no longer guaranteed. I look with trepidation at the future ahead. I do feel world is going through a trial and perhaps a punishment. Sorry to sound pessimistic but there's so much confusion. Church is going to die out in the western world, the majority of Mass-goers are elderly. They received their education pre-Vatican 2, sad to say the Vatican council destroyed that strong faith of the past. Hopefully there will be a revival, where is the leadership? We used to have a Wednesday evening novena, to pray for the people with problems and to worship Our Lady. It was stopped, why? I despair this church in its bid to appear modern. Young people have lost their way, and why aren't we praying more for their welfare and return to church.

[The Church is] not effective, too obsessed with out of date views on sexual relationships. Gross hypocrisy of clergy and hierarchy. Too many tales coming out of The Vatican of homosexuality and cocaine fuelled orgies. not allowing contraception in third world countries, whereas Widely used in developed countries. Celibacy in clergy somehow thought of as a gift to God but is in reality a very odd way to lead a life. Misogyny throughout the church. Fed up listening to sermons from priests and deacons about the old days when churches were full without any thought as to why Mass attendance in decline, also can you really expect anyone to want to confess to clergy, with widespread clerical child abuse. Taught as a child that giving to Peter's Pence was for the poor, now transpires widespread misuse of funds, no one in their right mind would want their son or daughter to follow a vocation into the church.

Two participants focused their concerns on a perceived failure by the Archdiocese to follow-through on its own, historic initiatives:

So much effort and so much hope [was] expressed in the discussions and concluding statements of Archbishop Beck's and Archbishop Worlock's pastoral councils and *Leaving Safe Harbours* came to nought.

I worry that the Church and faith that has nourished me and those who have gone before me is dying and may not be there for my children. It feels there is a failure to be relevant to the world and an inability to engage in a meaningful dialogue with contemporary culture. My perception is that fear and a lack of vision in our local Church prevents us getting into society and making our faith alive and active in the world. We have so many treasures to offer but fail to use the power and infrastructure we have to make them available. We need talent and prophetic vision so as to put out into the deep. We stared into the abyss with *Leaving Safe Harbours* and shrank back in fear. I worry that even if much comes from the Synod that we have wasted so many years and so much energy that could have been given to effect real change.

The revised English translation of the Roman Missal - and the mode of its introduction - was criticized by several:

The manner of introduction of the revised liturgy in 2012 was disgraceful. The work of those in this country to revise liturgy was disregarded and, we are led to understand, their services, work and concerns were ignored – as were the objections and petitions from clergy and lay groups.

Liturgy: it has to meet the spiritual needs of the people rather than the needs of a liturgical norms. The present translation of the missal is lamentable.

As the Church becomes more 'Latinized' ('consubstantial' and 'incarnate') a tension arises between everyday worship in colloquial ... English and the translations in the Mass which are far from this. The Collects in particular, read like a committee was sat down with a thesaurus and found the most obscure English they could find.

One member of the LGBTQ+ Focus Group included the revised translation as among his reasons for parting with the Catholic Church:

I haven't actually been directly involved with the Catholic parish or the Archdiocese for about seven, eight years. So, I walked away partly because I was struggling with hierarchies, pronouncements around the government's concentration on same-sex marriage, but also partly because I hate the new Mass translation and I think it was imposed from great heights, with great disrespect for local churches.

A few people expressed concern about the lack of knowledge and understanding of Church teaching among the laity, sometimes including themselves.

My main concern is that I think we, as lay people, are not sufficiently catechised to enjoy and experience Christian life to the full. This in turn means that we are poorer at communicating it to others outside the church either in terms of our lives or, if necessary, with something we say.

Catholics from the 1960s onwards haven't been taught the Catechism so are Ignorant of why God made each of us and The Commandments of God which are as Valid today as when God gave them to Moses, and if broken Mortal sin is on your soul and you must go to Confession asap. Catholic children are not being taught that Jesus is Truly Present Body Blood Soul and Divinity in the Tabernacle. Therefore, they are not taught to Genuflect and be silent in church. I don't think their teachers know this - are they practising Catholic teachers. Do children know how to say the Hail Mary and Our Father? Confession is less and less available this should be preached about. Priests need to tell the truth that Purgatory exists and how to avoid going there. Priests should daily be praying for the souls in Purgatory Especially those souls with no one to pray for them.

For some, this same concern extended to the clergy:

The Church's social teaching needs to be better known by the laity (and by those elements in the clergy who don't 'smell like sheep').

G. Catholic Schools

*'The poor level of Catholic instruction of the Catholic faith in our schools
- reminds me of the seeds that fall on shallow soil!'*

The positive experiences of both staff and children in the archdiocesan schools has already been noted. However, the responses to the consultation also raised voices of concern - especially as related to the decrease in Church attendance. A broad statement of an expected correlation between school enrolment and church attendance was expressed by a few:

In my opinion all young people attending either our primary or secondary schools should attend any Holy Day of Obligation Mass during the school day. It appears that in our High

Schools, children have the choice. Surely the fact that you're attending a Catholic school should mean that that choice has already been made. I appreciate that the answer is not as simple as that, but it would be a start.

What makes me unhappy is when I see families going to be baptised who have no intention of coming to church and keeping their promises and the catholic faith. Too many just come so they can get into the catholic schools and don't support the Catholic ethos once they are in. Its disrespectful. The baptisms are not conducted with any respect or dignity, or recognition of it being a sacrament and a sacred holy moment.

This expectation was linked by several to the celebration of First Holy Communion; the following respondent extended the frequent complaint that reception of First Communion did not initiate regular attendance to an appeal for an admission policy built around regular Mass attendance (and financial contribution to the parish):

It is also very sad to the 7-8-year olds making their First Holy Communion, and hardly ever returning to Mass, except at Christmas. Do parents only want their children to go to Catholic schools because we have a good ethos? We should make realistic demands for entry into our primary schools! That is, attendance at Sunday worship two out of four Sundays, also realistic contribution to the support of the parish.

A particular concern surfaced in several Listening Groups with regard to sex education in Catholic schools:

Gender theory and the sexualisation of children through sex education in schools, even catholic schools.

Compulsory sex education in schools without parents being able to withdraw their children from anti-moral agenda.

I fear for our children being taught in Christian (Catholic) schools about same sex marriage and transgender. Not part of Catholic teaching.

Several people suggested that the decline in Church attendance by young people was itself a result of a failure by the schools adequately to teach the Catholic faith:

[I worry about] The rejection of the Faith, especially by the young, which demonstrates ignorance and lack of understanding of the sacraments and the Faith and suggests that the teaching of them in our schools is failing very badly.

What Catholic education is being taught in primary and secondary education? I don't know what does get taught, I would hope the true meaning of Mass that Jesus is TRULY PRESENT in the Eucharist Body Blood Soul and Divinity. The Importance of the Sacraments Especially Confession, Adoration, Mass. Silence in church genuflection in Church children knowing why. Teaching Total Respect and Sanctity of every life from Natural Concept on to Natural Death. That God exists! Need more Confessions offered by Priests.

Proper Catholic education in schools. My children's school taught Year 6 crystal dowsing (a form of divination) as a way of 'relaxing' before SATS. When I put in a complaint, they didn't understand the problem, and said I was the only one who complained so it wasn't a problem! It is supposedly a Catholic school.

One person questioned the faith commitment of the classroom teachers themselves:

Lack of teaching of the faith in schools or positive role models. Few teachers are practicing Catholics and therefore can't teach with knowledge or authority, many say they are Catholic,

but live with partners and are not married etc., giving kids the impression that this is ok, and the truth is outdated or irrelevant. The majority of kids in schools are not practicing Catholic so as a parent trying to teach Catholic morals and theology to my children, far from being backed up by school, I often feel that school undermines Church teaching and makes it difficult for my kids to see the necessity of living life true to the faith when they see many people who profess to be catholic and even in positions of authority not living that way. I have also experienced teachers teaching their own incorrect beliefs, whether knowingly or not this should not be passed on to the next generation but is inevitable when the faith is taught by people who don't know it inside out.

Meanwhile, a former secondary headteacher suggested that recruitment of senior staff was becoming problematic:

Catholic secondary schools are a difficult concept now as it is difficult to recruit senior staff who can commit to the traditional description of a Catholic.

School teachers themselves expressed their own subject concerns. The perceived 'narrowness' of the revised GCSE syllabus was highlighted by several, while one spoke of the challenge of dealing with the resentment that other subject leaders in school felt at the allocation of 10% of curriculum time to RE.

A perception that the distinctiveness of Catholic schools was being lost was voiced in several Listening Groups. Admissions policies were criticized as being too 'lax' - with a more rigorous selection process proposed:

Decline in standards of Catholic schools – admissions policy too lax; not just baptismal certificate but also additional proof of participation in the life of the parish. e.g. Statement of proof from PP (attendance certificate).

One participant suggested a complete break with external, state scrutiny of Catholic schools:

We need to have our own specialist Catholic schools and ignore OFSTED and other government bodies that try to tell us what to teach or influence our beliefs.

Meanwhile, one Focus Group member had already taken matters into his own hands, and had decided to home-school his children:

The tendency nowadays is for Catholic schools to be not much different to secular schools. You do see a continual drift towards there being very little difference, in moral teaching and how children are looked after. My wife and I teach our children at home now, partly because we want to create and pass on something to our children, and I don't see it being passed on in schools. If most teachers aren't Catholic, it's hard to pass on something, isn't it, if the large majority- In secondary school, certainly more so. And, if the general drift is just to follow the secular agenda in schools, then it's hard to see the diocese opening up a wonderful new agenda of life, if it's just following the secular drift in schools. If the Synod doesn't tackle that drift in schools, towards the secular agenda, what will it achieve? I don't know what it hopes to achieve. We won't have wonderful fruits, if it doesn't tackle that kind of area.

3. Global Issues

'Climate Emergency – we are interconnected and what happens to the poorest, to the trees, the orangutans, affects me.'

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Many people mentioned global issues; they spoke about war, terrorism, and politics generally:

The inequalities and injustice in the world. The suffering through wars and famine.

The future of Africa and India. Will there ever be an end to poverty and inequality in our world. Where are the voices calling for justice today?

I worry about the future for our children and our children's children, I worry about the lack of peace in the world, the way we are destroying our planet. I worry about how we don't do enough to change the unfairness of the workings of the world, how so many people across the world live in poverty, no water, no food, no homes, no education, while we live in comparative luxury. I worry about how greedy we are.

I worry that democracy is breaking down all over the world with the rise of populism.

I worry for my children and grandchildren, that they may not live a complete life free from war and the worry of war like I have been lucky to have lived.

The inequalities and injustice in the world. The suffering through wars and famine.

International politics ... China, Donald Trump, terrorism, continuing poverty (especially the lack of fresh water for people...still!! 2019 and some people don't have fresh water).

However, the main single concern expressed was for the environment.

Far from being a counter-cultural voice, the Church operates in collusion with rapacious capitalism: carry on reproducing the more human beings the better, with no regard to sustainability, who then become consumers for more and more goods, most of which are neither needed nor required, but fuel addiction. Systemic injustice is a fact of life to serve demand. Through her social teaching, the Church pays lip service to the symptoms but does not address the causes. She has abandoned the concept of stewardship. She preaches respect for life but fails to see that this has to embrace the totality of life on earth, which is in peril - including human life! The lies and evasion over the facts of human sexuality have caused me to lose confidence in her credibility, and the behaviour of clerics has confirmed that.

The destruction of our planet by our lack of understanding and our failure to believe the science. We need to live more simply.

In general, I fear climate change and archaic politics. I fear that there will not be a world as we know it for more than maybe as little as a century. I fear that the world needs a strong lead on change which might not materialise.

The continuing rapid rise in the global population will continue to impact on our planet and this will eventually have severe consequences in terms of climate change, food production and drought.

Climate change: I believe this poses an existential threat to humanity. As a scientist, I fear the consequences might be more severe and the available timescale for action even shorter than current forecasts.

Many related this to concerns for the lives of their own children:

Climate change and its implication for our children and grandchildren. Most of us are dangerously in denial and we need to grasp the problem soon.

I worry about the world my children will grow old in, and the future for any grandchildren that I may have. I worry that we have destroyed our home, God's creation, and do far too little to rescue it.

Climate change, and the damage we are doing to our planet is the most worrying thing to me. I fear for the future of my children and grandchildren, worry that they will be coping with wars and disturbances as those who live in areas that will become uninhabitable move to places where life is possible, but which will already be occupied. I worry that there will not be enough clean water for drinking, that the strong and ruthless will have the best survival chances, and those who love and are sensitive will be lost.

I am scared of bringing my son up in a world that does not seem to care for human life or the planet that we live in.

The environment - the wastefulness of society, being able to preserve our planet and look after it for future generations, including animals. I want my grandchildren and their children to see all of the beautiful things we can see now.

Yet one survey respondent thought that,

The so-called global warming is, I believe, the end of this world as spoken of in the Bible and it is not far away. There is nothing anyone can do, as it is God's will.

Summing up most of what has gone before, one said:

I see a future that is more frightening and fragile for my grandchildren with regard to political, social and international policies. And also fears for the planet with climate change, plastic and other pollution. Within the church I can see falling numbers attending and a lack of priests available for parish work. My own family are no longer interested in church attendance.

4. Own life

*'I worry about what the future will hold for my with regards to health and well-being.
I worry that I have not been the best person I could have been.'*

Participants also mentioned concerns over things in their own life. These mostly related to health and old age, but money, work, relationships, and loneliness were also issues.

A priest worried about the expectations that were laid upon him:

[I worry about] The many things I expect of myself and others' expectations of me as a priest. These expectations are varied, contradictory and complex. How workload can change to become more sustainable and helps a priest be a priest in a community is a worry for now and the future.

For some it was their own practice of the faith that concerned them:

I'm afraid that I don't truly trust in God, and that I don't completely live by his will.

I don't seem to make much 'spiritual progress'. I always seem to make the same mistakes and end up confessing the same sins.

The only concern/worry is the discernment of whether I am living my life the way that is best for me, since figuring out what God wants a person to do can become extremely confusing.

My major concern is being alone and struggling with issues. Not having spiritual back up to support me, especially as I get older and [need] someone to talk to. For help when things aren't working out or just knowing that you are loved.

Facing future loneliness was an issue for others:

That the four members of my family live so far away and without my husband, I would be completely alone. If I chose to move nearer to them, I fear that I will not have access to a good catholic church and all the services I have access to now. I fear future loneliness and have poor confidence in the social and health system that I would be vulnerable and exposed to if on my own in advancing years. I fear the evil that some people possess towards the vulnerable and that I may experience that someday.

For some, the Church did little to alleviate the loneliness they already experienced:

Other than Eucharistic ministers no-one from the Church calls – priests, SVP. I feel isolated and wonder if anyone from Church knows I'm here.

Financial concerns were also expressed:

I need to work yet I have to also support my three children two of which have special needs as well as running the house. I have applied for money help once and been turned down because of my own poor health I have been unable to appeal. Families are often worse off living together. Families are not significantly better off for working. It's the system that's at fault as most people want to get on. Not spending enough time with my children worries me.

I'm concerned about finances, and unemployment. It does worry me, even though I try to remember that God always provides. I'm hoping He answers my prayers for a lottery win.

One of my biggest worries is my financial situation. We have debts which are like a millstone around our necks, no matter how hard we work we still have them, and it is hard having to watch every penny. You can be left feeling a failure as a parent when you see your children missing out due to the financial situation of the family. My only comfort is that my children consider themselves lucky and do not themselves feel they are deprived or short of anything. Raising a disabled child means that my earning potential is oppressed but making the decision to put my husband and children or my job first was no contest.

Ageing - with its consequent loss of independence - also raised its head:

Getting older with concerns about care as at times I have witnessed many non-caring services. I worry about losing my independence but have to trust that God will help.

Becoming a burden to my family and friends if my health fails.

While for one respondent, the challenge - as a divorced person - of facing old age alone raised its own issues:

I am also concerned that I personally, because I am divorced, will be unable to fully embrace human love in later life which is compatible with the teachings of the Catholic Church.

One respondent was worried that,

I may get dementia and be unable to care for myself. That I will have to go into some care facility. I have worked in as a nurse, a researcher at Post Doc level into 'care' and also cared for my mother, sister, and husband, and have a very disillusioned view of health and social care. There is also little presence of the church in all of this. The church I feel needs to speak out about the 'horror' of poor unauthentic care that is prevalent the so-called 'caring systems'. My husband at the end of his life did receive care from our local parish but the 'pastoral' care in hospital consisted of Communion almost been thrown at him in the bed. So, so sad, Kindness is such a precious gift and helps all involved to cope.

Death itself was also a cause of concern for many. For one participant it was not so much the event of death itself, 'but what I leave behind.'

I worry because at my age, 83 years, I've got to leave my family and friends; and I hope it will be a good long life for them with love, and that they will keep their faith. I worry about the mental health of the young people, also how my family will cope without me. I worry about my family when I'm gone. I worry about my son after I'm gone, his health and wellbeing and being lonely. No worries for me now, but I worry about the youth and their physical and mental health. I worry for the grandchildren; I hope Our Lord comes and saves them.

Others, however, evidently dreaded death - and what might follow:

I worry about sorting things out before I die.

Being on my own. Not knowing how I will die.

I worry about my life after death.

Is there really a heaven?

Even the location of the funeral at a time of closing churches could be a cause of concern:

Cannot understand being refused to be welcomed at the Church of your choice when you die - for some of us the parish church has closed.

Parents repeatedly expressed their concerns for their children:

Fear of children growing into a world full of danger, knife crime, and gun crime. Scared of losing son to bad kids.

My son is about to start university. He lives with his mother and so I worry about how he's going to manage but every time I see him, he gives me further confidence that he'll be ok. However, at the end of the day, I'm a parent and it's a parent's job to worry. I also worry about my own work, my home life, usually for silly reasons. Worry and concern is a part of life, though. If they weren't there, it would be an odd existence.

And children and young people repeatedly expressed their own fears; the following offers a flavour:

When someone other than Mum or Dad is looking after me.

When I start to walk home on my own.

Me causing something bad.

My looks and personality - will they hinder me in the future?

One mother expressed a mutuality of concerns between children and their parents:

We worry about the safety of our children. Children worry about the safety of their father when he is away at sea.

5. Technology

'Social media appears to be taking over all aspects of life - will there be time for people to sit and reflect in social groups or will we become more isolated in our communities?'

Many expressed about the impact of technology. Such concerns related, for example, to the rapid development of artificial Intelligence and to the increasing role of robotics in industrial production. However, by far the greatest concerns lay with social media; one response offers a particularly succinct summary of the ideas expressed by many:

The impact of social media is my greatest concern. People say and do things on social media that they wouldn't do face to face with people, it almost seems that people think they can say and do anything without considering the consequences of their words and deeds. We live in a materialistic society where people are judged by what they have. Young people, particularly those who are vulnerable, may think that all those they know on social media are having a much better life than them. I think it contributes to depression amongst young people who think that others' lives are perfect, which we all know is not the case. We should use social media to welcome people of all faiths to join us in church, with no expectations or requirement to commit.

Concern about the impact of social media was shared by several:

I also worry about our young ones. With all the social media, I think that simple face to face relationships are suffering. I don't use it myself, but it seems to cause a lot of problems when someone posts a comment without much thought and before long all their acquaintances have read it. It has caused problems in my own workplace. It also seems that children are under pressure to grow up too quickly. There is so much information available at the click of a button which can be harmful. Our young are idealistic and impressionable - I remember being so myself, but there were not so many opportunities to go down the wrong path.

Social media influence where people around the world know about the likes of Coca-Cola - 95% of people and only 48% know about Jesus. How can we spread the good news and encourage our young people to come to Church?

