



## DIOCESE OF LEEDS

# Synodal Listening Process 'Communication is Key!' A Communications Study & Report

### *Introduction*

Using only the original source material of people's responses to Synodal Questions I – X, as recorded direct from the facilitators' notes of in-person meetings, and in verbatim quotes of online submissions, a unique opportunity was presented by the (approximately 5k in total) group and individual submissions to the Synodal Listening Process. The variety of perceptions expressed about how we communicate in our parishes and diocese provided valuable research, insights, learning – and some key action points to continue the conversation and above all, to 'keep listening'!

### *Purpose*

1. Gain general insights into what respondents understand by the variety of meanings, messages and methods relating to 'communication(s)' in terms of parishes and diocese.
2. Identify current parish and diocesan communications needs and wishes of respondents who attended parish meetings and all who submitted their views online via the dedicated email and Survey software (both over- and under-18s).
3. Consider whether the current offers from Diocesan Communications are sufficient. Current offers have included Communications training for parishes, and for any parish, charity or individual making its stories and initiatives known to Diocesan Communications, to receive promotion and publicity at diocesan, national or international level.
4. Gain insights into reasons behind the very low take-up of the above offers. (Information, invitations and contacts are permanently promoted on the diocesan website, as well as via messages to parish clergy and administrators and via talks and presentations – however, as almost all our Communications 'tools' are online, how do we communicate with those who do not have internet access?)
5. Identify whether current plans between Diocesan Communications and CathCom, for systems and software specifically designed for parish use and for future 'conversations, dialogue and feedback' should be pursued. (The online survey and feedback facility of this package was made available to the Synodal Team and has been successfully trialled for almost 4k individual or group submissions – both from adults and under-18s - throughout the Listening Process.)

## *Methodology of this Study and Report*

**Step 1:** Studied all submissions from in-person parish meetings, all emailed submissions, and all (over 18 and under 18) submissions made by individuals and groups via the online survey form in detail in order to see the totality of matters discussed and collate specific examples.

**NB1 - Context** is of the greatest importance, as owing to the pressure of time in note-taking at meetings and the length of the online survey, not all comments were explained or were more than a word or phrase used in isolation: e.g. 'Two way communication' or 'Social Media'.

**NB2 - Accuracy** is also of great importance, as some perceptions expressed were demonstrably factually incorrect or inaccurate – however, the fact that mis-perceptions exist at all is of value as an opportunity to raise awareness and find ways to correct them.

**Step 2:** Performed a further word-search on the entirety of the material to capture all instances of synonyms and derivatives expressing any aspect of the concept of 'communication' in the sense both of imparting and receiving an exchange of news, views and information, and also in the sense of evangelising the Catholic faith by promoting and publicising faith and works to inspire and inform, educate and engage across parishes, diocese and wider secular society. Key words included: news, message, social, media, press, publicity, promote, information, evangelise, witness, story, event, pilgrimage, contact, diocese, letter, email, tell, speak, listen, discuss, forum, conversation, advise, consult, feedback, publish, report, broadcast, call, engage, value, collaborate, dialogue, transparent, show, share, ideas, initiatives, web, online, open etc (plus all proper names of the main Social Media networks).

**E.g. The number of responses regarding 'communic(ate/ion)' (C) and 'social media' (SM) across all ten themes:**

<b>Parish meetings:</b>	C = 129	SM = 24
<b>Online responses (over 18's):</b>	C = 166	SM = 22
<b>Online responses (under 18's):</b>	C = 3	SM = 4
<b>Totals (out of 5k respondents):</b>	<b>C = 298 (6%)</b>	<b>SM = 50 (1%)</b>

## *Current Priorities, Current Communications Tools and their Current Impact*

In order to make future plans, we need to know where we are now. Since 2016, Diocesan Communications priorities have been primarily to create and promote online platforms and publications for parish clergy and laity, assisting evangelisation through sharing their 'good news stories' of their parish and school initiatives motivated by their Faith. A journalistic 'news' format and style is the norm: using engaging photographs, 'plain English' and rigorously avoiding 'jargon'. In addition to words and pictures, we reveal the Beauty of Holiness in our Catholic worship to inspire and engage wider communities through our national BBC broadcasts.