The potential impact of social media on the spiritual and moral lives of young people was highlighted:

I worry about the world in which my children are coming into adulthood. Technology makes life less labour-intensive, but fragments communities and society, and exposes especially the young to more moral danger than ever before. Physically their lives are safer than ever; morally they have a vast choice of wrong paths to take. Sin is condoned, promoted and approved; virtue and Biblical standards despised, derided, condemned, excoriated.

Several people brought this home by framing their response in terms of their fears for younger members of their families:

I worry about the impact of social media on children and how it affects their self-esteem and the safety implications and how I can protect my children from this and educate them enough to be aware of the dangers.

Young people's exposure to media: games, internet, song lyrics, clothes sexualizing girls and boys; websites encouraging self-harm, suicide.

Increasing dependence on technology greatly concerns me as we now have to be suspicious of so many things which on the surface appear to be good but can be harmful or even evil. I fear for the safety of my children and grandchildren even while they are in their own homes because of this.

What the future holds for my children and their generation. The increasingly detached nature of social relationship in the teenage generation and the overwhelming dependency they have on social media to affirm themselves and to interact with each other.

One Listening Group took a long view on the role of the media and technology in negatively influencing moral standards:

The state of the world, and Satan's constant attack through TV, internet, phone, music of certain types, etc. In the 1960s Mary Whitehouse spoke out about sex, violence and bad language in the media which was leading to disbelief, doubt, dirt, promiscuity and infidelity (all of which have come about). Malcolm Muggeridge wrote, 'It is literally true but for her, the total demolition of Church decencies and values in this country would have taken place without a word of public protest.' What a pity all the main Christian Churches' 'Martin Luther King moment' was sadly missed, and they failed to get behind her.

Young people, too expressed some concerns about the media - tending particularly to reflect current societal concerns about the security of their data:

Data breaches – everything data.

Social media and the fact that information is shared.

6. Don't worry

'There's only so much your brain can take, isn't there?'

A small number of people said that they didn't worry at all:

As I decline into old age, I wish to retain serenity. I have no money worries, I have no dependants. Rather than worry about things, I try to make what small contribution I can to tackling problems.

Nothing much causes me concern. There is nothing God cannot resolve.

Others explained that they had ceased to worry about matters beyond their own family:

No, I just left everyone get on with it. I'm not bothered anymore. I've done all of that. I've seen all of that. As long as our little family is all right and people that we know are all right, I'm not interested. I'll watch the news. Ten minutes, and I'm more interested to see how Sunderland got on last night against Bristol Rovers. Not bothered. Let them get on with it.

One survey respondent offered a perspective on the human tendency to worry that draws on over 70 years of life experience:

Fear and concern are part and parcel of human life, the thing that makes individuals different is how we manage stress. So very wrong to generalise about my worries, or

anybody's. As we look, sound and smell differently, so do we worry differently. Our cares are very much related to our overall conception of things that will hurt and trouble either us or our loved ones. By telling somebody what I fret over I solve no useful purpose whatsoever, the belief that we are given troubles in direct relation to cope with them is perhaps one of the great gifts has given us.

SYNOD QUESTION 3: What is the purpose of the Catholic Church in the world today?

'To be the ever-present instrument of Christ in every aspect of our world.'

'To be the same as it's always been'

'It's for Nans to go to'

'Honestly, it looks like its purpose is self-preservation.'

A small number of people expressed surprise at this question - concerned, perhaps, that something outside the tradition of the church was being proposed:

What a misleading question. Why would the purpose of the Church have changed? The goal of the Church is always the salvation of souls. There are different challenges today, but all the purposes of the Church (allowing people to grow in holiness, especially through the sacraments, teaching the truth, performing charitable works etc.) are the same.

Why is this being asked? The purpose is to pass on the faith to future generations. We need to identify ways to bring our children back to the faith.

It is possible that a priest identified the concerns that may underpin the way that some people queried the question. He stated his fear that, 'Instead of listening to what the Church says it is,' the synodal process might be taken as an invitation to 'sort of, try to invent our own view of what we think it should be or what it is.' Without discounting the role of such reflection, he said,

I would have thought that *Lumen Gentium* was the document for this Synod, *Gaudium et Spes* is the document for this Synod, etc. I just think that we need much more seriousness about looking to the sources and saying, 'This is what the Church is,' as defined by the Church, not defined by our experience of what we think the Church should be. ... A Catholic in the 21st century stands in a tradition of what Catholicism has been at every other century. There's development, of course there is, there are new situations, we live in a very different world. What the Church is defined and it's for us to explore what that is, not always just to go back and say, 'What do we want it to be?' Experience is an important thing, and listening to people's experiences is very important but it's not the only thing that informs what we're doing.

The challenge of how to marry fidelity to tradition with appropriate responses to changing pastoral needs flows through the responses to the Listening exercise. As a consequence, a broad spectrum of ideas has been expressed, and at times there is a strong impression that people are struggling to find a language that holds together a valuing of tradition and a pastoral openness. The following quotations - which move in different directions - express this well:

I feel that the purpose of the Church today is the same as it has always been. It is easy to say that the Church is going through a hard time due to issues in the news or numbers attending Mass, but these seem to be things that have also been an issue and yet the Church survives.

It is important that the Church does recognise the changing times of the world but does not stray from its integral beliefs that have been followed for thousands of years.

The overall purpose of the Catholic Church today hasn't really changed. Rather the changes to family life and social acceptances that have changed in the past number of decades, probably dictate that we must be more tolerant and inclusive for the church to survive and indeed prosper. Marginalised groups in our society that were not recognised or seen as mainstream in the past, should probably be helped to share in the wonder and beauty of our faith. The promotion of our beliefs through evangelisation, broadness of thought and desire to be more inclusive of the changing nuclear families of 2020, should be the added purpose of the Catholic Church in the third millennia.

This section - as all the Report - aims faithfully to present the different perspectives raised during the listening process and to highlight the tensions that frequently lie between those perspectives. That tension is reflected by the quotations at the head of this section. It will be the Synod's and the Archbishop's responsibility to sift through the issues discussed and map a way forward for the Archdiocese that is both authentically Catholic and pastorally appropriate.

The concerns of some notwithstanding, the question received a broad range of responses, which proved particularly challenging to analyse. This was chiefly because quite a few respondents struggled to engage with the question. The feedback from one Group of Four at a Listening event neatly sums up the dilemma:

Within our group we all seemed to struggle with this question, each of us attempted to define the purpose of the Church but found it so difficult and all suggested different things whilst acknowledging that we didn't really know the answer to the question.

People, therefore, were searching for a language to answer the question with, and frequently resorted to a range of terms that held a breadth of possible content. For example, 'spreading the Gospel' could mean for one respondent saving souls and getting people into heaven, but for another it would mean teaching kindness and helping others on earth. Also striking was the minimal use that was made of the rich ecclesiology of Vatican II:

- The images of the Church as Bride and as the Body of Christ were referenced several times – but neither was particularly developed.
- The image of the Church as People of God was only rarely referenced. The single most explicit mention took the form of a question: 'What do we mean by 'the People of God' in today's world?'
- The baptismal priesthood of all the faithful was only referenced four times; consequently, the specificity and mutuality of the different ways in which the lay and ordained faithful share in the priesthood of Christ were not drawn out.

Instead, hierarchical understandings of the Church predominated, and a fully articulated theology of ministry within the Church was substantially missing. In its place, a somewhat functional approach to ministry tended to predominate, which extended into the proposed solutions to perceived problems.

Responses to the question mostly fell into five broad areas:

- 1 The Church's Religious Purpose
- 2 The Church's Role in the Midst of Human Society
- 3 Providing Community
- 4 Rebuild Trust/Reform
- 5 Negative or Uncertain Responses

1. The Church's Religious Purpose

'To remember Jesus. If there was no Church, we could not receive Jesus' Body and Blood and remember him like that.' (Primary School Listening Group)

By far the frequent responses to this third Synod Question pointed to the religious purpose of the Catholic Church.

The sub-headings here are:

- A. Evangelization
- B. Offering Spiritual Guidance
- C. Worship and Sacraments
- D. Inclusivity or Exclusivity
- E. Embodying God's Love
- F. Education

A. Evangelization

'To proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ to the world.'

It is striking how many people responded to the question in terms of the proclamation of the Good News of Jesus Christ - often with a strong practical dimension:

We are to proclaim the message of Jesus boldly. We are to go out from our safe churches and mingle with the outcasts, the lonely, the downtrodden, the forgotten, and call them home to Jesus. To go out and welcome them home!

To spread the good news that Jesus has called us all to become saints and to be happy with him in heaven forever. During the 20th century and this century Jesus is calling us to enter into his divine mercy and not to be afraid but fully embrace him in his love and he will protect us.

What it has always been: to spread the knowledge of the unconditional love that God has for each one of us as shown and taught to us by Jesus who emphasised by his words and actions

that all people are of equal value and that all creation is good. Everything else the Church does pales into insignificance, unless it helps to draw people closer to a deepening relationship with God.

Some added flesh to the practical implications of spreading the Gospel:

The purpose of the Catholic Church is to spread the word of God not necessarily by people in church but by Christian ways of living helping others (the present issue with refugees being a typical example).

And one thought the Church's moralism was preventing it from reaching many people:

The Church must proclaim the Good News to us - murderers, thieves, rapists, debtors, alcoholics, money slaves, egoists, worshipers of foreign idols. Because we are waiting for it. Christ has been covered in the Church and we can't see him behind the wall of demands, moralism. Church must show in living examples that God exists in my reality and is interested in my life. The Church must leave the buildings and to go to the modern social catacombs, streets, private houses. The Church must be missionary again.

Interestingly, a recurring theological motif appeared regard to evangelization, that of the Kingdom of God:

We talk so much about community and charity, and that's all absolutely necessary for a church, but we have to think that the primary purpose is about getting individuals closer to God, building the kingdom of heaven here on earth. What does Jesus talk about? I think it's something like 121 times he says, 'The Kingdom of God'. We can't just ignore that. This is Jesus. This is what he's talking about. All the other stuff in the Church is important, but Jesus didn't mention half the stuff we bang on about today. He did say, 'Build the Kingdom of God'.

This focus on the Kingdom, however, was seen to challenge many of the Church's current preoccupations:

The same as it has always been - to bring about the Kingdom of God. I fully support the Church's teachings on most things, but let's not forget what Jesus actually came to earth for. Look at the Gospels - the 'Kingdom of God' is mentioned 120 times. Homosexuality, abortion, church fundraisers, leaky roof appeals - I'm yet to find them mentioned as often in my Bible. I'm not saying that these things aren't important, or that I disagree with the Church's teachings on issues that come up these days, but I find it odd that they're the things we're so focused on. Quite simply, the purpose of the Church is to bring people closer to God, to inspire good works, to speak the truth, to stand up for those who are being oppressed, to do everything we can in our short space of time here on earth to follow in Christ's footsteps in prayer and action.

Three participants drew out further some of the same challenges:

To give glory to God and bring sanctification to His people. We need to be profoundly counter cultural but not absent from culture. We have to be prepared to sacrifice old and comfortable ways and structures in order to make our beliefs relevant and part of the consciousness of our society. Is our work maintenance or is it mission? Are we truly out there practically loving the lost and the least or are we just shoring up an ever-decaying and ever-decreasing club? I'm not saying we should water down or compromise truth, but we cannot just pull up the drawbridge and hope the world sees the error of its ways. We have to be in it to win it!

To point to Jesus Christ as the Son of God made flesh, who became man to save humankind from its sinfulness, and open the doors of Heaven to those who believe and repent. To

faithfully follow the Gospel and teachings of the Catholic Church, without compromising with the world. To be a beacon of light for the world by its actions, evangelization and charitable works. To be responsible for the catechesis of adults and children, second only to administering the Sacraments.

To put its own house in order and to witness to Jesus in every area of life, public and private, with Pope Francis as an example not to be afraid to speak out and stand up for what is right. If I was persecuted and tried for being a Catholic (Christian) would there be enough evidence to convict me?

Several participants drew out the broader, societal challenges to evangelization, at times comparing the Church's efforts unfavourably with a perceived sense of the success of Muslim proselytizing. One blamed government policy (presumably with regard to religious tolerance):

Our Church should put a lot of the blame on the government for allowing the Muslim faith to force their views on us all.

B. Offering Spiritual Guidance

'To free us from fear! To show us Christ and the way to the Father. To guide us, but also to help us develop as truly whole individuals.'

A good number thought that the Church should offer spiritual guidance,

To remind us that God has a mission for each of us, to help us reflect and listen to what God wants from us, to make us look beyond our own needs and be responsive to the needs of others whenever and wherever we can.

Not all participants felt that clear guidance was on offer:

This is difficult. The Church should be looking after our immortal soul and preparing for the long journey and not just in this world. However, it seems to be entering a beauty contest in order to retain membership. Singing the Lord's Prayer trivialises it as one does not concentrate on the prayer and modernisations such as this should be resisted. The church should be there to support us spiritually when necessary (more than Prozac) but it should also teach us moral values. Today the Ten Commandments do not even amount to a mission statement for most people and many commandments have been abolished outright. It seems that most in Mass are on autopilot. As one who has lived in the Middle East for a long time, I find it strange that Islam should be booming when its message is nothing special. How many mothers now want their sons to enter the priesthood?

I think we need the Church to be in unison like years ago. What happens now, one priest will say one thing and you will be told something different from another, they seem to be saying what they believe not the teaching of the Catholic Church. I believe it has lost its purpose (but we need to have hope).

C. Worship and Sacraments

'To be a school of prayer and worship'

Several respondents bracketed the Church's call to evangelization with its responsibility to lead worship and celebrate the sacraments:

Of course, the primary purpose is to proclaim the Gospel and administer the sacraments. The Catholic Church is also the true and faithful herald speaking out against oppression and leading the people into the light. It listens to people's concerns, worries and fears and be a place of refuge and sanctuary for anyone and all.

The Catholic Church is more needed than ever in our world today. It has a responsibility to bring love, truth, joy, hope and goodness to everyone. To spread the Good News of Jesus Christ to those who don't know it. To show how the most intimate and beautiful of encounters with God is waiting for everyone in the sacraments, particularly Confession and the Eucharist. The Church has a duty to care for those in need, to witness and to love as Jesus loved.

To be what Jesus prayed it would be from the start: an instrument of unity and a force for evangelisation, a group of believers united in heart and soul, a praying community and one that leads people to the Truth about Jesus Christ. A channel of grace through the sacraments and an example of service, especially to the poor.

However, there was very little examination as to how the celebration of the sacraments related directly to the enactment of the mission of the Church. The following quotations are almost exceptional:

To teach people about God and Jesus Christ. To explain and celebrate the sacraments and through that foster a vibrant, outward looking, welcoming community that follows Christ's teachings. In doing so, show people (whoever they are) love, compassion and inclusiveness.

We have to lead; we have to live the Beatitudes. We are not to be a middle-class organisation but have to truly live by the Gospel values. If we are to close churches, we need to have sorted alternatives properly not just say 'go to Saint So and So'. We need to put the Eucharist at the heart of all we do. We have to accept that there is a generation who have grown up with little knowledge of the faith and do not see Eucharist as a need and tackle this in schools and in our Sacramental programmes

The Catholic Church should be an open, forward thinking, understanding and spiritual place, which is - open to the struggles of people. It must not be judgemental. It should seek to heal, forgive and provide hope to the vulnerable. The Catholic Church should be a place of hope and joy. It should have at its centre the Mass, the Eucharist, the sharing of community. This is the starting point which inspires everyone present to go out and live and provide real tangible hope for others - to make a difference to the lives of others.

Only three respondents picked up the language used by Vatican II to forge a link between the liturgy and the rest of the Christian life:

The source and summit of our faith is the Eucharist, and this needs to be URGENTLY rediscovered by bishops, priests, religious people, and laity.

Two respondents spoke of the Church as 'A school of prayer and worship' (This suggests an understanding of the Christian life as a progression – which was also picked out by others: 'to be

strengthened on life's journey by the Holy Sacraments, prayer and formation'). One respondent expanded on this, critically:

The purpose of the Catholic Church in the world today is to offer a spiritual support, based on each individual's journey through the sacraments with Christ. Sadly, this journey does not always translate into a purposeful relationship with God but is seen more as a rite of passage for Catholics. Falling attendances at Mass are indicative of a community which does not see its relevance in their lives, yet many strive to be good Christians on a daily basis. This daily commitment to their faith often goes unrecognised because they are not practising. The Church must find ways to recognise and celebrate these journeys, providing opportunities to remain part of the Church community.

A few respondents broadened out the call for inclusion found in the previous quotation, and asked that a broader range of people might be admitted to the Eucharist and other sacraments:

It should be a Church which values other faiths and unites them through the Eucharist. Husbands and wives, children and grandparents should be free to receive Christ together in love at his altars.

To offer all the Sacraments to whoever requests them.

Although many of the responses referenced the Mass, Baptism, Confirmation and marriage, it is noteworthy that the sacrament of Reconciliation was rarely mentioned in response to this particular question (though see the responses below to Question Four). There were, however, three identifiable exceptions. The first was from recent arrivals in the UK:

For me, you know my faith is like a table with four legs. One leg is a prayer, second is the priest, third is the community, and fourth is (*searches for English word*) - it's when we say the sins.

Other person: Confession.

Confession, yes. It's four legs. And here I can develop these legs, so I can take my powerful medicine for my whole week, first of all, with our Eucharist. I can live, you know. So, for me ... That's why, for my four legs, I can start very firmly. If one leg will be not good, the day, you can give me some temptation, etc., you know. And about the church, like a system, it's quite good, because we have 2,000 years old, so it's the most- It's the oldest company in the world, you can say.

The second exception was those who preferred the celebration of the liturgy according to the Extraordinary Form:

Do you know what else gives me hope? Do you know, if you go to confession- There is confession before Mass every single day here. If you come on a Saturday, sometimes there are that many people there, it's on for two hours. There's that many people there that Father has to come back out after Mass and listen to other confessions. And that gives you hope. Because you can go. They might be perishers or saints, I don't know, but there's not many people that don't go to Communion in other churches and they've not been to confession. So, they're going to - there is no awareness of sin anymore.

The third exception was among those who paid particular attention to the messages of the 20th century Marian apparitions:

The purpose of the Catholic church today is to continue to live the faith that Jesus himself taught and bequeathed to his Apostles. Jesus came to this earth to teach us the Catholic faith,

by living it is praying, going to Confession monthly fasting receiving Jesus in the Eucharist this is helping us to gain entry to Heaven by loving our neighbours as ourselves. Life is the Most Precious Gift from God we are each Unique and Irreplaceable in his eyes but we are on a journey getting Tested by God - we need to try and keep Our Heart ♥ for when we come before God we will only have our soul dirty or clean We have our time on earth to pray for ourselves as if we go to Purgatory we can't pray for ourselves. Our Holy Priests are the Bridge to Heaven for all Catholics, and they are Jesus on this earth hearing Confessions Saying Holy Mass where Jesus is Truly Present. The world would not continue without the Eucharist!

Alongside the sacraments, there was also a call from some for the restoration of traditional Catholic devotions. Once again, this was strongly true for those who cited the 20th century Marian apparitions. The following catches the urgency with which these appeals were frequently addressed:

Tell the truth of Faith. Be courageous. Pray the Rosary led by Priests as requested by Our Lady of Medjugorje. WAKE UP Archbishop Malcolm. Stand up for Our Lady, Hurry up!

D. Inclusivity vs Exclusivity

'We cannot settle for a small Church, and we can't afford to exclude anyone'

One of the lines of tension that runs through the responses to this third question relates to how porous the boundaries of the Church should be. Ought the Church to be open to minority groups or people of different faiths? Or should the boundaries be more closely drawn, with the emphasis placed on the uniqueness of the Catholic Church? In analysing the responses, we can detect subtly different expressions of the depth to which such inclusivity and openness to others should go. The first is, straightforwardly, that the Church should be a place where all should feel welcome, especially in time of need:

To be a haven for everyone in time of need. To promote peace and harmony in our communities and in the world. To help the sick and lonely. To comfort the dying. To spread the love of God to all without judgement and without religious prejudice.

The Catholic church should continue to work to help the poorest in society and to unite communities and people that would otherwise remain disparate. The Catholic church should be welcoming and continue to welcome all. The church can unite across race, gender, class barriers and creed - we need to tell ourselves that Jesus loves us every day.

Many people spelled-out some of the categories of people whom such inclusiveness should embrace:

I believe that the Church has to be a place of hope and of acceptance for everyone regardless of their faith or none. It should be non-judgmental, open, loving and ready to embrace the most broken if they are seeking comfort and help.

To be a loving and guiding community that embraces all cultures and welcomes all regardless of age, gender, ability, sexual preference, marital status and culture.

To be inclusive of anyone who wants to be a part of it, irrespective of race, colour, gender and sexual preference. Also, to reach out to people who have experienced divorce, especially when it wasn't their fault.

Other participants set out the challenges - and internal personal conflicts - that such a degree of openness might generate:

The Catholic Church has a vital role to play. It is essential that we stand strong and ensure that we have a future. This may mean changing some current thinking or traditions, should priests be able to marry; this may attract more priests. I love the fact that the Catholic Church appears to not only accept but embrace difference now. Same sex marriages may not be conducive to the Catholic faith, but it is essential that Catholics within those relationships feel that they belong. As a divorcee myself, it took me a long time to feel that I had been accepted within my faith; I felt that I had done something wrong (even though I hadn't). However, because of my parish priest and because of the recent changes in the Catholic Church, I now feel fully included and welcomed in my Church. If the Catholic Church does not reflect and evaluate their beliefs, I worry that it will no longer be here, or as strong in the years to come.

Still others broadened out the discourse further still to include members of other faith groups in society:

To support people of all faiths in whatever way they need; food, shelter, comfort, love, a listening ear, with no fear of having to commit to being members of the Church.

To reach out to other faiths and all people. To give witness there is one God for all people on earth and that there are many ways to heaven. The church does not have exclusive rights to goodness and should extend a hand of friendship to all in the love of Christ. To build heaven on earth in anticipation of heaven in heaven. To cherish the planet, moving away from dominion over to stewardship of. To promote the wonder of life and fight for goodness in the shown to us by Jesus.

To bring people together of all faiths, history has divided many faiths and we need to invite Muslim communities to our churches and to arrange taking part in their prayer groups. Not to come across as so judgemental, our God loves everyone, why is this message not passed on to the outside world. We hear it at the pulpit, but it isn't in the wider community. Priests I know are few, but they are held busy in parishes, so we need to share our parishes more openly in any way possible to non-believers, lapsed Catholics. I think some don't want to get involved with the church, in a sacramental way because their lives prevent them from attending weekly so why go at all. Maybe sport or entertainment in our churches might encourage a more relaxed atmosphere to coming nearer to religious groups.

One related this compassionate outreach to those within the clergy:

Who knows? It needs to show the world the compassion of Jesus. He helped the marginalised, the prostitutes, the people rejected by society. Most of those people would be shunned by the church today. It cares too much about tradition, its status and ritual and not enough about people. We need to see compassion in action - and that doesn't mean being wishy-washy, or morally weak. It needs to stop focussing on particular sins, while turning a blind eye to others. Sin is sin. It needs more humility and a willingness to admit it's made mistakes. I don't believe in papal infallibility - only God is perfect. And I think priests ought to be allowed to marry. There are too many lonely ageing single men in the priesthood. Let them have companionship and love.

The last response was typical of several, in which a concern was expressed that the Church's current preoccupations and structures were preventing it from reaching out beyond itself:

This shouldn't be about the Catholic Church but about God! About His authority and what He and the Bible say. As Christians - of ALL denominations - we should be looking at a common

goal and belief, and that is the salvation of those who don't know Jesus Christ as their Lord and who don't have a personal relationship with Him. We preach too much condemnation, put too many barriers in the way and all Jesus told us to do was Love. To be fishers of men. We discriminate, get caught up in serious pomp and ceremony; that is not how we are intended to live. Religiosity should not define the church - God's people. The called are many, the chosen, few.

When I was a teenager in the eighties, I thought it was about applying Christ's teaching to improve social justice but now it seems more concerned with dogma and being judgemental. It seems to me that it lacks compassion and is unwilling to acknowledge other beliefs and philosophies that promote compassion, like Buddhism. If it continues to alienate people through a lack of compassion it will further decline.

Other participants, however, firmly held that the Catholic Church and its mission superseded all other faiths, and so insisted that it must hold firm to its traditions:

To be a beacon of light that by passing on the tradition of Christ and the Saints will lift up humans from the mire. It needs to proclaim its unique foundation and not to present itself as just another option. It should stand against political pressures to bend to the fashions of the world and instead proclaim the Gospel truth. It makes Christ available to believers in the Blessed Sacrament and it is this real presence that is the source and summit of our faith. This cannot be compared with man-made religions (like protestant communities) and Christ-denying faiths like Islam. The Church also need to hold its members (clergy and lay) to a high ethical standard and not relax what the Bible and tradition has taught.

For such respondents the maintenance of tradition was key:

The same as it has always been. To preach the Gospel, the truth and to warn people about the dangers of a sinful lifestyle. To preach about heaven and hell. To tell people that God never changes his laws. Teach people about prayer and the importance of prayer. The rosary is the greatest weapon given to any Christian and will defeat any evil spirit including Satan himself.

The same as it has always been: to pass on the Apostolic Faith and its immutable dogma and to change absolutely nothing to suit the fashions of the World and the secularists. To unapologetically maintain the teaching of Christ and the Tradition in a sea of post-Reformation errors.

To spread the Good news as Jesus asked us. To evangelise others to reach out in love to our brothers and sisters in need and to teach them the Truth. The church should defend more vehemently pro-life issues. We should hear sound Catholic teaching from the pulpit each day and not water it down to suit other denominations. The Church is the guardian of the Truth and should be the means of explaining Scripture to the masses.

A subtly nuanced engagement with the same theme emerged in a Listening Group:

Stand up for the faith, move with the times when necessary. Build on the rock of Peter, give today's Catholics – old and new – a Church to be proud of, sure in its belief and teaching. Do not let our foundations crumble or our traditions wither away. Diversity when necessary but make things clear and do not leave us not knowing if what we thought we knew is still true.

Meanwhile, not all participants shared the desire expressed above for inclusivity across genders and different sexual orientations:

To show that we have only two genders – male and female. To fight for normal people – heterosexuals.

These very different perspectives on how the Church relates to the world continued to play out in the responses to the fourth question.

E. Embodying God's Love

'To be Christ in the world'

Some exceptional references to Vatican II were made with regard to sharing God's love. Thus, the Church was described by many in terms of being an instrument (or, as one put it, 'sacrament') of God's love. Core to this was a sense of continuity between the mission of Jesus and that of the Church, that is expressed both in terms of the message proclaimed and the actions of the Church:

The purpose is to continue Jesus' ministry by spreading as I see it a message based on his fundamental values of love, compassion and forgiveness.

To show forth the love and compassion of Christ to the world through the actions of its members.

The ecclesiology of the Second Vatican Council further surfaces in these discourses:

The purpose of the Catholic Church is to be the place where Jesus Christ lives through time in the strongest possible way in a corporate human institution which is also divine. The Church provides the main way for human beings to discover Jesus Christ, the gateway to God the Father and to heaven.

In practical terms, this perspective opens a number of challenges to the Catholic community:

To love, to channel God's love to the world, to be his hands and feet, his arms and smile, his encouraging face. To empathise and be aware of the poor, those poor in material sense, but also those in emotional, spiritual poverty. To be a family, a caring, loving, supportive family, that welcomes everyone, has space and time for them, that works hard to avoid judging others, and just allows God's spirit to reach out to all who need.

The Catholic Church should be a beacon of Christ's Love and Light in a world struggling to keep up moral standards and life-giving growth and contemplation for the survival of the Human race. How we treat our fellow journeyers in this world is of vital importance for the future wellbeing of Human society as we know it. Jesus came to give Love not hate, to give peace not tragedy, he came to bring all human beings into God's Love and bring them ultimately to God's heavenly home.

The call to inclusiveness which this perspective entails was raised by a survey respondent and by a Listening Group:

To be the visible, tangible love of Christ to all of his children, not just those who adhere to the traditional image promoted by the Church.

To be a poor church for the poor. The Church has a marvellous opportunity to throw a light on those that are marginalised and demonised, to offer a lived and vital morality Focused on the common good of all, shared with all life on earth in respect.

F. Education

Some also spoke about the educational role of the Catholic Church:

To ensure Catholic education remains strong and encourage attendance of young people and children to a church that will 'include' them in an interesting and awakening environment that meets the needs of a modern and intelligent youth who are continually distracted by negative influences and terrifying social media, TV and internet cultures that never include Faith and God.

To teach what God expects to be taught. To spread the word of God. To educate the young and nurture a love of God. To provide a place where people can meet and communicate and enjoy each other's company.

2. The Church's Role in the Midst of Human Society

Very many people desired an outward-facing role for the Church, engaging with the world. Four subheadings were-identified from the data:

- A. Offering Moral Leadership and guidance
- B. Action
- C. Setting an Example
- D. Protecting Christians throughout the world.

A. Offering Moral Leadership and Guidance

'To be a compass in the world, directing to living abundantly'

Many understood that the Church's role in the midst of the world was to offer moral leadership and guidance:

Quite simply to be another voice, to give witness to an alternative set of values and goals, which are not dependent on selfishness, self-interest and exploitation; to value the dignity and integrity of every living thing as created by God who saw each one of them good - that is intrinsically good, not as merely useful means to the ends of the dominant species.

To be influential in framing our political agendas by helping to determine priorities in policy making and encouraging Catholic and other politicians to have compassion and concern for the poor and the sick.

Some recognised that moral leadership must always be tempered with compassion so that it doesn't slide into judgmentalism.

To pass on the Catholic faith. Challenging the world to be better but being careful not to dilute the message but also not to be judgemental of when people can't live up to the standards. To be charity (the face of Christ) in the world and to shout it from the rooftops what we do and why we do it. To be a force for good - moral values, caring, compassion and an example to the world. To encourage people, living out the works of mercy but not doing it behind closed doors (i.e. church) but starting there and building outwards into the local, national, international communities.

Engagement with politicians, especially on issues relating to war and world peace, was a frequent concern.

I feel the Catholic Church must speak up about these issues [war, environment, Brexit] especially since our politicians don't seem to be held accountable. I believe if we take Grenfell as an example there should be perhaps monthly updates on how people affected are coping. I think Vin Nicholls should be seen to be working with Justin Welby and other faith leaders as it is harder to ignore when they are united. Working with civic leaders would also strengthen the message.

This also included ecological concerns as well as humanitarian.

Not only guidance, spirituality, spreading peace, but now priority to protect the planet to reverse the climate catastrophe - protect God's nature with its biodiversity and multi-ethnicity for current and future generations. Non-violent peacefulness protest against injustice and destruction - set up training camps. Take a firm stance against pure profit-orientated business 'culture'. The Catholic Church should guide political and economic leaders and distance itself from powerful tyranny/tycoons/organisations which claim to act in Catholic faith. Put preservation of nature, environment, recreation areas as absolute Focus for urban and society planning. Continue to investigate and legally punish child and other abuse offenders in the Church. Continue dialogue with other religions, support exchange of youth groups to learn and understand other beliefs and find common grounds.

One participant challenged the perception that the Church should 'keep out' of politics:

Contrary to popular belief, the Church should have more say in politics to point out the benefits of foreign aid, for example. The Church is not just there to help following disasters, which it does well, and gives it the authority to advise authorities how to avoid human conflict.

Another, however, questioned the Church's effectiveness in engaging with those in power:

Once the Church held power, but now it appears to lobby decision makers, as pretty much every other opposition party does ... but with less influence.

For some, the purpose of the Church was to stand as an alternative to secular, materialistic society:

It should be a haven of love, a shelter for us all against the inadequacy of a materialistic society and a place where we feel as one family. It should shine like a beacon of truth and hope against the ills in society. It should offer an open door to anyone who chooses to seek it. I fear that its inability to grow and change as society grows and changes (not trends but genuine growth) however will be its ultimate downfall.

However, many linked the moral and the spiritual guidance they receive from the Church:

To provide moral guidance, continuity and stability. To provide a moral conscience. I think going to confession supports people to do right.

And more concretely:

To play a leading role in 're-spiritualising' the world. To lead, both in its teaching and in its actions and example, Pope Francis's message in *Laudato Si'*. To lead boldly in opposing injustice, violence, wars, nuclear weapons. To speak out strongly on all these issues. To have courage, to stand up publicly against racism, war, government failure. To lead us with conviction in a society, country, world so lacking in moral leadership. We are sheep with few courageous shepherds.

One *Listening Record* summarised many of the issues raised above

To be an anchor point in a chaotic world pointing us to a better world:

- Remaining constant and stable.
- To be the conscience of the world, confronting the forces of hatred and greed; to be prepared to call something wrong when it clearly runs foul of God's teaching.
- Being reflexive and prophetic.
- Putting aside any ambition for power, to keep itself going, and to speak to the whole world.
- To promote fairer redistribution of the world's wealth.
- To speak out against injustice.

B. Action

'The Church should develop with the community it resides in, and make local societal issues a priority for support, with the mantra "charity starts at home".'

In line with the above, a significant voice emerged from the data that the church should be practically involved in good works in society:

Support for vulnerable people overseas and fundraising for charities at home.

To feed the faith-hungry in society but also actions of love; feeding hungry here and abroad, loving the sometimes seemingly unlovable.

Some tied this to the practical spreading of the Gospel

To preach the Gospel in action and word. Specifically, to feed the hungry, cloth the naked, home the homeless etc. And to provide what aid possible when natural disasters happen.

The Catholic Church is to go into the whole world and proclaim the Gospel to every nation by any available means. To help the hungry, homeless and the poor, to that end why are not more churches open for homeless people to sleep in shelter? so few catholic ones are, we could learn from our Protestant brothers. One area is to train Priests to have better oratory skills. Shouldn't Eucharistic ministers maybe dress in the same way as altar servers, or wear

Sunday best? It's Christ they are serving, not McDonald's burgers. But charity is the greatest thing to carry forward.

Or, by doing the work of Christ in the world:

The purpose of the Church is to proclaim the Gospel, to make Christ present to our broken world not only by spreading God's word and by the sacraments but being as St Theresa put it 'being Christ eyes, ears, mouth and hands' by going out and working to support the poor, abandoned, dispossessed, lonely and those in any sort of need (refugees, homeless, abused, oppressed, etc.). Also, to pray for a broken world, that it will know the healing presence of God and ask for His mercy and be forgiven (intercede for the world).

Well, hope it is for doing what God would want. I can understand why the Pope said to pray before doing this survey. We should surely try to look after humanity and all creatures and elements of this world. This is difficult because it is the tapestry of life and is, it seems, forever changing. Consistency stillness and prayer are important too. Feel Catholic Church should be still but open out too and open out to all spheres in prayer and action.

God gave Jesus to the world so that we would come to know who God is, so that we know God's unconditional love for each one of us and to help us know who we are in God. I believe that the church exists to help us come to know Jesus and therefore God. Church should constantly provide opportunities to encounter the love of God. If we truly know Jesus and come to know who we are called to be in God then all other purposes of church would come to be e.g. providing outreach for the poor, the marginalised, to guide people in the decisions throughout their life journeys, to be a brave voice for good in the world and to provide a community to journey with to a closer knowledge of God.

More poetic, but expressing the same sentiment:

To do what Jesus asked us to do 'Love one another', 'Feed my lambs. Feed my Sheep'. Whatever it takes to fulfil those words today that is what we should be doing. Unfortunately, who are the lambs, who are sheep? There are so many flocks of needy and so few shepherds we have quite a job on our hands, but with God's help we can do it: he left the Holy Spirit to guide us.

C. Setting an example

'To offer leadership modelled on the leadership of Jesus Christ.'

The two previous sections discussed how the Church speaks to the world, and how it acts in the world. A number of participants added a further dimension that in some respects draws the ideas expressed above together: The Church sets an example for the rest of the world:

I would hope that the Church should be the living embodiment of the example of Christ in the world today. By its example it would make clear Christ's message of charity, faith and hope. It would be the example of the inclusive nature of the message of the Gospel.

To be so convinced of our beliefs that we live them in everyday life and so others will want to know why we are so happy and content that they want to learn more and join us.

We are to shine like bright stars and with love and encouragement embrace a hostile world with mercy. For as the world grows increasingly darker, we must be prepared to suffer with love for our people without compromise.

For one person, even the mistakes the Church has made can serve as an important example of how to apologise and atone.

The Church could be exactly this conscience-former; an example in the world. Through its social teaching, based on what Christ taught, it has put our good and bad human instincts into a context which is fathomable to all people. The Church makes mistakes. Pope Francis said this week (re: Vatican Archives), that 'the Church is not afraid of History; the Church loves History'. Individual members would probably disagree, but the Church as a body could welcome this chance to show it understands its failings and is ready to correct and re correct. And this is the example the Church can set.

For another acceptance and radical compassion was a key example to set:

It's about being witnesses to our faith. We can't go out there and demand that everyone is a catholic. we have to embrace all faiths, all beliefs all understandings. We have to accept so many things that we thought were sinful. We have to accept that even though it's wrong to have sex before marriage, even though it feels wrong to get married man and man, woman and woman. Even though that feels wrong. We can't condemn, we can't cut them off or treat them in an inhumane fashion. We need to love them. All of them 'warts and all'. Our world, our quilt, if you will, is a very different quilt to the one of our Grandparents. Everything was hushed up then, now it's in the open, people can be who they want to be. We have to accept that and love them; follow Pope Francis, who are we to judge?

A cleric of another denomination wrote:

The Catholic Church is not co-terminous with the denomination that uses the term as if it were its name. It includes all who truly trust God to love them, to fulfil his promises of Scripture, and to judge all people wisely and mercifully, but with due justice and mercy. Its purpose is to witness to the reality of God's existence and his claim on every human life as their creator, and therefore their sovereign Lord, and to show in the life of each local church how God's Spirit transforms sinful human beings to become more like the perfected beings they can only be when the Lord returns and welcomes them home. It must never put the performance of good deeds before its primary task of glorifying God through transformed lives and communities, but the glory of God is most clearly shown in lives marked by deeds that are truly good.

D. Protecting Christians

Several respondents saw a role for the Church in protecting Christians globally:

What it has always been - teaching Christ's message. To guide our children from an early age at schools. To be able to speak out when we see our churches being burned down in Muslim states and in China.

I think the Church should be more proactive and vocal, from the pulpit and on the world stage, and stand up for the people who follow its teachings. Before more leave the Church, and the Church itself loses influence.

3. Providing Community

'To provide and support loving and mutually caring communities.'

In terms of working with and in the midst of broader society, a significant number of participants specifically highlighted the role of the Church in creating a community

- A. Offering Support, Hope, and Refuge
- B. Creating an Open Community
- C. Offering Personal Support
- D. Supporting Families

A. Offering Support, Hope, and Refuge

'To be a sanctuary for the marginalized and voiceless'

Many people understood the Church's role to be one of offering support, provide hope, and refuge.

I believe that the Church has to be a place of hope and of acceptance for everyone regardless of their faith or none. It should be non-judgmental, open, loving and ready to embrace the most broken if they are seeking comfort and help.

To provide a place of comfort and stability for our people in the difficult times of their lives. To accompany people at significant moments in their lives, bereavement, becoming parents, times of sickness, times of questioning or crisis. People should know we are here for them when they need us.