The current impacts of the Diocesan Communications channels and tools available include both online and offline resources, such as:

\* **Diocesan website.** An informal and informational site with between 10k and 17k visits each month, primarily to 'News'. Homepage header menu contains opportunity for feedback: **How do I ... Comment, Compliment or Complain?** Dedicated email address: [complaints@dioceseofleeds.org.uk](mailto:complaints@dioceseofleeds.org.uk)

\* **Communications pages** set out role of Diocesan Communications, priorities and strategy with details of support, advice and training offered and contacts. Dedicated email address: [communications@dioceseofleeds.org.uk](mailto:communications@dioceseofleeds.org.uk)

\* **Diocesan Yearbook.** A formal and informational hard-copy publication of diocesan contacts, facts and figures, plus Obituaries and the Ordo.

\* **Diocesan Annual Review.** A free, informal, printed and online colour photo-booklet targeted towards acknowledging and valuing known initiatives and collaborations in parishes, schools and curia. The *Review* is structured around the diocese's Four Charitable Purposes:

- i) Advancement of the Catholic Religion;
- ii) Promotion of Catholic Teaching;
- iii) Provision and Care of Priests;
- iv) Provision and Maintenance of Churches and Schools.

\* **Livestreaming of (moderated) Sunday Mass** from Leeds Cathedral (800k visits since March 2020) and **weekday Masses from those parishes livestreaming daily** to which 365 people subscribe.

\* More than 25 **BBC network TV & Radio broadcasts** since 2016. We are the most-broadcast Catholic diocese in the UK. Overwhelmingly positive feedback (letters and emails) direct to Bishop, BBC and Diocesan Communications indicates the evangelising power of preaching, music and liturgy to Catholics and non-Catholics alike through broadcasting.

\* **Diocesan social media** includes:

YouTube views (since 2020)	800k (6k subscribers)
Facebook followers	848

\* Other dedicated **diocesan social media** includes:

**Music** (Diocesan Schools Singing Programme):

YouTube views (since 2020)	78k (1.4k subscribers)
Facebook followers	1.5k
Twitter followers (since 2012)	1.2k

**Youth**

YouTube views (since 2020)	2k (62 subscribers)
Twitter followers (since 2011)	2k

Instagram followers	834
Facebook followers	625

### Education

YouTube views (since 2020)	7k (148 subscribers)
Twitter followers (since 2017)	512

### Caritas Leeds

YouTube views (since 2020)	555 (13 subscribers)
Facebook followers	151

\* **Parish clergy** make their own decisions regarding websites and social media in their own parishes. Advice may be sought at any time from Diocesan Communications – e.g. from the start of the pandemic in March/April 2020, 11 basic websites were provided gratis by the diocese for parishes with no previous online presence, plus detailed advice on how to livestream and create social media communities safely.

\* An online initiative of the **Franciscan Friars of the Renewal, clergy & laity in the Diocese of Leeds** (The Mark 10 Mission, online social media for primary aged children since 2020)

YouTube views	61k (364 subscribers)
Twitter followers	506
Instagram followers	438

### ***Key Findings on Communication(s) across all Synodal Listening Sessions and Submissions***

1. The term ‘communication(s)’ was used in almost all of that word’s wide variety of meanings, with an equally wide spectrum of positive and negative opinions and with one respondent writing: *‘This question appears to set up a straw man and to suggest that there is something preventing communication. A good answer would need more context from the question - communicate about what, and for what purpose?’*

2. The parish or school and not the diocese was seen as the key relationship in terms of communication, although some felt there were no clear structures for parish communication: *‘at the present time I feel I can only communicate appropriately what is important to me and the parish and the church by communicating directly with the diocese. This is no reflection on our current parish priest or on previous parish priests.’*

The context of almost all responses was primarily concerned with internal parish communication, especially imparting information at internal, parish level and permitting two-way discussions. The majority of views were regarding clergy communicating to or with laity, and centred on the desire to be informed and involved in any parish (and sometimes diocesan) *‘decision-making’*.

3. The idea of communication being a *'two way process'* was frequently raised, again in a parish context with the phrase usually used in isolation without further explanation, therefore further context needs to be sought.
4. Similarly, the phrase *'use social media'* was mentioned in isolation, or in the context of widespread parish messaging and outreach to those (particularly the young) not already engaged with the parish or of the faith, and the phrase was often used with, or as a synonym for, unspecified *'modern technology'*.
5. Parish newsletters, bulletins, social media, websites, social and *'outreach'* events were highlighted in the specific contexts of: connecting with other parishioners, young people, non-churchgoers, the lapsed, and with ecumenical and interfaith groups within the local community. One respondent recommended *'having groups and individuals speak about what they're doing. Write a piece and put it in the weekly bulletin.'*
6. By far the greatest desire expressed for communication was for a *'forum'* where both parish and diocesan *'decisions'* could be discussed and debated and opinions expressed.
7. In the context of the Diocese, Bishop and wider Church, the word *'communication(s)'* was almost exclusively used in the context of official correspondence from the Bishop and/or the Curia about *'diocesan decisions'* being disseminated to parishes and the laity. Directives from the Bishops' Conference and the Vatican were highlighted as using particularly difficult language and *'... using `Christian jargon` (take note CBCEW and Holy See!!) - otherwise you're speaking only to those who are already catechists and theologians: that's not evangelisation!'* The language and purpose of most *'official'* documents is usually that of the Church, and therefore is more formal and, according to one respondent, *'flowery'*. To another the word *'synodal'* was an example of this: *'...the language used by the church in mass, in literature, in all communications (eg `synodal`) is exclusive and distancing'*.
8. There were only two substantial instances mentioning pro-active communication of ideas, initiatives and *'good news'* stories to the wider Diocesan Family, wider communities, and wider world.
9. There were only 3 informed mentions of the diocesan website, including: *'we get very little information from the Diocese or from other parishes in the Deanery unless it is gleaned from other newsletters or by going on the Diocesan website...'*
10. There were 9 mentions of the need for, and usefulness of, parish websites.

### ***Conclusions and Action Points***

**1. Parish Respondents' main communications priority** was clearly and overwhelmingly for a parish (and also a diocesan) *'forum'* in which to air views and opinions and contribute to *'decision making'* at both parish and diocesan levels.

**Communications Action Point:** As with most informational websites, the diocesan site currently presents opportunities for comment and feedback via the dedicated email

[communications@dioceseofleeds.org.uk](mailto:communications@dioceseofleeds.org.uk) which are responded to personally by the Director of Communications. However, plans have been underway for some months with CathCom (providers of the Online Synodal Survey) to use the same software to enhance the diocesan website with a similar web form, creating opportunities for ‘continuing the conversation’ as well as giving the potential for presenting opinions, suggestions and ideas which can be anonymised. This is part of a ‘package’ which will be made available to all parishes. This would fulfil the request expressed by one respondent, but reflective of several others: *‘Take a look at the design of parish websites and the diocesan website - they offer visitors no means of exchanging views and suggestions...’* and *‘most church websites are woeful, with some honourable exceptions. And these can become a useful two way form of contact, not solely a source of information.’*

**2. Parish Respondents’ second most-expressed priority** was to use laity’s existing skills and to receive training in ways to connect and communicate with: the young people of the parish; other Christians and those of other faiths in the local communities; and in order to make contacts and evangelise. The tools and methods most asked for are online – e.g. web presence and social media (with concerns expressed by some for young people’s safe and secure use of social media to be taken into account).