To build communities, where the people in need will find help, people who are lonely will find friendship, people who are suffering will find comfort, where young and old are able to discuss their problems with our society, so that we can try to better the situations, and to encourage a love for our neighbours, just as we would want for ourselves. It is so sad that the word 'love' is quickly becoming one of those words which has been so abused in our society that people are becoming afraid to use the word....and yet it is the simplest and greatest of gifts - that we all possess.

The Church's purpose today is what it has always been: to share the good news of the birth, death and resurrection of Jesus and the coming of the Holy Spirit. On more practical levels the Church provides community and continuity and a space for people to contemplate, encourage and share the spiritual dimension of their lives. The Church is a human institution and so flawed, but it should always strive to be its best self. The Church should actively support and speak up for the many people in the world who are overlooked, undervalued, and oppressed by large institutions (governments, businesses, etc.).

Some related this to the difficult times in our society, and in the world:

I feel the Catholic church provides a haven from the hustle and bustle of our broken society in Britain today but as religion is becoming less of a part of family life we do need to be more open to certain sections of the population, i.e. people who have divorced or homosexuals being able to be a part of our Church and receive the sacraments.

I think the Church represents something of a last beacon of light in a world that is growing increasingly darker. In an age of loneliness, anxiety and depression being epidemic almost, the church represents a sanctuary of joy, peace togetherness and belonging. The Holy Father Pope Francis also has helped to build many bridges and outreach people from outside of the faith in a special way and allowed a dialogue to the wider world and an openness and I feel thankfully this has been reflected in the Church today also.

I believe that providing opportunities for receiving the sacraments, high quality preparation for children, opportunities for prayer and support for those who are disadvantaged in anyway are priorities for parishes or however the communities are defined. This of course should extend beyond these communities at all times, but particularly at times of great difficulty. The Church should be a beacon of goodness, as it has been throughout history, but which has been marred by the abusive behaviour of some of those who have been in power within various institutions. We can learn from e.g. Muslim communities who minister to those in need. Many Catholics need to get away from thinking it's just about attending Mass.

The Catholic Church promotes positivity and hope. People rich in faith are less likely to suffer from anxiety, and the Church plays a part in this. It brings people together and promotes values for a rich and fruitful life. I believe the Church offers hope and positivity and helps us to realise there is a greater plan and everything comes to him who waits.

Poignantly one wrote,

I think in times where many of my generation have stopped going to church, the church needs to be encouraging and welcoming. I understand that the physical buildings and Catholic Schools are reliant on contributions from parishioners and I do sympathise but I feel that many priests still make parents feel awkward when they attend family Masses for special occasions and this is off putting rather than encouraging for them to come again. My own husband is not religious at all but was hugely impressed with the comfort and attention my family received from our family priest when my father was terminally ill. Priests like this who do not judge but are there to support families quietly do so much towards bringing religion back to families.

Some talked about the Church's role in supporting and nourishing its members so that *they* could do the good works:

I believe that the purpose of the church is to provide the spiritual food and sustaining community so that its members can go out into the world and carry out God's will through their actions. The Church should be recognised by what it does, not what it says. As part of that, the Church needs to give guidance on how to interpret God's will in the modern world. It needs to support all people whether they are members or not. It needs to work together with people of all faiths and none. The Church needs to be part of the world, not apart from it.

B. Creating an Open Community

'To build communities of welcome and inclusion in a fragmented society'

Many thought the Church has a function in creating a community:

My belief is that the Church represents an open community where people of walks of life can be united in one faith. I believe the Church provides structure for this community, but should allow for a deeply personal and unique relationship with God for each of its members. I also think the Church should develop with the community it resides in, and make local societal issues a priority for support, with the mantra 'charity starts at home'.

Love feeling part of a happy, secure community that is my parish, good for my children to see for 1 hour a week a peaceful haven of no phones and a place where they see all age groups especially pensioners. It is good for them to mix with all different age groups.

Some articulated this in terms of family

To offer a sense of 'family' for all parishioners of all ages, many of whom live alone or feel lonely or not connected to anything.

And for some it indicated the need for a universalistic acceptance

To be the roots in people's lives and community. Every parish should be open to all, from mothers with new-born babies - to elderly, and the vulnerable in our community.

Some thought that the Church was not living up to this community role

There are a number of 'good Catholics' who believe that the criteria for this is that you attend Mass weekly and you are assured salvation. When the Christian message was first proclaimed by the Apostles, there were communities supporting one another. How do we develop the issue of community or Christian family? Currently it is difficult to get to know fellow worshippers. One way to develop the feeling of family is to have a series of activities that all age groups could be interested in. The question is 'Are parishioners willing to put some effort into developing their parish?' As an aside, I was brought up at a time when most Catholic churches had youth clubs. The answer to the question has to be that the Catholic Church has to develop parish communities, but I would go further than this. The Catholic Church has to recognise that it is but one part of God's Christian community and is no longer the arbiter of 'What God determines'.

A lot has been taken away from some churches e.g. church clubs, where people used to meet, mothers' groups, women's confraternity, activities for children, CYMS. So many things have been lost where communities always ran different things, days out etc.

This is sometimes aggravated by locked churches:

My feeling is Church could be a focal part of the community, a safe place, friendly, a comforting place to call into. Sadly, lots of churches are closed other than when services are held. If churches could be open and inviting would they suit the needs of today's society who are time starved and may not be available when Mass is held? In my opinion the Catholic Church or any Church should advocate, we are open, come in, just sit and take 5, reflect, take strength and push on. A place that offered such support without rules of belonging may gain far greater following.

And for some the Church needed to be more inclusive and considerate of its existing members:

I think the Church should be totally inclusive and be reaching out to all members of the community no matter who and what they are with love. The Church community should encourage social activities that appeal to all sections and ages in society to help people from different backgrounds etc. to spend and enjoy time together. This would allow everyone involved to show and receive the love of Our Lord. Simple things like tea/coffee after Mass on Sunday are a good way to get members of the congregation talking to each other.

C. Offering Personal Support

'To keep people following Christ's message and help people be the best version of themselves'

Some talked about more personal purposes for the Church, such as supporting their development as Christian men and women:

To help people become the person God intended them to be.

I am not qualified to answer that question. For myself, and I can speak for no one else it helps me to keep Focused on the things which matter, and to remind me that I can and should do more to be a better person.

For me personally, it offers a chance for me to reflect and gives me strength when I feel alone.

I cannot answer this for the whole Church, other than to say it is to proclaim the Good News. How does this help the Synod? It is about the individual relationship of every person with God. The parable of the talents applies. If every person asks God in humility to help them to discern their talents (and conversely where they lack talent) and then asks for the grace to be able to apply those talents for God's purpose, then everything will be fine.

One admitted a conflict between their personal belief that religious institutions should offer a personal service and the importance of humanitarian action

This is difficult as my personal ideology and practicality are in conflict. Personally, I don't believe the Church, or any religion, should be seeking a grand place on the world stage. I see it as a more personal thing: to support and care for people who seek it, offering a sense of community, shared values, refuge from modern life concerns and a place for reflection. While all of this is already true to some extent, the idea of a global, powerful 'Church' is old fashioned to me, stuck in a past of empire and missionaries. However, I understand that global power brings advantages, being able to have an influence on the world stage and being able to respond to humanitarian needs. But I don't think this should be the identity of the Church, as I don't think this is why people choose religion. Personally, I'm turned off by a powerful religious group. I see religion as a friend: personal, local, always available, helpful and understanding.

And some felt that there was a substantially therapeutic role:

To bring perspective and meaning to people's lives. Putting spirituality and love within the everyday lives of people who are busy trying to provide for themselves and their families. Making it easy for people to take time out to think, contemplate or pray when they can.

Perhaps through apps or church social media with church attendance being a special, highly spiritual experience.

For some, this was because the Church had a stabilising role in an uncertain world:

As so much around us seemingly spins out of control physically, mentally and spiritually. The purpose of our Church is so important. The constancy, the rituals, the communion with our brothers and sisters gives us purpose, reaffirms our deep love and need for love from our Mother Church.

To provide a safe and steadfast oasis for all who wish to belong.

One survey respondent drew many ideas expressed above into a powerful conclusion:

The Catholic Church saves lives. This is not something that is not seen on the surface but if evangelization is done properly and Catholics are clear on what they learn, then many lives can be saved; thereby allowing the Catholic Church to assist in the decline of the dead-end pandemic of suicide.

D. Supporting Families

'Find ways of involving families - not just receiving the sacraments.'

Another recurring theme was that the Church should promote family values, or the value of the family:

To support families and encourage them to meet Jesus in the Sacraments. To bring them up in the faith that has been passed on.

Family values should be promoted, but not by excluding Christians of a 'gay' nature.

I think the Catholic Church should be an organisation of ministry to families and people in need. The Church can influence social justice and women's rights by virtue of its position in society. It should do this to reduce poverty to create a culture in which every child matters. Family is the heart of every community and they come in all shapes and sizes and the Church should find a place for them all. I think that in not allowing priests to marry the Church loses something perhaps an understanding of the modern family. A family at the heart of a church would not set the priest aside from his parishioners but bring them closer they would celebrate those achievements and milestones in his life as he does in theirs.

I think the Church also has a big responsibility in the community, nurturing married couples and helping to sustain family life.

To continue the mission of Jesus! Build caring communities with spirit; help the human race recognise they have a spiritual dimension. Promote the family as a basis for a good society. Show that God is love and Christianity is the one true faith.

4. Rebuild Trust/Reform

'To be all it can to the people that need it the most'

In responding to this third Synod Question, a number of people did not focus on the purpose of the Church, but on its need to reform. Some related this to judgmentalism:

I think in the past the Catholic Church 'managed' people by fear of hell, these days there is change of teaching that God loves us no matter what, but I think it needs to go further than that. we can't say God loves you but you can't be gay, to be married as gay, adopt the children as gay, receive the communion... we can't say you have stay in marriage no matter what or if you leave you can never remarry or you cannot receive the Communion.... it's just wrong. it sends complete opposite message about Catholic Church. I think that is the main reason why people leave or have resentment for religious people. Non-religious people are sometimes more kind, helpful, unjudgmental and free.

To bring the love of God (shown through Jesus) to the world in a way relevant for the 21st century and beyond. Jesus saw the Jewish faith as having failed to change, become too concerned with its own importance and having lost sight of God and his love for us and how to show it to our fellow beings. I see the Church I was brought up in as having been controlling, steeped in power and dogma - no wonder that I look at the congregation now and see most of the 40+ people I went to school with have 'drifted away' as we used to put it. I want a revolution - Pope Francis is leading the way and yet he is dogged by the conservative arm of our Hierarchy. We must modernise to bring the message of Jesus to our fellow beings in a fit for purpose way today - that might not mean slavish adherence to organised religion. Question: Have we really not changed in 2000 years or is it that we have changed the way we wanted to change but we ditched the true message somewhere along the road?

Several respondents used the image of the Church as a beacon:

To be a beacon to the world, reflecting God's love and not a rigid set of pharisaical rules to be obeyed. I have seen the exodus from the Church over the years of good Christians who have been driven out by the actions of clergy and the harsh words of so-called 'good Catholics' and wept over this exodus.

The Catholic Church today should be a shining light to the world. We should all be seen as true followers of Jesus. I think that the Church should be teaching us how to be better Christians, to treat each other with respect and love. We are too busy being Catholic and not enough time spent being Christian. More needs to be done with regard to the abuse in the past, hopefully the conference that Pope Francis had with the bishops will bring about some resolution.

To be a beacon of hope, to be a beacon of change.

The realities of declining numbers and of the abuse scandals entered here:

I sometimes wonder. It provides me with a focus to slow down and engage and think with God about what is important and about those worse off than me and my congregation - this has been the case I think for many years. I don't think younger people see the Church as providing any purpose. This can be evidenced by the aging congregation around me. I don't think the Church figures in the lives of younger people who I think are very busy and have lots of choices about what to do with spare time most of which appear to them to be more attractive than the Church. I think they only see being a member of a Church as the

Mass/worship and the Church needs to protect its future by encouraging younger members - you could say bringing itself in line with modern life. Whilst developing a congregation for the future, I think the Church must be seen as upholding high moral standards and practicing what it preaches. The cases of the abuse scandals have not helped to support this.

The need for reform was envisioned as extending to the highest levels of the Church and its structures:

The purpose of the Catholic Church in the world today is to continue to search (even in the face of difficulty) for ways and means by which it can live, worship, speak and preach Christ's Gospel corporately in the present because God lives in the present. It is through present circumstances and uncertainties that God makes His demands on us to upgrade and improve Christ's Church here on earth. This is why the Catholic Church has to be in constant renewal and reform. The Catholic Church is in crisis at present. In my humble opinion the bishops have lost their moral compass and the priests can't fight back because the Vatican is so powerful.

As always to bring the love of God to the people in ways that are meaningful in today's society. But, in order to do that it needs to recognise the world as it is today and the real challenges that people face with access to technology and faster awareness of other parts of the world to their own. It can no longer be dominated by the male hierarchical institution it has been and should truly embrace the work and gifts of women in the Church and of a dwindling laity.

The Catholic Church should be the gateway to Christ for the whole community not just a select few. It has a key role to play in Christ's mission to bring the good news of the resurrection to everyone. Particularly those on the edges of society who feel abandoned and alone. Its tradition has been to evolve to fulfil this mission in every age. In recent times the Church locally has been too fearful to meet this challenge, choosing instead to retreat within its walls and focus on its existing community. This has facilitated the decline we see active members of our parish communities. It must move towards a growth strategy by taking new paths and creating new visions of what Church means today.

The purpose of the Church is now to cleanse the bad, the ugly and the criminals in the priesthood and religious life - priests and Nuns/Sisters - alike. Then the Church can start afresh and build on the pure Teachings of Christ and not the trash that comes out of some Cardinals and Bishops who think that they will bring the Faith into the 21st Century with a new overhaul and adaptation of the Faith. Priests have failed grossly - not all, but many. The newly ordained will have a terrible job on their hands. Christianity is being suppressed by Islam and more and more priests will become martyrs to the Faith. The laity don't care or are looking the other way. Many are atheists because it is easier for them to be so and not be committed to a religion. Those that are committed are basically hanging on or become fanatics. Either way, there will be a huge struggle for the Church to maintain her numbers, her followers and her ordained.

One answered,

What is it or should it be? It should be about liberation from oppression. Sadly [the Church] is one of the last bastions of homophobia and fails to address the stigma and pain it causes.

5. Negative or Uncertain Responses

'I don't know - but I still want to get involved'

As was noted at the start of this section, many people found it difficult to answer the third Synod Question. We can recognise this in the number of responses in which people said they either didn't know what the Church's purpose was, or that they didn't think it had one any longer. Usually, these responses expressed exasperation with the current state of the Church, or with one or other particular issue:

I can honestly say, I don't know. I know you're looking for a positive answer, however my view for a while is that the Catholic Church (and the majority of religions) is confusing the world to the point where most of the world is thinking the same thing... what are they for?

Good question, not sure. What I have noticed is that we seem a bit insular. I see wonderful community work carried out by C of E and Methodist churches and receive a much better welcome from them than my own church. It may well be that being a minority church and in that past being defensive we are struggling to find our true role.

I think the Church serves very little purpose in the world today. It continues to be judgemental and homophobic in rejecting the very people who were 'made in the image of God'. Its 'new' wording of the Mass is so archaic it has made the whole liturgy seem meaningless and un-prayer-like. The continued protection of child batterers and sexual predators still irks and is heart rending for the victims of those perpetrators. If disbanded would it be missed? Likely not - there are lots of gatherings of like-minded people who want to meet up forming a community of support for each other. 'Church' would still exist - yet, there is no guarantee, just like now, that the underhandedness of trafficking, slavery, poverty, violence etc would cease to a greater degree.

I'm not too sure. Right now, it looks to me like the Catholic Church is in the middle of a monumental and all-encompassing breakdown. In the language of the 12 Steps - it has just hit rock bottom.

To cover for homosexual men who don't want to get their hands dirty working in the real world.

There is no point – fictional stories.

I still go to church because I believe in the Real Presence of the Eucharist and because it is my natural cultural home. However, I have been sorely tempted to stop going to church because it has transpired that the Institution, headed by the Vatican, is full of hypocrisy and self-deception. I know many Non - Catholics who are truthful, kind, generous and wise and I know many Catholics who are mean spirited, full of bigotry and elitist. I also know many non - Catholics who are mean etc., and many Catholics who are merciful and welcoming - and so I do not know what the special purpose of the Catholic Church is in the World today.

Limited. Fewer people attend church. God has a big role, but do I need to be a member of the Catholic Church? I'm not sure. I am constantly frustrated by the Catholic Church accepting that in the past priests have committed crimes in particular sex offences but not accepting the Church's role in not only covering it up but failing to address the incidents. I'm not sure the Catholic Church impacts at all on my daily life.

I think its purpose is generally seen to be declining - the Church has always had values based on the words of Jesus in his lifetime on this earth - love one another as I have loved you. Believe. The Church became hierarchical long ago and seem to have lost the simplicity of Jesus's life and preached words. Grand buildings, so many now empty or tourist attractions. Pomp and ceremony displaying riches of costume and artefacts. Behaviour and irresponsibility of anointed persons. The simple purpose has been lost and many are accountable but have not been made accountable. Today many feel the purpose of the Church is far removed from them through the Church leaders and traditions, but they can love one another and show empathy for all people on other levels.

Good question. The Church seems to be divided into those on the right wing, head bangers in the Vatican who have lost the real mission of Christ. We the people of the truth are lost because of how the Vatican head bangers have hidden the true extent of corruption in finance and child abuse. What chance has Pope Francis got when he has to deal with the likes of [N. and N.], plus a host of priest administrators who really shouldn't be priests? I pray that the Church can survive, how can I tell my children and grandchildren to practice their faith when we are in such a mess?

Another offered a 2000-year historical perspective on this:

The Church seems to be deaf to Pope Francis and be more concerned with preserving tradition built on the Roman imperialist model of the Roman Empire which took Christianity and used it to continue to rule over the known world, laying down rules and regulations to keep people in order, to keep the powerful in power and exploit the masses. Pope Francis is bringing us back to the lessons which Jesus taught us that the most important thing is to love God and our sisters and brothers. Christ was inclusive, no one was left out because they 'didn't fit.' The Church has a great opportunity to play a key role in tempering the influence of the media, big companies and governments in their attempts to sell this idea of the individual being all important while driving divisions between us so they can manipulate us. The Church could make a difference and is our only hope in bringing big business to account and helping people to stand up for what is right.

Again, some used this as an opportunity to critique what they perceived as the Church missing the mark:

I suppose a 'dictionary definition,' as it were, would be 'To carry on Christ's work on Earth'. That would include spreading the Word and reaching out to others in the Spirit of Christ. That indeed might be the intention, but I'm not convinced that the Church succeeds. On a local national and global level, I feel that the Church overall and thus those of us in it, are just too inward looking. Where do we REALLY reach out and make the Church RELEVANT to the wider local community? WHEN do we meet others where THEY 'are' in terms of circumstances, beliefs, whatever? Where for example is the Church's flexibility in approaches to worship, being innovative and ever renewing, being truly inclusive? Jesus had some radical ideas, which were considered off the wall and rattled quite a few cages. However, he knew what turned people on, threw away the rule book and the rest, as they say, is history. WHERE is THAT spirit in the Church today?

Echoing concerns mentioned earlier about an apparent prioritising of exclusive morality over loving acceptance, one wrote:

I don't know and, more worryingly, that makes me question its relevance to so many people. Who is the Church supposed to serve? If we accept that it's Jesus' Church - and not the people's Church, how do we best serve Jesus' Catholic Church? By serving the people. If we

are to serve the people, then we have to engage the people and not reject them. We have to welcome them - and not as sinners. What percentage of the population meet the perceived entry criteria? How many are divorced, how many not in heterosexual relationships? Is the Church ready to accept people as they are and for what they are?