**Communications Action Point:** In addition to continuing to offer communications advice and training at request, resume pro-active approaches to parish priests for suggestions of parish volunteers to train in basic communications skills (the information needed to compile an article or news release, the simple, jargon-free style for writing them, and the crucial provision of lively and GDPR-compliant photographs to accompany them).

**Communications Action Point:** Continue to collaborate with The Twelve via Diocese of Leeds Youth and Caritas Leeds at diocesan level, to help The Twelve develop and facilitate their Communications Priority (and also to help communicate their Social Justice Priority) within parishes. Fast-track approaches to parish clergy, school, and parish youth workers to gain access to parishes to recruit and train young people as parish youth communications representatives.

**Communications Action Point:** Re-issue information commissioned from the Youth Service and sent to parishes during the pandemic lockdown with details of how parishes can create safe social media accounts. As is the case at present, Diocesan Communications will continue to put any parish requests for a new or refreshed online presence to the supplier and developer of our diocesan website, and to other trusted providers locally.

**3. What was actually absent or missing from the Synodal responses also creates positive opportunities to raise people’s knowledge and awareness of the role Communications can play in both a parish and diocesan context.** Although the number of respondents overall was small (less than 20% of Mass attending Catholics in the diocese), several proven routes of successful methods of evangelisation currently employed across the Local, National and Universal Church did not receive many (or in some cases, any) mentions. Some examples include:

i) The large numbers of young people and their families brought back to faith and the Church through exposure to the Church's treasures of liturgy and music via the Schools Singing Programme (now successfully rolled out to Catholic schools in most other Catholic dioceses across England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland) is one such positive trend.

**Communications Action Point:** Give greater emphasis to the fact that all our diocesan choirs are children's and young people's choirs and increase visibility of this fact through encouraging greater involvement of participating schools in their parish's liturgies, events and concerts.

ii) Our many BBC broadcasts have perhaps the highest impact and widest reach of all Communications initiatives involving our parishes and Cathedral. Numbers between the hundreds of thousands to millions watch and listen to our parishioners, clergy and bishop bearing witness to the Catholic faith.

**Communications Action Point:** The large amount of positive feedback sent by hundreds of individuals of all ages to the BBC and to the Bishop after broadcasts constitutes confidential personal information, but perhaps something as simple as collating selected and anonymised quotes and publishing them via the diocesan website may help to reveal the continuing power of mass-media in the 'New Evangelisation'.

iii) The main priorities 'gap' identified was there was only one reference to evangelisation through the communication of parish and school 'good news stories' via Diocesan Communications channels (i.e. through online, publications, social media and press and media contacts). The comment advocated *'being proud of your parish and wanting to use its stories to evangelise others - but not being so `parochial` that you don't look beyond it to the rest of the deanery or diocese ... engaging with diocesan communications, press and media.'* For any organisation, this is the principal way of inspiring others, and widening knowledge and participation across local, national and international communities.

**Communications Action Point – and an Appeal:** Many thanks to all those taking part in the Synodal Process who correctly recognised that *'Communication is key!'* and also *'two-way!'* If you perceive any current 'barriers' to contacting Diocesan Communications and taking advantage of promotion, help, advice and training, you are warmly invited to contact Rowan Morton-Gledhill direct by email – [communications@dioceseofleeds.org.uk](mailto:communications@dioceseofleeds.org.uk) or call 07703 341 527 or send/deliver your thoughts to: **Communications Survey** C/O Director of Communications, Diocese of Leeds, Hinsley Hall, Headingley Leeds LS6 2BX.

Watch the bulletins and diocesan website news pages for when our new, **Discussion Forum** comes online, and please feel free to suggest issues YOU would like to discuss.

*All stories, ideas and suggestions gratefully received and all concerns listened to!*