I really find it hard to see the Church as relevant in today's world. It does NOT SPEAK to the majority. We need a new Church rising like the Phoenix out of the ground. The early Church ideals is what we need to go back to. Clericalism is the scourge of the present-day Church. Where is the compassion and love? This seems to be missing.

Another raised concerns about Church's accumulation of wealth

The Catholic Church that I belong to exists to make money to go into reserves. Reserves for what? in a very short space of time we will not have a need for these reserves. in 2017 the diocese had £196,599,000. The priests' retirement fund - the George Andrew Fund - stood in 2017 at £7,421,000 That is to top up the state pension of priests. My own parish fails to give detailed accounts each year. We are told we don't need to know and do not have the right to know. We have surely had enough scandals in the Church. let us not now be faced with further scandals with financial irregularities.

The Catholic Church is already very good at fund-raising and parishes enjoy providing entertainment programmes and good nights out! However, what goes on as we enter our church is not acceptable for many, including the young. The feeling that we are entering the holy presence of God, where the true presence of Christ is in the Blessed Sacrament is not apparent here anymore. We have lost the theme. The Catholic Church in the world today should concentrate on teaching the children in the early years about this fact, and strengthen the young minds, perhaps providing one evening Mass a week for students and young workers, instead of early morning Masses for the few retired.

Concluding Remarks on Responses to this Question

As noted at the head of this section, the third Synod Question generated a rich - and varied - set of responses. Many of the tensions outlined in earlier sections were reflected here, and the fact that so many declared themselves to be either uncertain or negative about the purpose of the Church in the world today is significant. However, the thrust of the overwhelming majority of responses was a plea for a Church that was open, welcoming of all, and willing to engage with the world and its problems. Two participants neatly summarised the thoughts of many:

To be a universal Church witnessing to and embodying as a whole and in its members the unity which exists at the heart of our faith...the love life of the Holy Trinity. Thus, providing a safe space and place where people can feel welcomed as they are, where they are and for who they are. A place where people can begin to live more fully from the deepest truth of God present within themselves and others. A place where people can ask the difficult questions. A place that is not afraid to live with the mystery and not have all the answers. A place of welcome and hospitality for all. A place of prayer and service, of action and above all a place of silence. A place where Jesus is known, loved and experienced.

The Catholic Church is a place of community, understanding and kindness. It is a voice against hostility, violence, terrorism and war. It is a refuge for the poor and lonely, the elderly and learning impaired. A place where all walks of life can pray, praise God for the gifts we have been given and use them in any small way for kindness and greater good.

SYNOD QUESTION 4: Having reflected on these things, what are the topics you would like to see on the agenda of Synod 2020?

As with other questions, there was some concern that the question might either be misunderstood, or that it was inappropriate/unnecessary:

This question is not a good question as there will be an agenda – hopefully there will be a set of practical questions to address specific issues.

The Synod – most people don't know what it means. The Synod needs to start talking to people who understand what you're saying and meaning.

Others were quite certain about what they did not wish to see discussed at the Synod:

Not the usual show of 'there's no young people', or 'there aren't enough priests', but, how a merciful Church = a Church for everyone beyond the limits of buildings can be real in people's lives. Not just for the Sunday 'some' but whoever people are.

A frank discussion about moving on from old attitudes. I am tired of people asking for the catechism to be taught in schools. I pray that this Synod will not be hijacked by those unhappy people who are living in the past.

While others expressed what they did hope for from the Synod:

Honest debate about why certain things are clearly not working and need change.

Church of change - needs to listen to the people and be prepared to act/change.

Turn the listening into action (unusual for Catholic Church).

How to 'incarnate' the proposals from the Synod beyond the Synod.

I would want to know that there is going to be follow up when Synod 2020 is over to know that it wasn't just a talking shop.

That we are open minded and free to express what we see as a Church that is unable to cope with the world's problems and frightened to move forward and ready to change. This is a must, as living in the past will be our downfall. Jesus came to change the world. We must continue his work.

A Listening Group of men and women belonging to Religious Congregations, meanwhile, recognised the limited scope of the Synod itself:

The propositions of the Synod cannot possibly 'resolve' things. We need long term attractive ways to help people know God, know the Word of God, understand the joy of the Christian life, understand over time the purpose of being a member of the Church, understand the Holy Spirit etc. in practical ways, understand what people already know within - life is worth living if we Focus on others and not on self - learning how to love.

Perhaps not surprisingly, therefore, the question yielded substantial and diverse responses, which are organised here under 19 headings:

1. Doctrinal Questions
2. Address Falling Mass Attendance
3. Ministry and Responsibility in the Church
4. Liturgy and Spirituality
5. Learn from the Scandals
6. Improve the Public Image of the Church
7. Make More Effective Use of the Media
8. Church Organisation
9. Education
10. Review the Use of Church Property
11. Provide Political Leadership and Social Justice
12. The Parish and the Local Community
13. Creating an Open Community
14. Ecology
15. Medical and Sexual Ethics
16. Family
17. Ecumenism, and Interfaith Engagement
18. Mental Health
19. Offering Guidance

1. Doctrinal Questions

'How can we educate the Church more fully in the beauty of our theology?'

When asked what the Synod should discuss, a number of people raised questions of a doctrinal nature. Whilst these do not technically lie within the scope of a diocesan Synod, they nonetheless give a flavour of some of the concerns of participants, and so a selection is offered here:

The concept of hell in the modern world.

Why did Jesus promise to send the Holy Spirit [...] What does Baptism in the Holy Spirit mean?

A greater Focus on the afterlife

Proofs of the existence of God [...] How is it possible for all the thousands who have lived to occupy heaven

Will my non-Catholic family not go to heaven because they do not have confession in their church?

What is the role of Our Lady?

Why do we pray to Mary? Is it idolatry? We should pray to Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

I do not understand the part of the Creed, 'He descended into hell'.

Original blessing, not original sin

Revelation 21:8 - to educate people on this Scripture and thus wake people up to realise that hell is for real and that we need to be more aware of how our worldly existence can corrupt us and avoid the temptations of this world that Revelation 21:8 talks about.

Teach children and adults that Satan exists, and Rosary ties him up. Teach Jesus is truly present in Tabernacle.

Are the orders and ministries of other churches not valid? Is it not monstrous pride and error to judge them 'totally null and utterly void'?

To encourage the increase of devotion to Christ in the Blessed Sacrament as more of the faithful do not believe in transubstantiation in our times. [...] The role of Our Blessed Lady in the Church as Mother of all the faithful and the first tabernacle of the Lord.

What is literal in Scripture and what is allegorical. e.g. Adam and Eve- allegorical surely? (M61-70 - however this same respondent continued, 'Catholicism is too complicated unlike evangelical Christianity'.

More emphasis on God's basic message - love and forgiveness and less clutter. I think we are in danger of forgetting this message which should be the simple yardstick for all decisions.

Ensure that the Church militant is armed with the tools to fight Satan, the Church is the ammunition factory and the heart is the arsenal. We are scared of challenging Satan in the modern world, when we do Satan is scared of us.

I read that the Catholic Church no longer believes that unbaptised babies go to Limbo. I know someone who had a baby who died shortly after birth and has found it so difficult to think that her little one isn't in Heaven.

[The Synod should consider] how to eradicate false beliefs/ practices within the Church including some clergy and parishioners who believe heresies.

2. Address Falling Mass Attendance

'Make being Catholic cool' (F, 70+)

The single issue that was most frequently raised by both Listening Group and on-line survey participants was the need to address the fall in Mass attendance, which was understood by many as indicating an existential crisis for the Church in Liverpool. A discourse that emerged in different forms, and with regard to different groups within the Church, was a frequently repeated call for inclusivity:

[The Synod should discuss] inclusivity. Essential for the survival of the Church. Jesus Christ himself reached out to those on the edge. Why don't we?

In other words, very many people felt that the Church should become more mindful of and welcoming to various sections of its population. Many of the issues raised here have been discussed in previous sections of this Report, so a sample of the data is presented, mainly without comment, under the following sub-headings:

- A. Young People
- B. Gender Equality
- C. The LGBTQ+ Community
- D. Divorced People
- E. Families and Younger Children
- F. Making the Church more Welcoming and Accessible
- G. Adopting a Missionary Perspective
- H. Opposing Voices

Specifically, liturgical issues are considered under Section 4, below.

A. Young People

To be truly focused, Synod 2020 needs to seriously think about how we encourage more young people to return to the Church. This may not be Sunday Mass attendance but other demonstrable ways they can be involved in the Catholic community. Look at the people who flock to Glastonbury! Young and old alike. Why don't we see the same mix of people and joy in our churches? I know we can't have rock bands every week – but let's look at what motivates and excites people and how we can apply at least a sprinkling of this into the Church.

[The Synod should] discuss ways of engaging young people that don't belittle or patronise. Give them real spiritual food, not cheap gimmicks.

[The Synod should] encourage clergy to make their homilies relevant, understandable, especially for the youth. Not just the children but our teens and young adults.

[The Synod should] create opportunities for more youth clubs etc we had, guides, scouts, YCW, Guild of St Agnes, Children of Mary, we need to introduce alternatives that will interest our young.

[The Synod should discuss how] to engage more with schools and show the younger people the advantages of becoming an active member of the local Church. Start football teams representing the Church. It's not easy but we must try!

More and more people attend church to please older relatives, what happens when they are no longer with us?

B. Gender Equality

Women are discriminated against in the Church for no valid theological reason. [The Synod should discuss] how this can be changed for the benefit of all. Women Priests and Deacons would be a start.

Increasing participation of women at a more senior level.

Time for equality between the sexes - remembering without Mary there would have been no Jesus.

The Church must address its denigration of women that is scandalous in the modern world. The treatment of women is shocking.

The most important topic for the Church today is the role and greater inclusion of women. Young people especially need to feel that the Church is more inclusive and not so male dominated.

C. The LGBTQ+ Community:

How to welcome people of all sexual orientations so that they feel as though they are part of the worshipping community.

Sex and sexuality. Absolutely crucial. The Church has lost the plot here and is rightly regarded with derision. We need to listen to people's voices on contraception, divorce and homosexuality.

As someone who was (reluctantly!) celibate for a long time, I feel so much for gay people who want to follow the Church's teaching - especially when many Catholics see heterosexual adultery and issues like artificial birth control and IVF as 'okay'. We need to show that gay people do matter!

How can we best include Gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people in the life of the Church?

How can the Archdiocese offer better pastoral care to the LGBT community?

To have uniform policies across the diocese, across the country. I don't know, universal policies for Catholics or something. So, it's not pick-and-mix, and I know that you've got that difficulty with people's personal conscience, but to have some kind of thing, 'Right, okay. This is the official policy', and there are people who will go to different parishes, and that's fine. I think I can live with that, but not to have, like, one place where it's okay to be gay, and the others where it's not because that just sends out the wrong message, for me anyway. I'm not speaking for anybody else.

There has to be a consistent message across the leadership of the Archdiocese, so that seminarians are talking about it, anybody, that [homophobia] will not be tolerated. The LGBT people are there to be accepted. It's not about toleration. It's about acceptance and celebration.

D. Divorced People

Why are divorced and remarried Catholics denied the sacrament of the Eucharist when unmarried mothers are not? In the strictest (and most uncharitable terms) these women would have been described as living in sin previously.

Divorce, I think it's so unfair that a Catholic, who finds themselves divorced through no fault of their own, is unable to marry again in a Catholic Church!! I feel annulment is archaic and can be extremely embarrassing to the innocent party!!

People should not be excluded from the Eucharist because their marriage has failed and/or they entered new relationships. I don't believe Christ would impose such a punishment, making this the main unforgivable sin!

E. Families and Younger Children

The broad concern expressed here was how to facilitate the participation of families with children in the life of the Church, and especially at Sunday Mass:

I believe strongly that the Church needs to adapt to the changes that occur in generations to remain relevant otherwise people will not see what there is to gain from attending Church. As families become a lot busier due to modern family life it can be challenging for young families to attend regularly so it is about thinking outside the box about how to adapt to things like this. [...] Length of time services last. A lot of families are very busy trying to cram lots of things into the weekend after working all week and they are often equally important. It would be good to have Mass at a reduced time but with the option for those who want to stay longer to stay to chat.

Improve declining church numbers: church should be more fun (that's what my kids tell me). Need more modern hymns, revive church choirs/musician, clearer explanations of readings during Mass. Create community spirit (e.g. drinks/social/table tennis/drawing club after church - young can mix with old.)

Please can we look at how we encourage young families to keep coming to church after their child has made their First Communion. This is a problem. Perhaps we could have a buddy system for a family to link them up with another family?

Of course, children have their own perspective, so it is perhaps worth recounting here in full the responses given by one primary school (year group in brackets):

- Toys to play with. (Y2)
- Tell us stories in language we can understand like our teacher does. (Y2)
- Have worksheets/colouring sheets in the benches for children to complete. (Y3)
- Lego activities/board games after Mass. (Y3)
- Have a big screen to watch clips/look at pictures of stories of Jesus. (Y3)
- Children acting out the Gospel story. (Y4)
- Children to sing Gospel with actions, not traditional hymns. (Y4)
- A band to play the music, people could practise together in their spare time. (Y4)
- Open church when it is not Mass, take tours to talk about the things in church because there is so much to look at. (Y4)
- 'Tot spot' - a place/room to take babies. (Y4)

- 'Senior Church' - a 'little Church' for older children - not completing colouring activities. (Y4)
- Questions from the congregation during the homily - answered by the priest or other people. (Y5)
- Coffee morning sounds like it's for old people - maybe 'treat morning' for children after Mass? (Y5)
- Café after Mass. (Y6)
- Have different age groups for Little Church - group for toddlers, 5-8, then above. (Y6)
- Be able to play instruments at Mass in a band. (Y6)

F. Making the Church more Welcoming and Accessible

One person highlighted changing patterns of church attendance, and the opportunities that exist for engaging better with 'occasional attenders':

[The Synod should discuss] adapting current practice to recognise that there are far more 'occasional attenders' so we need to improve our communications structures within parishes. There are vast numbers of people with 'Catholic connections' and we need to make it easier for people to reconnect.

Many wrote about making the Church more welcoming, but some put it particularly succinctly. The Synod, they suggested, should ask:

How do we make the Church more approachable for those seeking to join a faith community? Mass can be overwhelming and incomprehensible for people who haven't experienced it before.

How to become more welcoming as Church I speak to many people who would love to come but worry what will happen. The fear of Church stops many from attending.

A few mentioned the need to make churches more accessible and welcoming for those with disabilities or other special needs:

How to improve accessibility, including appropriate ways of reaching people and sharing the Gospel message. This includes making churches physically and spiritually more inclusive and accessible for those with mental or physical difficulties.

Modernise the Mass and consider autistic friendly Masses.

As did a few for the elderly, members of other cultures, and single people:

[The Synod should discuss] how the Church treats single Catholics who take their faith seriously. Staying strong in a secular world is no mean feat, yet all the single adult practicing Catholics I know say they feel infantilised, pitied and even ostracised by parishioners, or seen as 'unnatural'. This is so wrong!

One person spoke powerfully from their personal experience of the need for the Church to listen more carefully to the experiences of its members:

When somebody once said to me 'the only people you know are gangsters, drug dealers and football hooligans' it hit home what 'normal' people actually thought of me.... My faith now helps to keep me on the 'straight and narrow'. I was like a rudderless ship prior to my conversion... I had everything...but in reality, I had nothing...Many of 'these people', (my

former friends, colleagues, associates) identify as Catholic and as such are part of our Church.... How/When do we go out and hear their 'story', their reality?

G. Adopting a Missionary Perspective

All of the above relates primarily to the Church's engagement with those who are already within its fold by virtue of baptism. Given that the non-participation of very many Catholics in the life and worship of the Church is a cause of (frequently personal) concern to those who still attend, the intensity of this focus is not surprising. However, there were others who eschewed these concerns, and proposed an externally directed missionary perspective:

[The Synod should] be outward looking and not overly concerned with the negatives and dwindling numbers. To be a Church people want to belong to.

One Listening Group felt that that if such an outward, missionary focus was to be realised, then some radical re-thinking would be necessary:

It is very hard to know at times – the Church is an obstacle between Jesus/God and humans rather than showing them to humans. Like a big untidy loft that needs a big clear out. The Church needs to stop being so concerned with itself, 'The Church', as the most important thing and concentrate on showing people the love of God like Jesus [did].

One person made a practical proposal:

I would like to see on the agenda putting a group of two together and going out to the people in the city, as a Church, proclaiming the Good News and how they feel in this world.

Another person simply asked,

In the Acts of the Apostles, the message of the Gospel spread like wildfire. How does the Church begin a new age of evangelisation?

H. Opposing Voices

While many argued for greater inclusivity, others argued that the opposite represented an authentic Catholicism:

Affirm the traditional Catholic Church stance on homosexual issues and the role of women; Stop being progressive and get back to traditional values.

We need to do something about the Clergy, who have given up and taken on the ways of the world. We need to return to our last known working formula, post 50 years ago. Since that time the Church has fallen into self-destruct mode.

To refrain from progressive teaching curriculums that include gender ideology topics i.e. pushing homosexuality as normal. I recommend the notable work Theology of the Body by St John Paul II.

These responses align to some extent with those who felt that the Church's sacramental discipline had become too lax:

A much stronger programme of sacramental discipline. Baptising children we never see again, giving young people communion who have no real faith and are never seen again, marrying

folk who are not part of our living community. All these are recipes for continuing decline and need to be tackled.

Celebrating the people still supporting the Church rather than have these people the centre of attention for being lectured to about being sinful - give folk a break!! The world is a tougher place than 40 years ago (second Vat Council!!) and the Mass/feasts/other gatherings should reflect this

3. Ministry and Responsibility within the Church

A very large number of participants asked that the Synod should consider questions relating to the broad theme of ministry and responsibility in the Church. This material will be presented under four headings, which themselves are further broken down into subheadings

- A. Addressing Current Challenges Relating to the Ordained Ministry.
 - a. Addressing the welfare of the clergy
 - b. Addressing Clericalism
 - c. Review of Priestly Formation
 - d. Review of Appointments Process
- B. Addressing the Shortage of Clergy
 - a. To consider drawing in priests from further afield
 - b. To revisit experiments from the previous century
 - c. To hold 'an open and honest discussion of compulsory clerical celibacy'
 - d. To consider the ordination of mature, married men drawn from the parish community itself
 - e. To petition Rome for the ordination of women
- C. Enhancing the Role of the Laity in the Life of the Church.
 - a. A call to recognise the vocation of the laity.
 - b. Relieving the priest of the non-sacramental burden
 - c. Developing lay ministry in collaborative context
- D. The Bishop.

A. Addressing Current Challenges relating to the Ordained Ministry.

'I thought the clergy was supposed to smell like the sheep?'

We noted in the responses to Question Two that on the one hand people expressed concern for the welfare of their priests, and on the other hand criticised certain aspects of priestly life and ministry. The same delicate balance was also found here:

(a) Addressing the welfare of the clergy

Many suggested that the welfare of existing clergy should be discussed at the Synod:

Ensuring the health and well-being of our priests particularly with regard to the practices of lone working, mental health, responding to verbal, physical and emotional abuse. Life beyond parish ministry and opportunities for retirement and welfare within the Archdiocese.

Support for the mental health of clergy especially those ordained before psychometric screening was introduced.

Care for priests (Burnout is on the way for many...)

Priests' job has become impossible - they have to live outside society and become a target of abuse.

The question of the isolated lives of many priests - especially when set against the expectations that most of the clergy may have had for their future at ordination - was raised by the lay ministers' Focus Group:

When a lot of them went into seminary they had this idea that they'd be living in a big presbytery with several other priests. Now the reality is they're on their own and the churches around them have closed, so how do we support those priests? They must be extremely lonely. For some, not for all. Some, probably.

An individual participant identified the associated risks:

[The Synod should discuss] better pastoral care of the priests; huge workloads, isolation, early responsibility etc. endanger physical and mental health.

The issues raised by the last person quoted were also developed by another, who noted the significance of the priest's health for the entire life of the parish:

Good health (mentally and physically) and happiness of the priests have a domino effect on the happiness of the Church members. This allows for a more realistic and passionate evangelisation.

One person simply thought the Synod should consider, 'Are we asking too much of our priests?' and another proposed that by way of the support the Archdiocese should set in place for the priests, a 'fitness to practice certificates as judges and airline pilots are required to have'.

This last response introduces the practicalities attached to the Archdiocese's role in caring for the welfare of its clergy. Yet, as was the case with Question Two, some criticism of the relationship between the central archdiocesan authorities and individual priests was voiced - here, by a lay woman:

Make sure that the Archdiocese practically supports parish priests. I find that the people who work in LACE seem to live in a different world. They need to come and see what really happens on a daily basis at the coal face.

(b) Addressing clericalism

Yet, the clergy themselves also came under criticism; one person asked whether the Synod might consider the entire topic of the ordained ministry itself:

Is it fit for purpose in the 21st century? Many of us are fed up with slapdash Masses, poor sermons, ugly churches, ordained ministers with few interpersonal skills; we are fed up with poorly executed preparation for the sacraments.

For several, the issue at stake here was clericalism, defined by one person as, '[the] Father is always right syndrome, the Church is always right. So many priests meet enjoy status above service.' Therefore, a number of requests were made that engaging with clericalism should be on the Synod agenda:

To reduce the cult of clericalism in the Church and the view among some of the laity and the ordained or in holy orders that ordination or vows brings omniscience.

The Church needs to listen to the laity before it's too late. Clericalism is the biggest impediment to the direction of the Church. It creates a narrow, backward looking Church devoid of ideas and living in an arrogant men's club.

The challenge was neatly expressed by one person:

How to address the problem of clericalism without losing respect for the role of priests.

(c) Review of priestly formation

There were also requests that the system for training priests should be re-examined. One Listening Group asked for, 'A radical reformation of the way we select and train our priests in the future.' Other participants spelled out what this might involve in practice:

Seminary training. Our priests need formation in becoming fully rounded human beings above all. They also need to be introduced to the mystical traditions of the Church and the teachings which existed before all the accretions of imperialism were added.

The training of priests should start with a period of parish work in deprived areas of the country, before studying theology.

The current training of priests and what they are taught. Why is it that Vatican II does not appear to have been fully implemented after all this time? Why does the Catholic Church appear to be going backwards?

A review of the non-theological dimensions of training was also called for:

Training for clergy to listen, develop and harness the skills within their parishes.

Priests as Managers: With fewer priests, training is needed on how they manage and motivate voluntary input of their parishioners. Army-style command structure no longer viable and can be counter-productive by estranging parishioners.

(d) Review of appointments process

Suggestions for Synodal discussion were also made in relation to the appointments process for parish priests:

[The Synod should discuss] a system for assessing suitability of clergy before being appointed to various parish communities. Little attention seems to be given to matching the strengths / abilities of clergy to the needs of the various areas and parish communities - appointments re capability and suitability of individuals.

It was suggested that each parish produce a profile of itself – its culture/nature/perceived needs and present this to those who make decisions about clergy placements, then, in dialogue with them, try to find a fitting replacement should their priest move on. This would be a truly collaborative exercise instead of the current practice where no consultation takes place with parishioners and where clergy are imposed on the people. Could this be discussed?

[The Synod should discuss] the issue of continuity in a parish when an effective and formative Parish Priest leaves a parish and a new person comes in. The parish is in practice often the only place where people meet Christ.

[The Synod should] ask what happens when a priest with vision leaves and another who has little vision of a less collaborative leadership style? Parishioners can be 'stuck' with such a priest (perhaps for decades, as has been the case in some parishes) making minimal/ no development and therefore denying the laity their baptismal dignity and the growth and witness of the Church. How can a parish prepare for such a situation and challenge it?

There should be a desire to leave no priest in any role for more than ten years and no priest should be left in any role for more than 15yrs extreme max. All appointments should reflect this, and change should be part of the culture. Good for both parishes, diocesan organisations and the people served.

Another respondent suggested a maximum term of seven years for parish priests.

B. Addressing the Shortage of Clergy

Given the concerns that were expressed in response to Question Two, it is hardly surprising that many participants asked that the shortage of priests should form part of the Synod's agenda:

How we are going to continue to sustain the number of parish churches with the fall in numbers of ordinations of priests?

How will sacraments be made available with forthcoming shortage of priests?

The future of our priests and how we can support them. What is our alternative for the future as we run out of priests?

In response, many participants suggested that the Synod needed to examine more concrete ways of attracting vocations and resolving the current shortage of priests:

(a) To consider drawing in priests from further afield:

An acceptance that we should be seen as 'mission territory,' and that our situation requires welcoming priests from parts of the world where vocations are more plentiful, as well as discerning 'native' vocations.

Bring in more priests from other countries so we can share their experiences.

Bring some of the missionaries back so that parishes have adequate clergy to serve our congregation.

(b) To revisit experiments from the previous century:

Is it time for a reinstating of worker priests as an outreach strategy, as seen by the French Catholic Church in the 1900s?

(c) To hold 'an honest and open discussion of compulsory priestly celibacy'

This emerged as a very strong theme from the Listening process, across all its strands.

Allowing priests to marry; a big question fraught with all kinds of difficulties BUT also potentially providing part solution to a declining priesthood.

The most important change should be to allow priests to marry. There is no historical religious reasoning to prevent it and it would allow priests to enjoy a fuller life with a family of their own plus give the congregation the assurance that if they need guidance with family difficulties, their priest will have a greater understanding. I truly believe this will strengthen the Church and encourage more males to become priests and more families to attend.

I also feel married priests could offer a greater understanding of the problems of married parishioners who often feel clergy currently have little understanding of modern family life.

Young people, too, raised this as a solution; one said,

If the Church would like to go forward into the future with a strong and inclusive community, it is a fact that some radical changes need to be made. I would especially like to see priests being allowed to marry and have relationships. This would mean more could train to be a priest without having to experience an unnecessary burden. This is a matter my parish priests, family, friends, and their family all agree with. PLEASE CHANGE FOR OUR FUTURE.

Close reading of the data suggests that for some respondents at least, what was understood here was not simply a choice to be offered to future clergy, but that existing priests, too, should be free to marry. One Listening Group stated this explicitly:

Priests should be allowed to marry and have children and stay within the Church in a paid capacity.

The ordination of married former Anglican clergy has created an anomaly for some Catholics:

Celibacy is failing - it is an unnatural state and unnecessary requirement. Many good married men would make fantastic priests, but this ministry is not available to them. Yet we accept Anglican Priests and their families into ministry in the Catholic Church.

Why are married priests not accepted unless they were previously ordained in the Church of England? That is illogical and unrealistic given current number of priests.

Several participants suggested that an end to compulsory celibacy might potentially contribute to the resolution of the sexual abuse scandal:

Priests able to marry: This would open up this vocation to more. It is a disgrace to think what has gone on with priests and the abuse of young boys.

Sexual abuse of children. Just because it's being talked about now doesn't mean it's still not happening every day! The problem is widespread and ingrained. The Church seems to be attracting paedophiles probably because of its requirement of celibacy for priests.

(d) To consider the ordination of mature, married men drawn from the parish community itself:

Viri probati - 'proven men' - at least ask the question.

(e) To petition Rome for the ordination of women:

Several participants set the question of the ordination of women into the broader discourse of the role of women more generally in the Church:

The role of women - surprise, surprise!!

To explore the need for multiple ministries by women of all cultures and nationalities for the pastoral and theological growth of the People of God.

Remodelling the Church to include the proper place of women and give them a realistic voice and an equal voice.

Women in Church and Church Leadership - we are not an aberration, but more than 50% of the population!

The role of females in the Church- I find it completely illogical that we have a huge shortage of effective Church leadership (far greater than just a lack of priests) and yet we rule out 50% of the population as having any significant or leading role to play based purely on gender.

A number of participants advocated the ordination of women to the diaconate. For some, this would be a pragmatic move in itself:

The inclusion of women in leadership roles in the Church like the Diaconate. There are more women than men in the older population groups and it just makes sense.

An increased role for women in the Church, particularly in the role of Deacon.

Women Deacons. Wives of deacons often go through the training with their husbands, and women in general must make 80% of the church attendees during the weekly Masses.

For others, however, the ordination of women to the diaconate was perceived as the first step along the way to the ordination of women to the priesthood:

Begin the move towards female equality including priests by opening up the diaconate to women.

Women being more involved in the Church. I have prayed all my life for the ordination of women deacons and eventually priests.

One Listening Group participant acknowledged the limited scope of the Synod in taking forward the ordination of women:

Women Priests (though I know this won't be discussed) - The Synod can't change the rules!!!
But take this message to Francis.

Nonetheless, the issue was repeatedly raised:

Planning for the inevitable closure of our churches. Is it time to think about asking Rome to consider female priesthood?

Is it time to have female priests? I think yes. It's the 21st Century and gender equality is huge. Why do Catholic priests have to be men? It will most likely cause huge uproar and dramatics in the press but isn't it time? Less priests/lower Mass attendance isn't going away.

Women priests - we have so few priests (especially younger ones) and I see women doing all the other duties and keeping the Church together - we are in the 21st century and attitudes have changed everywhere, and the Church should follow.

Women priests? When is this going to happen and why is there a delay? Are any objections not more traditional than theological based on the situation of women in the past?

Women priests: why is the Church SO AFRAID of women? And don't give me any rubbish about coming from man.

And one Listening Group suggested that women's ordination should not be limited to the Diaconate or Priesthood:

The Church should make better use of the Heads of Women's Congregations by making them all bishops.

There was, of course, some disagreement:

The role of women in the Church: The Church of England promoted this to try to encourage membership, but it seemed to be the death rattle rather than a growth engine. Probably I am against women becoming priests etc

[The Synod should] emphasise the fact that topics like married priests and women priests should be decided by the Pope and Bishops, not the laity.

C. Enhancing the Role of the Laity in the Life of the Church.

Can we at last have a greater role for the laity, and especially for women? These are always being promised but....

(a) A call to recognise the vocation of the laity.

One person summarised much of what is found in this section in the request that the Synod should 'develop the sense of vocation for the laity'. One Listening Group participant expressed this vocation as follows:

People with gifts and ideas and abilities looking towards each other to bring changes in line with the love and the gifts in us from our creator: we all have a ministry and capabilities and ability to grow, develop and encouraging others. We're all leaders with gifts from God

through Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit, awaiting recognition and use to bring about healing and change in the world.

Yet several participants expressed a sense that the Church neither fully acknowledged nor adequately supported their vocation in the world:

How can the laity be given recognition for bearing witness to their faith in their everyday family living, with friends, in work and in encounters with the public? How can the community of the Church give recognition to the laity for the good lives they lead?

The place of laity. A recognition of how much influence they can have. The opportunity to be supported by clergy and religious in their vocation in family life and society.

Nor, indeed, was it yet appreciated by many lay people:

Recognition of the gifts, dignity and value of all lay people, first by raising their own awareness.

(b) Relieving the priest of the non-sacramental burden

A widespread concern for the welfare of priests - and an awareness of the risk of them becoming overloaded - has already been noted. For many participants, the solution was for the laity to relieve the priests of much (or, indeed, all) of their administrative burden. As one participant put it, 'there are many responsibilities that could be undertaken by lay people, freeing our priests to carry out those duties and functions only they can.' For some participants, this related primarily to domestic tasks, which have - in fact - traditionally been carried out by laywomen:

Get more people involved with the upkeep of the church by leaving positions and jobs open. e.g. Open weekly/monthly list at the back of church for anyone to sign after Mass for church cleaning at a particular time that week or visiting the sick or helping with the aged [...] How can we help the priest this week, cleaning, cooking, driving around, answering phones etc. Many people will be glad to help but may feel that they have to be in a clique with other church members.

However, others suggested extending the potential range of roles for the laity beyond the patterns of the past:

Let our priests concentrate on the sacraments and recognise that we have an educated laity who are capable of administering a parish. This would free up the time of priests and allow them to undertake pastoral visits.

Unshackle our clergy from meetings and get them in to our schools, playgrounds, youth centres, nursing homes, into our homes and hospitals. Many priests just celebrate Mass and then they're out the door.

Relieve the priest from the arranging and officiating at a funeral service for someone who hasn't attended church for years and years and whose family are not interested. Let this be done by bereavement groups. So, the priest can spend more valuable time with the youth.

How can the laity take a more active role to alleviate the pressure on priests? We already have people who can conduct funeral services could we also have people who could baptise children.

(c) Developing lay ministry in a collaborative context

Many participants, however, were interested in seeing an expansion of lay responsibility and voice so that the dynamics of Church leadership would change:

Vocation of the laity be properly recognised alongside that of the priesthood and not as an inferior state – God calls us in different ways – none superior to others.

Would the Synod consider if lay people are being motivated by their pastors to respond to the changing needs of the Church and the world? If so, great; if not, ask why not?

Take the focus away from liturgical ministries, sacristans, Eucharistic ministers, readers, musicians and Father- we are all children of God and have a baptismal responsibility to act not just to please the priest.

Greater power to and involvement of lay people in all aspects of Church life and organisation.

The last quotation introduces a further dimension to the laity-clergy relationship: shared decision-making. A number of participants raised this, suggesting that the Synod should discuss:

The role of the laity. The Church hierarchy seems to cling on to authority. It can't go on doing this.

Greater power to and involvement of lay people in all aspects of Church life and organisation.

The Church needs to acknowledge the wealth of skills at parish level, allow parishioners to organise and control non-liturgical issues, it is their parish, they or their families will be there whilst priests come and go.

As the vision of the priest determines the future of the parish then, if the priest-in-charge values an issue/project, he will pursue it; if he doesn't, he will not. This raises questions about power; accountability; parish development; clergy training.

More value given to the laity and recognise that the Priest is not always right, and that inclusion is the key to a brighter and more secure Church.

How do we give the authority for the parish to the people of the parish instead of them being at the mercy (or whim) of a parish priest?

Several participants used the language of 'collaborative ministry' to express their desires for the future shape of the Church:

Ensure that the Archdiocese really has a shared vision emphasizing the importance of Collaborative and Lay Ministry. Despite Vatican II, this isn't always the case?

We thought that collaborative ministry would work best if the Archdiocese developed guidelines and provided training on it for its priest and if it was made the preferred working practice for parishes across the Archdiocese with accountability a priority. Could this be discussed?

One Listening Group participant stressed that collaboration had to draw upon gifts of all, and not merely of a select few within the parish:

I feel it very important certain gifts and ministries should be shared and are not meant to be restricted to one individual, thus blocking some people from using their gifts.

A cautionary note about practicalities was sounded by another Listening Group:

Looking to the not-too distant future: more women in full-time work, the gig economy and the later retirement age will impact the capacity for parishioners to volunteer and reduce the availability of a 'pool of talent' among the laity.

Two people queried the need for the ordained ministry altogether - one of them suggesting that the future lay with the replacement of the ordained by lay ministry:

What is the place of bishops and clergy in the Church? Are they really needed?

The clergy. Total disaster area: a culture of self-entitlement and mendacity. We need to explore how we can continue what Vatican II started: involvement of lay ministry growing at last to maturity and making an ordained priesthood effectively redundant.

However, some participants thought the opposite:

Stop the lay people taking over control of the Church.

Sometimes when lay people take over, they think they own it – it's a clique. This is dangerous.

d. The ministry of the Bishop

The discussion of ministry focussed primarily on the ordained ministries of diaconate and presbyterate, and the vocation and role of the laity. Consideration of the ministerial role of the bishop, on the other hand, was notably muted. This almost certainly reflects the lived experience of lay people who have little or no direct contact with the Archbishop himself. Nonetheless, a couple of themes can be picked from the few references that were made to the episcopal ministry in response to this fourth question; these do echo concerns expressed in relation to the priests.

The first touches on the question of formation:

The Episcopate. Should bishops be required to have pastoral experience before appointment? Is it still valid for bishops to make up rules such as Friday abstinence? Do the faithful take any heed anyway?

The second is the whole area of accountability. A desire for increased accountability that has been noted elsewhere in this Report here surfaces again:

[The Synod should discuss] greater openness and accountability of everyone in the diocese from the Archbishop downwards.

[The Synod should consider] that we improve our transparency both between the Church and laity and between those in leadership and the clergy. That we have a written covenant with the people of God and the bishop has a written covenant with his priests.

Two participants suggested that formalised structures for ongoing evaluation of clergy should be implemented, to be run by, but also considering, the bishops:

[The Synod should consider] lines of accountability for priests, i.e. like an OFSTED to ensure quality of parish leadership, run by Vatican and cardinals/ archbishops.

That there should be greater discernment in the granting and keeping of the priestly faculties of confession and preaching. The damage done by bad preaching is horrendous and a lack of mercy in the confessional is even worse. These should be dealt with, and deacons', priests' and bishops' competencies assessed.

This element of oversight exercised by the bishop was reflected in the following submission:

More frequent visits by bishops, archbishops etc to ordinary parishes so they have more of a presence.

4. Liturgy and Spirituality

A large number of suggestions for Synod topics related to the practice of the faith. Participants revisited several of the issues they had raised in responses to the previous three questions, now expressing them as proposals for discussion. The material here has been arranged under three sub-headings:

- A. The celebration of the Eucharist
- B. The Sacrament of Reconciliation
- C. Spirituality

A. The Celebration of the Eucharist

‘Why do many people say the Mass is boring?’

Many felt that the way in which Mass was celebrated was itself turning people away, although explanations and solutions varied. For some, the drop-off was due to a loss of a sense of the sacred:

[The Synod should discuss] recovering the solemnity of the Holy Mass from a generation of priests who seem to lack faith and whose main offerings are entertainment and social commentary.

[The Synod should discuss how to] make Church a more prayerful place. Encourage silence before the Blessed Sacrament before the start of Mass. Recover a sense of the sacred, something that really seems lacking in the Church now.

[The Synod should discuss how] to develop a richer and more meaningful Liturgy. Reclaim some of our symbolism. We seem to be becoming terribly bland and trite.

Keep silence in the church before and after Mass as the Body of Christ we are part of it (the branches).

Recover and educate in our Catholic heritage - most especially in music but in art and architecture as well - as powerful instruments of supporting the Faith and conversion.

Will the Mass be restored to its former glory?

Some people felt that the Synod should restore and mandate earlier liturgical practices, particularly relating to the reception of Holy Communion:

Head covering in church. [i.e. for women]

Respect for the Blessed Sacrament

To stop communion in the hand and return to the tongue. Altar rails back so can kneel to receive Communion on the tongue.

I would like to see priests only giving out Holy Communion – although I am a eucharistic minister myself, I don't feel comfortable handling the purity of the Body of Christ (the Eucharist).

Stop turning back on God, especially when handshaking.

An endorsement for priests to be able to celebrate the Mass in an eastward facing position, in order to encourage prayer at Mass.

For others, a solution to the problem of non-attendance lay in the opposite direction:

The solemnity of the Catholic is wonderful, but maybe we need to somewhat more upbeat either side of the Consecration.

Explore options for different ways to come together and worship. United prayers in different settings and in different structures. Mass is not attracting younger people in some areas. They may find alternative forms of worship accessible. Talk to people, ask for ideas.

Get rid of all the Latin – people sing/say but do not understand it.

Making Mass Meaningful - Mass is beautiful but it can become a ritual rather than a meaningful expression of love. Make it feel relevant and that the community wants to join in and be a part of it. We need to feel the love from the altar. Make Priests Happy - quite often at Mass there are no smiles, there is a monotonous tone, and there is a feeling that the priest is simply going through the motions of Mass. We need to see their love of God to inspire us to go out and show it too.

Look at ways to make the celebration of Mass more vibrant and engaging to a modern congregation – music/technology.

Why does Mass have to be so serious? I have known several Priests who encouraged the congregation to be joyful. Instead of just mumbling through the responses and whispering our way through the hymns, why can't we all be more cheerful while celebrating Mass?

A rather different opinion was voiced by someone else:

Priests in general seem to think that Mass is a joke, and that it's all about them being funny or popular. People hate it. They just want Mass, celebrated in a respectful way.

A desire to reinforce the dimension of community engagement was expressed by several - sometimes accompanied by radical proposals:

Modern celebration of Mass (people being more involved), getting to know one another instead of kneeling behind people week after week not getting to know our brothers and sisters.

The format of the Mass. Why do we all face away from each other and be preached to. Put tables around, have meals together to share the faith we have. Be more relaxed, interact, ask friends to come, share food, discuss openly the Gospel of the day.

Several asked that the Synod should consider the liturgical needs of particular groups within the Church:

Can we find inclusive ways of celebrating the liturgy that speak to people with different tastes - the young, those who value dignity and tradition?

Can we please make Mass more interesting, relevant, understandable and accessible to all families? If a family makes the effort to come to Mass there is no point in making the time totally boring, they won't come again!

Use modern technology to connect with people, especially young people, do not discriminate against people who cannot attend sacraments on a regular basis, Stream services to parishes who do not have regular priest, service could be used for the sick, hospitals and nursing homes.

A number of people used this question to raise liturgical issues of a health or hygienic nature; they were asking that the Synod should set archdiocesan policy in a number of areas:

A policy for the distribution of gluten-free hosts so that coeliac sufferers do not feel a nuisance.

Make provision for anyone who won't take from the chalice for hygiene reasons e.g. have small individual cups as well as the chalice.

Uniformity in all churches regarding intinction to save the embarrassment of being refused. For health reasons some people choose not to receive from the chalice, and this should be respected.

Handshake of peace: stop it. It's awful sitting next to someone who has coughed and sneezed all through the Mass then they give you their hand just before you go to communion too. I am far from alone in this.

Concern about the current practice of First Holy Communion were expressed:

[The Synod should discuss] making First Communions less consumerist.

Threaded through this section of the Report have been the tensions between what we might label as 'progressive' and 'conservative' approaches to the liturgy that were identified in earlier questions. Several people identified a need to find a balance between the two - in a sense, to look in both directions:

How we find the balance between progress and tradition. Resisting the urge to fight back by rejecting the work of the 2nd Vatican Council.

Modernisation of some of our devotional practices and music while retaining the best of our traditional hymns and Gregorian chant.

How do we cater for everyone's needs - conservative worship vs evangelical, quiet vs noisy, internal looking vs external witnessing etc?

Need to make the Mass/service a bit up to date, current and new. But need to keep to the values in the Gospels and the Catholic Church, adhered to and/or explored.

As one Listening Group pointed out, the challenge in much of what has preceded is how to make changes at Mass without alienating existing members.

B. The Sacrament of Reconciliation

'Confession needs to be available, EVERYWHERE.'

The scant discussion of the Sacrament of Reconciliation in response to previous questions has been noted. The issue, however, emerged more strongly in response to this fourth question. Several participants made a plea that the Sacrament should be more widely available:

Reconciliation - Jesus is a loving father and not a judgmental distant character. To make this sacrament more available.

There was an accompanying sense that in some places, the practice of the clergy setting aside regular times for confession had slipped:

Priest should make scheduled and dedicated time for confession instead of by request.

Weekly Confessions at least for one hour.

Alongside this, several expressed a concern that many Catholics - and especially the young - had abandoned the use of this sacrament. One person suggested that a return to the absolute anonymity of the confessional would help to restore the discipline:

Confession seems to be largely irrelevant to many Catholics, especially the younger. Make confession more central and abolish face to face only confessionals. Preserve anonymity.

However, the most frequently expressed response was a call for permission to celebrate the third form of the Rite, with General Absolution:

There was a time when we had general absolution services and the church would be full. Now hardly anyone goes to confession. Could that be reintroduced?

General confession introduced in to church every season. Christmas, Beginning of Lent and within 6 weeks after Easter.

That an indult be sought for the use of General Absolution in England and Wales.

Encourage more Catholics to take Holy Communion. Some are reluctant to go to confession. A Reconciliation Mass would overcome this. Everyone could collectively acknowledge and express sorrow, regret and ask forgiveness. The Priest could then give Absolution to all. This could grow the congregation.

Meanwhile, one participant felt that the therapeutic scope of Confession could be broadened out:

I think the Catholic Church has an opportunity to provide for people in desperate need of it, council, and to allow people to let go of things that cut them up in their lives through confession, but this has to be more open than it is today, more like a counselling service rather than a penance. I think that the Catholic Church could promote positive mental and physical health but only if it is prepared to put aside some of the older practices and modernise its way of worship. I also believe it should take direct and binary stances on issues instead of seeming to shy away from having a voice. It should be something that young people can be proud to say they are a part of and not fear ridicule from friends.

C. Spirituality

'The Church feels "establishment", but faith feels "intimate"' - how can we marry the two?'

Looking beyond the celebration of the sacraments, a number of people asked that the Synod should consider ways of helping them in their own life of prayer:

A return, if it is lost or not taught now, to mystical spirituality as of the early Church Fathers.

Initiatives to develop, and deepen, individual spirituality to be offered in all parishes.

From primary schools upwards, how to make personal prayer and silent time to get to know Jesus, His Mother and our family in God's love.

Holiness. Priests must lead the way by their example. We are all called to be holy. Priests should pray more with their parishioners e.g. prayer groups, Rosary, catechesis, Bible study. This is their responsibility to build up the Church.

A number of people wanted the Synod to consider prayer or study groups.

Opportunities to engage with other Catholics and not just for one hour every Sunday. More opportunities for fellowship, Bible study, teaching, evangelical events, worship etc. I've rediscovered my Faith recently and want to immerse myself in Christian life, but opportunity is so limited for Catholics.

The Bible ... can you have more time with courses to understand what is being said I feel there could be weekly study groups where interested people could discuss their thoughts and issues, people want to learn more about the Gospel, reading, listening and living the words are we doing enough

Finally, at the close of this section it is important to acknowledge the contribution of one couple who completed the on-line survey together:

We as 70 plus year olds are happy with our religion without changes.

5. Learn from the Scandals

'How do we recover our moral authority in the shadow of the abuse scandal?'

The continuing impact of the child abuse and other scandals led many to ask the Synod to ensure that lessons were learned from the past. People called for greater transparency, better safeguarding, and zero tolerance. One participant summarised the opinions of many:

The perception is that the Catholic Church is still in denial about this. The actions of the Church so far have been inadequate, more concrete action must be taken. Justice must be seen to be done.

Clearly, several participants shared in that perception of denial, demanding that the Church ceased 'covering up' abuse, and casting doubt as to whether or not the current safeguarding procedures were adequate. For example, one person wrote,

I'm not sure how the Archbishop can honestly say that safeguards are in place across the diocese to prevent abuse when training is voluntary, safeguarding reps are volunteers with varying ability and there is no 'audit' of parish procedures- we need to invest greatly in this area.

Whilst responses included the condemnation of perpetrators, it was noteworthy that the Church itself was the primary focus of criticism: the historic tardiness in responding to the scandal appears to have framed a continuing sense of anger and distress:

A better response to Church scandals - to-date the response has been a bigger scandal than the actual initial failings. Again, it lacks compassion and is totally out of touch with how the rest of the world views things.

The challenge presented to the Church by these perceptions were set out by two participants:

How can we move forward from the abuse that has tainted the reputation of the Church?
How so we regain people who no longer wish to associate with the Church because of these events? How can we regain the trust of the lay people in the clergy?

At Synod 2020 I would like the Church to be open, as open as it can be regarding sexual abuse, so many non-Catholics despise the Catholic Church because of the perception that so many of its priests are sexually evil. This MUST CHANGE!

A strong sense emerges from these submissions that zero-tolerance should be the default position, and the repeated use of expressions such as 'rooting-out' perpetrators, ending 'brushing under the carpet' and of 'complicit clergy' convey the emotional intensity that many brought to this issue. A few participants also drew questions of homosexuality among the clergy and of the potential contribution to the problem of mandatory clerical celibacy into the discussion.

A few also voiced a call for fairness - which as one respondent noted, includes 'appropriate punishments for crimes committed.' Others broadened the range of abusive sins committed beyond that of children alone:

Acknowledge ALL abuse - adult, financial, etc. Need openness.

Clerical abuse of women, men and children and the failure of the hierarchy to care for victims.

The extent of such abuse - and its dreadful capacity to lead to further sin and suffering down the line - was underlined by one respondent:

Encourage compassion and understanding for those Religious who joined orders to escape poverty at an age when they were too young to really grasp what they were doing. There is no excuse for paedophilia or other abuse, but we must accept the Church preyed on the vulnerable in more ways than one.

Overall, the challenge faced by the Church as viewed by the world in the light of these scandals was summarized by one participant:

[The Synod should discuss] how the Church can be seen as more humble in the light of recent scandals.

6. Improve the Public Image of the Church

'The Catholic Church is supposed to be a beacon that shines out to all, to give hope, joy encouragement and love, and much more. But the flame of the beacon is very hard to see.'

The challenge faced by the Archdiocese is to hold in mind the last comment of the preceding section - concerning humility - as it seeks to engage with the world. In response to this challenge, many people regarded a need for transparency and accountability as pressing. Many talked about the image of the Church and how this could be improved:

How can we better equip ourselves to answer questions about our faith from those not of our faith community, particularly if they are hostile, perhaps due to previous bad experiences within the Church?

To promote the good works of the Catholic Church more in mainstream media.

Strengthening further the Church's image of a loving and caring mother.

For me and people in the community, the Catholic Church doesn't serve a purpose for them. They are defunct Catholics. They don't really understand the Church. When I was growing up, we didn't know what the Bible was. You were told God hated you, didn't love you. We were all damned. A lot of people still think that is what the Catholic Church teaches.

How to encourage Catholics to be strong and stand for their faith in a way that doesn't alienate others but recognises that we have to lead by example and acknowledge goodness and truth, not be afraid to celebrate it.

Be more vocal about our successes, publish our achievements. The only time Catholicism gets national publicity is when there is a scandal ... SING the praises of the Church's successes ... HOW else will people know that we work locally, nationally, internationally and globally for all mankind?

7. Make More Effective Use of the Media

'Making the Church more in touch with the technological age we live in'

Concerns about the role and influence of social media have already been noted in regard to Question One, above. Nor were those concerns entirely absent from the proposals for Synod topics:

Much of the media (papers, soaps, game shows, gambling) gives the pleasure of the Roman Colosseum (and the brothel) without moral guidance.

However, several people in response to this fourth question also posited a (cautiously) positive approach to an increased use of the Media by the Church. At its most straight-forward, this approach related to the long-established media:

[Make] increase use of TV to publish the message to wide range of viewers – e.g. EWTN.

However, others were concerned to broaden the range of media:

How does the Church leverage modern communications and social media to promote its message?

[Develop] online websites that attract our young people should be much more closely monitored to make it as safe as possible for youngsters (teenagers) to join in discussions on the future of the Church. After all, it is their future!

One Focus Group participant suggested that the Church should actively harness the new technology as an educational tool (e.g. an App) for its members:

I think the Synod should talk about technology and the Church, ... let's simply say, 'teaching, technology and the Church'. The Mass, we have. Homily, yes, but can we just look at one product? So, they can say, 'Let's develop a system that will teach those who are in church these basic things that you're talking about, there's five things that we need to learn,' or whatever it is. And nothing is free. And, 'We have some money, we can get some money, let's develop that, tick the box. If you're inside the church, you can learn about these things very easily, and we're using the technology to do that.' That's very specific. I think the Synod needs to develop that.

Another, Listening Group participant, suggested that the Synod should consider, 'funding for an online YouTube-style outreach/education programme for Liverpool.'

Some concerns about modern technology - especially social media - remained. However, one Listening Group participant said that the Church's guidance was valuable but underused:

As a Church we should support our parishioners in relation to good use of social media. Young people should be able to seek advice and know what the Church's position is on this. Many children graduate from primary to secondary school and are given their first phone. High schools try to discourage the use of mobile phones and in some instances ban them. Young people leaving school and moving on to university will need phones daily. We need to (with the help of psychologists I would think) run courses for secondary school pupils and students new to university/work. So much unhappiness and misery could be avoided if children were taught 'best practice' use of this incredibly powerful tool. This should be to complement the local education authority young person's guide to using phones where possible. I would further advocate that many parents need retraining on the responsible use of mobile phones - with a Christian perspective. The use of mobile phones and video gaming should be explained in relation to addiction.

8. Church Organisation

'Reshaping our archdiocesan structures and organisation to be fit for the 21st century'

A recurring question was what will happen after the Synod. Responses included a number of discussion points that mapped out practical suggestions for the way ahead. The calls that were made for transparency in response to the sexual abuse scandals found their echo here:

[The Synod should discuss] Mandatory ongoing structures within the Church for listening/consultation about all matters affecting the faithful (at every level) [...] Transparent, inclusive, properly representative involvement by laity and clergy in selecting Church leaders.

There was also acknowledgement of just how challenging such a consultative structure would be:

The views of the Church are very different in various contents. Keeping everyone together is going to be a very difficult thing.

One person proposed that the Synod should discuss establishing a permanent archdiocesan pastoral council as a way of continuing the consultation:

The creation of a pastoral council as follow up to the Synod. Drawing say about 150 members perhaps one priest and three Laity per pastoral area plus Episcopal Vicars etc, the bishops, chairs of key committees elected deacons and religious, expert members and ecumenical observers.

At parish level, some people thought that the Synod should re-think the entire notion of parish and its traditional leadership structures:

A rethink of the concept of parish. I am not suggesting anything other than a move away from a rigidity which creates a barrier to community and cooperation. I will leave it to others to explore the possibilities!

The Church needs to be relevant to our communities (country, diocese, parish, age group etc.). One size does not fit all.

We need to ensure the leadership of our Christian communities / parishes. The traditional model of this leadership and sacramental service is no longer viable. What model can we propose?

One person, however, insisted that the hierarchical authority of the Church could not be ignored:

The Church is not a democracy. People must understand that some of the Church's teachings are unchangeable and while that might be inconvenient to them, what's important is the salvation of souls, not people getting what they want.

9. Education

'Role of secondary schools and links to Church: faith and education'

As the theme of education - and particularly of the role of Catholic Schools - has already been discussed at some length, it should come as no surprise that it re-emerged as a proposed topic for the Synod. It was here that the call for adult religious education emerged with particular force, and it may be useful to read the following against the doctrinal questions raised at the head of this section of the Report:

Catechesis of adults and children as a priority, to correct the lamentable lack of knowledge of the faith by Catholics as a result of catastrophic introduction of 'weaving the web' programmes in schools.

I would like to see Catechesis for all ages, not just children, so that those in middle age can grow their faith, and those who are elderly can prepare themselves for the inevitable end.

Better education for the laity. The Catholic Church is based on Scripture, tradition and the sacraments. We need updating on the concept of sin, forgiveness absolution and the need for the sacrament of penance in our lives today.

Teaching/ opportunities to fully understand the faith you were baptised into. The Ongoing development of what it is Catholics are called to believe from preschool to adulthood and beyond. Because my faith is constantly challenged by life situations and needs to grow and change with them.

Teach people theology – don't pass on to next generation a theology of a punitive God REQUIRING Jesus' crucifixion.

One Listening Group offered an extended and detail consideration of what was needed:

We are particularly bothered by the lack of meaningful teaching and explanation of our faith to adults. Younger generations are well versed in understandings of the nature of the universe and much accepted scientific explanations and current paradigms. Most people we meet, family members, friends, professional associates, find that their understanding of what is real and what is possible collides with Christian convictions – virgin birth, water into wine, etc. and in much of the western world there has been a vast increase in the number of 'unbelievers'. However, many theologians offer understandings based on what some call 'historical – metaphorical' paradigms. The Gospels combine memory and testimony; historical memory with metaphorical narrative. These are compatible with modern scientific world views and provides a challenging basis for our faith, spirituality and moral Focus. We need to look closely at how the Church explains the life and teachings of Jesus otherwise we lose most of the current and future young members of our Christian families – look at the census figures. [Therefore they recommended] To explain the Gospels in a manner at one with current scientific paradigms and so provide a sound and rational basis for our understanding of the Gospel accounts of Jesus' teaching and actions and our beliefs – and thereby of our values relating to personal and public attitudes, behaviour, morality.

The 'Ordinary Catholics' Focus Group also raised the question of scriptural interpretation, and related it to preaching at Mass:

I think its interpretation of the Bible, like you said. I think it needs to be modernised. I think the priests need to almost teach properly. I don't mean teach, but when you're teaching a lesson you have your aims, your objectives, and, 'What do I want by the end of this?' A sermon, in my opinion, that's probably classical teaching. But you've got an audience there. There are certain things you should do from start to finish. And it's about getting the message of what the Bible is today. [...] I mean how it applies. [...] what I find an awful lot of the time is that I'm sat in a sermon in Mass, going, - 'All you're doing is basically just rewording that Bible passage to me'.

However, the majority of people who raised the question of education were interested in schooling. Many of these thought that Catholic schools were crucial to sustaining the faith, but that this importance was not being taken seriously; more, they thought, needed to be done to make Catholic schools formative of new Catholics.

Active Input in Education - there is a lot going on in Catholic schools, but there needs to be a greater push behind it to show that the Catholic Life of the pupils is more important than exam targets. A greater emphasis needs to be put on the importance of chaplaincy work.

Perhaps, in the Primary Schools, the Church could hold a children's Mass on Friday afternoon 2.30 - 3.30pm. Then they would get to know the Mass. Parents, grandparents picking them up could also join in with them. Mass is held on a Saturday, why not Friday?

This was echoed by the New Arrivals Focus Group.

And another thing I want to add is, like he said, how to attract the young to our Church. They should talk about maybe through doing Christmas or Easter, if they can arrange some practical Christian drama for them. I know they do it in primary school, but this secondary school, they've lost it. And most of them have lost the touch. My son, they did all those things in primary school, but in secondary school- Some of them don't even know who Jesus is. I mean, what are you doing? So, during our festive periods, like Easter and so on and so- For the Catholic schools, they should talk about how to practise what we are preaching. Bring it live, let the children participate in a kind of a drama. Take one part of what is happening at that time. The agenda – one of the agendas – should be how to bring Jesus into the life of every young person in secondary school?

Another person thought that more involvement of priests in the schools would help:

I would like to see it made mandatory for Parish Priests to be on the board of Governors of their schools. They should be there to give religious guidance as not all teachers in Catholic schools are Catholic and will happily whittle away the time for religious education given in schools to other topics if they are allowed. It's incredible that they do not seek this post.

Clergy need to be in schools regularly, Primary and Secondary, mixing with parents at the school gates and being at, say, secondary sports events, youth clubs.

Several people asked that the Synod should consider the content of Catholic religious education:

My nephew no longer wishes to be a Catholic. Hardly surprising since his Catholic primary school taught him that going to Mass every Sunday is not important and 'nobody really believes' in the Real Presence anymore! I would like the Synod to think what 'Catholic Education' means today.

[The Synod should discuss] taking more control of our schools and what is taught.

We need to begin teaching the catechism again, as many faithful have grown confused.

The question of whether admission to Catholic schools should be more restrictive has already been raised under Question Two, and resurfaced here:

Parents wanting their children to go to a Catholic school should attend church.

Headteachers of Catholic schools should arrange Masses for their pupils, so they all attend Mass at least once a month

However, another participant proposed that the Synod should consider a very different way forward:

Allowing children to attend Catholic Schools whether or not they go to church. This is one way of ensuring that the children get to know about Jesus Christ. Seeing parents in Mass who obviously are coming with their children so they can get a place in a Catholic school is not the way forward.

Finally, one Focus Group drew attention to what it perceived to be the negative influence of some external organisations active in some UK schools:

Challenging the use of organisations such as UK Military School and Commando Joe's in our schools, which actually perpetuates militarism and the lure and use of violence as a solution

to conflict under the guise of character and resilience building; and instead promote Peace Studies in our schools as an alternative.

10. Review the Use of Church Property

‘Using churches and church buildings to better support the community.’

A few people thought that the Synod should consider the use and management of Church property and investments. One perspective was that a reduction in the Church’s property portfolio diminished its local presence:

Sadly, the authority of the once powerful Church is being undermined by selling of Church land and property for quick benefit, losing presence in the community.

However, a diametrically opposite approach was also proposed by other participants:

We have too many churches and not enough priests, we should close some and bring the smaller congregations together to give a more meaningful sense of community, sell off the crumbling churches and use the money to update the churches that are left, many of which don’t meet the disability access standards with no disabled toilet, no ramps, no signage for people with learning disabilities.

More church closures. A full and honest appraisal of the physical structures that we have so that we have only what we need, and the surplus is no longer a barrier to evangelization.

Re-distribution of the wealth of the Church - sell-off disused properties and invest in charitable works to support the weakest of society.

Opening closed buildings/churches as seasonal shelters/youth centres/safe houses for young people. half-way houses.

The contribution of another, survey respondent, broadens the discourse to include a review of domestic provision for priests:

Look closely at your finances, parishioners are tired of giving constantly. Take a hard look at your property portfolio. Empty presbyteries, and priests living in some cases in 4 bed new builds. That can't be right.

11. Provide Political Leadership and Social Justice

‘The Church as servant, as Good Samaritan...it is here to serve, not to be served, to serve the oppressed those who suffer.’

Many people would like to see discussion of the Church’s role in leading on political and social issues, including the petitioning of politicians and practical support for marginalised or disadvantaged groups.

Could our Church find ways of creating jobs, this would be better than food banks. With our imagination have training places for new jobs, what can we do for homeless, plans more than giving food.

More pastoral work, e.g. offering food and drinks for homeless and disadvantaged. This might need to be done by having paid positions; you can't expect the same lay people to be volunteering all the time.

Bold opposition to warfare, to government investment in nuclear weapons, to militarisation of society, especially our young. Turn weapons into ploughshares.

Supporting children from low income families in education.

Addressing inequalities - preference to work with the poor and the marginalized.

Catholic teaching on the environment and social justice is powerfully articulated - but somehow ignored by politicians. Why? How can we make our voices heard?

The Church needs to 'rebrand' itself offering support to politicians and others with Christian values and commenting on all relevant topics which come before parliament. Catholic members of parliament who propose unfair policies affecting vulnerable people need to be reminded of the foundation of their belief.

[The Church should provide] Free sanitary wear for all females (no matter what religion they are). Fulfil basic (food/water etc.) needs for all individuals no matter what religion they are. The Catholic Church should offer financial assistance/aid to help fund sustainable energy i.e. solar panels etc.

[The Synod should consider] what practical actions can be taken in the Archdiocese to become the 'poor Church for the poor' that Pope Francis is asking us to become.

A few argued that disused buildings and Church wealth could be used for social good:

Open the churches to the homeless in winter.

Off-loading surplus assets (buildings etc) and using resources for those in need - sharing our wealth.

Could some of our churches which sadly are no longer in use be adapted for the homeless?

12. Parish and Local Community

'Being an active presence in community life, local politics, local action, etc.'

Many people thought that the synod should discuss the Church's relationship to the local community:

[The Synod should discuss] The world beyond the parish – don't make this all about keeping the parishes going. Put priests and resources into ministries beyond that reach out to those on the margins of society and in the shadows of life.

Opening up of churches so that they bridge the gap between the worshipping community inside and the people that live round about who never cross the threshold.

Parishes as centres of social action for the needy in our communities. Parishes as places where community is built and nourished.

The Church needs to reflect the needs of its LOCAL communities, be RELEVANT to them, offering unique rather than generic solutions.

Enabling the Church to reach out into the community.

The Church's work in this region. How do we reach out beyond the laity in the pews?

How can the Church reach out to our wider community and engage with them? How can we be more active in the community and not behind the doors of the church? How can we show other people us doing the good work as the lord intended us to do and encourage others to do so?

13. Creating an Open Community

'How do we make the parish a place of friendship and concern for one another?'

Many would like the Church to take on a broader social role, offering activities and events for its members.

Tackling loneliness in our world. Sharing a meal together like Jesus. Sharing food around a table is sacred and people feel warmth and get to know people's names and about them more than standing next to then in a Mass like silent strangers.

Making church not just a place to go to Mass.

Visiting the sick and dying. I couldn't get a priest the day my mum died.

Some suggested that emphasising the community role of the Church was important:

Making the parish a hub of the community offering support and belonging rather than just a place of worship.

A Post Office in church would be good, community cafe, playgroup, craft group and other groups.

Interaction – I feel that apart from attendance at Mass we don't come together as often as we should. As examples, do we need to provide 'clubs' or 'meeting places' for the elderly, where they can meet, talk, get warm in winter and stay active? For the youth do we need sports activities, or more?

A recurring theme was the need for young people to have a wide range of openings into the broader life of their parish:

Many churches have no social activities, I think something like this would encourage younger people to come.

The children want more involvement in their local church, with activities and groups tailored to them that do not involve any ministry, such as games nights, film clubs, youth groups and football teams - in short, they want to be included in the wider community.

Church should be more fun (that's what my kids tell me). Need more modern hymns, revive church choirs/musician, clearer explanations of readings during Mass. Create community spirit (e.g. drinks/social/table tennis/drawing club after church - young can mix with old).

Given the parlous state of our current parish structure, should we be looking to encourage and foster the establishment and development of Small Christian Communities (including some specifically for younger people)?

14. Ecology

'What's the point of discussing the future of the Archdiocese if all the members of the Archdiocese are merrily contributing to the destruction of the planet?'

We have already noted that many participants pointed to the environment in their responses to Question Two. Now, the ecological outlook of the Church was suggested as a topic for discussion by the Synod.

Climate change. Speak, but green our church estates, churches, schools. Plant trees recycle in all offices, meeting rooms, kitchens. Involve parishioners, especially the young in all such action.

Climate crisis. Act now, what can, and must we do. Teach non-confrontational protest, challenge the establishment, provide spiritual and ethical guidance [...] Sustainability, resourcefulness, prevention of production of litter and useless objects/matters.

How to take ownership of our planet? Change the view that recycling, the use of renewable energy is for someone else to sort out, and not my responsibility.

It would be great to have the Church reflect more on how the climate and animals are a blessing to humans, and how all should be respected.

One individual Listening Group participant recommended the following:

New Zealand is one of the least religious countries. The earthquake which struck Christchurch caused widespread destruction killing 185 people. After the earthquake attendance at religious services rose dramatically and stayed high for months. There is good evidence to show where life is more precarious people increasingly turn to religion. It therefore it follows that what world religions teach about environmental issues will become increasingly important. We need to speak out strongly about this. Locally can we develop our own green initiatives - e.g. can we have solar panels on the church roof for hot water. Do we need triple glazing? Ensure we are recycling and not using disposable anything where possible. Would it be an idea to have an electric charger for cars which people could pay to use? Cut down on priests travelling to attend meetings - encourage use of videoconferencing (e.g. use of Zoom).

Several related their ecological concerns to *Laudato Si'*:

[The Synod should discuss] how this Archdiocese is to embrace and live out in all ways the theology expressed by the Pope in *Laudato Si'* (the eco theology). After all, ALL living things are out neighbours or has the Church forgotten this important and salient fact?

[The Synod should discuss] how to bring the wisdom and teaching of *Laudato Si'* to life in our Archdiocese. E.g. how might our parishes be more environmentally friendly and reveal our love of and care for the planet?

15. Medical and Sexual Ethics:

Several people thought the Synod ought to discuss the Church's stance on the beginning and end of life. As with other issues, diametrically opposed views were expressed:

[The Synod should discuss] the absolute dignity and respect for human beings from conception to natural death.

[The Synod should discuss] views on abortion- some women may have been raped or have been told their child has awful conditions and it is women's issues about their body that the Church should not make women feel worse during an awful time. These decisions are not made lightly in most cases.

Meanwhile others raised contraception and IVF.

[The Synod should discuss] birth control, I think the way the world is now, birth control should be accepted as part of life! People with jobs are using food banks to feed their children. How can we expect young people to live in this poor society and bring children they can't afford into the world?

In vitro treatments should be accepted for married couples who struggle to conceive on their own.

One talked specifically about sexual ethics:

[The Synod should discuss] how to work against this culture of casual sex and the growing acceptance of this - the media, television etc are big contributors to this, I think.

Attitudes towards those who had undergone abortions were also raised. One Listening Group participant spoke against the 'judgement of those who had undergone an abortion'. The *Listening Record* continues, 'provide support rather than condemn – hypocrisy of "Love thy neighbour," – important to challenge those who do not live by it.'

16. Family

Several thought that family and marriage, its nature, practice, and relationship to the Church should be discussed by the Synod:

Guidance - families come in all sizes. No two being the same, it must accept it has a place to support best practice but not to sit in judgment! Like any good friend its role is to nurture not lambast!

The importance of sacramental marriage between one man and one woman.

Pastoral care, especially within troubled families.

17. Ecumenism and Interfaith Engagement

'Cross boundaries, breaking down silos, joining together as one Church'

Ecumenism was a concern for many:

Every meeting and committee should ask the question, 'Are there any ecumenical dimensions to this item'?

Christian unity needs to be embraced. More tolerance to others who are different because the God who created me also created them. In our Parish, we were a thriving ecumenical community, until the will of our Archbishop was to stop our Simultaneous Eucharistic Services.

Ecumenism and working with Other Christians: need Archdiocese to strongly encourage all parishes (priests and laity) to be actively involved with other denominations. If we can't work together with other Christians, then what sort of message does this send to others?

Some related ecumenical activity to service to the broader community:

How can we engage more with our Christian brothers and sisters of other denominations?
How do we go beyond ecumenical services and collaborate on other pressing issues of our time such as asylum seekers the homeless those in despair or desperate situations the sick and the lonely?

To seek unity with other Christians through charitable work (e.g. for asylum seekers and refugees) rather than concentrating on the doctrinal differences that divide us.

Another person suggested that the Synod should consider an ecumenical approach to resolving the pastoral issues presented by the closure of parishes:

Does the Church need to be more accommodating to other Christian denominations? If the Catholic Church cannot sustain the current parishes (in the form of priests/parishioners), should the Church allow dispensation for Catholics to join other Christian denominations?

One woman spoke from her own experience, and from it proposed that the Synod should listen to how other Christians go about things:

One of the women I go to Slimming World with is a Salvation Army woman, and she said to me last year, 'Come to one of our Women's nights,' and I went, 'Women's nights? Salvation Army?' But I went along, in a big hall in Walton, there were 200 women there, women from the age of about 50 to 60 up to 90, and it was a whole evening of giving witness and prayer, of song. We had a guest speaker, a woman talking about her ministry and what drives her, and she'd set her own church up somewhere in Liverpool, this woman, and then we had tea and coffee and we had a cake. Do you know what? I came out of that evening, it was a two-hour event, and I came out of that evening absolutely filled with the Holy Spirit, and I have to say I've never experienced that, what I felt that night, in my church. So, the Salvation Army have something going, they have something there. So, maybe we need to look at what other faiths are doing and how they're celebrating their faith and their understanding of God, because they had something that was tangible, you could feel it.

The issue of interfaith relations and dialogue with religious groups outside the Christian churches was raised:

Christianity is a peaceful tolerant religion which has been abused over the years - wars, hatred in the name of Christ. We all need to decide what kind of society we want to live in - Christian

values (genuine) need to be a part of life but in conjunction with other religions. We need to learn from other religions. Look for commonalities not differences.

Partnership - as humans in an unstable world it has to accept the challenge to work with other religious leaders, God is there for us all no matter the person.

For the Church to liaise more with other religions and show a united front against intolerance and injustice.

Growth in tolerance to other faiths, and also tolerance by the Church to Catholics.

Bringing together other faiths, finding a common goal of togetherness in the hope that our world becomes a much safer and happier place to live.

Tolerance of other faiths.

Dialogue with the Islamic and Jewish faiths, not just 'Christian' churches.

Including those of no faith:

What can the Catholic Church do to foster tolerance and mutual respect between those with a non-religious outlook?

18. Mental Health

A growing issue, and one that several thought the Church should attempt to play a role in responding to it:

Mental Health- This is an epidemic in our society and the Church could do so much to offer hope and healing to individuals and communities. The mental health of our clergy must feature.

Although one respondent shared a concern:

Education in mental health for our clergy - and a review of training and activities of diocesan exorcists. Suffering from clinical depression, having prayers of deliverance and exorcism used by my Parish Priest was both inappropriate and dangerous.

19. Offering Guidance

A few would like to see the Church offer more guidance to its members, on both life and death.

How can the Church become more involved in the education of our young people on the work of the Church whilst promoting peace, love and an appreciation of what is morally right and wrong?

How to help people prepare for death, including spiritual and practical issues? Not just towards end of life. Some direction and advice about content and format of how to share information or deliver sessions would be useful.

Summary of the Responses of Children and Young People

The Archdiocese held 90 Listening Groups wholly or partly comprised of under 18s. 27 different schools took part (2 were Key Stage 1, 20 of which were Key Stage 2, and 5 were secondary/high school; most returned several responses, up to ten per school). 11 *Listening Records* were from parish children's groups and family Masses, etc.

Under- 18s were asked three different sets of questions - Key Stage 1 were asked four new questions (What do you know about Church? When and why did you go? What did you like? What did you not?); Key Stage 2 had a slightly different set (What do you think of the Catholic Church as it is today? What concerns or worries do you have for the future of the Church? What changes would you make to the Church?); and Key Stage 3 upwards had the same four questions as the adults. Nevertheless, we can discern some trends that emerged.

They found positivity in interactions with friends and family, at home, at school and less frequently at church; with successes like doing well at school and exams; music, sport, video games and clubs; holidays; eating and sleeping. Pets were often mentioned. A few mentioned a specific school subject that they enjoyed.

At Key Stages 1 and 2, the children perceived the church to be a pleasant place, safe, and beautiful; a place of 'love and hope'; it is 'an amazing place because when one of your family passes away you can still speak to them.' One the same theme, another child said that the purpose of the Church was, 'To bring dead loved ones to their family's hearts.' However, they also experienced the Church as a place inhabited largely by old people ('The Church is for Nans') - and so the future looks uncertain. Many expressed concern that people will soon stop going to church entirely and the churches will close - meaning that everyone becomes mean to each other and no one goes to heaven. One worried that robots would take it over. Many thought the Church was uncomfortable (especially the wooden benches) or services go on too long. The Primary-aged children like the ceremonies, especially when they are the centre of attention, and singing and praying (some didn't like the hymns, though). Some also liked the Bible stories and the stained glass, and several mentioned the candles and the pictures. Some couldn't see the point and thought church was boring and irrelevant (at least for young people) and some had problems understanding the language used. A few disliked the rigmarole of sitting and standing: 'I think we are just a nuisance to the people there and to the priest. We don't know what to do, when to sit or stand and just have to follow all the others.' Generally, however, they liked the priests. A few mentioned Little Church, which they enjoyed - and one child asked for a 'Big Church', for older children.

From Key Stage Two upwards, their anxieties often centred around their future: employment or university prospects, relationships and simply 'growing up.' But they were also quite concerned with how others perceived them and whether they were, or would be, liked; related to this was bullying, a common theme. Environment and the consequences of climate change for humans and animals were frequently mentioned, for example '[t]hat we might not make it to adulthood because there is so much pollution that we might all be extinct in 10 years' time,' as was war and terrorism. The death of family and pets (and themselves) was a source of worry. Only a few mentioned politics (including Boris

Johnson and Trump), but among these Brexit was especially prominent. A few mentioned violence in society. Some worried about non-Catholic family members not getting to heaven. Peer pressure and social media were mentioned by a couple.

The Church was thought to have both a practical and a therapeutic role, for people in distress or in difficult life situations; notably some said that the Church had a role in guiding people away from criminal activities, and several mentioned CAFOD and charitable work. Some thought the role was to bring people together. And a fair few mentioned explicitly religious roles like bringing people closer to God, prayer/worship, the Bible, or getting souls to heaven; only a few mentioned spreading the religion. One thought it was 'to make sure that God doesn't feel bad because people don't go to Church'.

The issues or improvements they thought of included (overwhelmingly) female priests and an option of marriage, as well as other equality issues (LGBTQ+, divorcees, disabled, and racism/sexism generally). One convenor (Key Stage 4) wrote that 'Pupils saw that there is a problem with the R.E. curriculum and its teaching about homosexuality and family life and how this Church teaching was at odds with how they interpreted the inclusiveness of Jesus' teaching. They would like this to be discussed.' One student suggested representing Jesus as black. Pilgrimage was mentioned by several, and there was a feeling that being a Catholic in Lourdes is a different experience from being a Catholic in Liverpool. Also mentioned were the visibility of Catholics, and of course (low) attendance. One group, jumping ahead of the married priests question, suggested 'Priests to have lots of children they will help spread the news when they can talk.'

They would like more youth/child-centred activities or play areas, and for the Church to be 'more fun' or more engaging for the youth generally; one convenor of a youth Listening Group commented that,

The most prominent and clear message [is that] The children want more involvement in their local church, with activities and groups tailored to them that do not involve any ministry, such as games nights, film clubs, youth groups and football teams - in short, they want to be included in the wider community.

They continued,

Separate from this listening, more recently in our parish we held a family Mass and picnic. In preparation for this Mass children from both the primary school and the Little Church/liturgy groups completed faith passports. The ages ranged from 2 to 11 and whilst the information from them does not fit with the Synod questions format, one crystal clear picture has formed. Where all of the children said what their favourite hymn is, where they learn about Jesus, what they like about Him and how much they love Him, many could not comment on Little Church/children's liturgy as they do not go, i.e. they are not taken to church by their parents.

How to welcome/invite families back into church is a topic that should be on the agenda of Synod 2020, as children who love Jesus and his teachings are missing out on this part of their faith.

One group suggested:

Kids clubs - so you mission can be showed, fun things, like building Jesus out of Lego! Spirituality gardens where people can just sit and relax with peace and quiet. More time in church for kids - like an hour to spend time doing painting or drawing after the priest has taught us something.

Some thought using modern music would help, and one suggested allowing questions during the homily. Several expressed a desire to learn more about other religions and some thought help with mental health issues would be good, and a few mentioned bullying. One group outlined the issues as follows:

How to support young people with the issues they face: mental health, violence, abortion, stress, self-esteem, anxiety, being accepted, peer pressure, bullying, trust issues, drugs.

Also helping the poor/alleviating poverty was mentioned. A fair few of the younger children wanted more comfortable seating, and less standing ('it makes my legs hurt') - and some thought that the church could be more colourful. A few thought the schools should be more active in the faith. Some thought later Masses would be good (only partly because they then wouldn't clash with football). Some asked for videos instead or as well as the Bible readings (some even suggested acting out the readings).

Finally, one group would like the Synod to discuss 'Unicorns, dinosaurs and sharks'.