



Synodal Report

A synthesis of feedback from across the diocese

Introduction

In September 2019, Bishop Marcus presented to the Leeds Diocesan Pastoral Council his wish to initiate a synodal process to assist in planning for the future mission of the diocese. To facilitate this process, which has since been called *'From Parish to Mission,'* the bishop established a steering group, comprising both laypeople and clergy. The steering group considered various models of processes used elsewhere in the UK and Ireland. It was decided to commission a series of listening exercises in every parish, facilitated by trained volunteers. Online questionnaires would be published too for individuals, school groups and members of the various pastoral organisations in the diocese to complete.

With the onset of the Covid pandemic in early 2020 it was not possible to conduct the process within the original timeframe, however the planning continued and, at the beginning of May 2021, Bishop Marcus announced the process to the clergy. On 20 May 2021, Pope Francis published his mandate for the Universal Church to engage in the preparatory work for a Synod of Bishops in 2023. The clear link between the two initiatives enabled them to run as one process, with the preparatory work for the Synod of Bishops as the first phase. Bishop Marcus issued a Pastoral Letter read throughout the diocese on the weekend of 6/7 September 2021, detailing the process that the diocese would follow.

The Bishop concluded the letter by asking, *"all the lay faithful, consecrated religious men and women, and clergy of our diocese, first and foremost to pray that Almighty God will grant us the Spirit of Wisdom to discern His will for the Church in this diocese and to understand how we can serve Him more completely in the work of evangelisation. Please pray for our Holy Father Pope Francis and for all the bishops of the Church as they prepare for the Synod in 2023. I hope and pray that all the members of the family of our diocese will participate positively in the Synodal process and maintain a spirit of mutual trust, common faith, and a shared purpose."*

On the weekend following the Pastoral Letter, specially designed Prayer Cards were sent out to every parish for distribution among the faithful and religious in the diocese. The card contained the prayer *Adsumus Sancte Spiritus* provided by the Synod Office of the Holy See. The bishop encouraged everyone to use this prayer daily and particularly at the commencement of all meetings within the diocese.

The listening sessions needed to be completed by the middle of January 2022 and would require the assistance of at least 60 facilitator volunteers. Within a brief period over 80 people volunteered for this role. This response was a great sign of encouragement and evidenced a desire on the part of the faithful to engage with the synodal process. The volunteers attended two days of training at the Diocesan Pastoral Centre, Hinsley Hall, on Saturday 16 and 23 October 2021.

The training for the facilitators was provided by the British Province of the Society of Jesus. The volunteers expressed great appreciation for this training and stated that it equipped them well for the task ahead. Particular gratitude was articulated by the volunteers for the training they received

in leading groups of people in prayer. Bishop Marcus had asked that the listening process be rooted in meditation on Sacred Scripture, the liturgy, and prayer. It was established, therefore, that each session would begin with at least 20 minutes of prayer led by the facilitators. The trainers provided the volunteers with clear guidelines for leading the prayer and supplied them with comprehensive notes for facilitating each of the 90-minute listening sessions.

Meeting dates for each parish within the diocese were agreed with the respective parish priest and the group of 3 volunteer facilitators designated for that parish. No volunteer facilitated a meeting in their own parish. Between the beginning of November 2020 and mid-January 2021, 78 parish meetings took place, attended by 1,149 parishioners. Clergy were encouraged to attend the parish meetings and to journey together with the lay faithful on the Synodal pathway. During the meetings, the participants considered 10 questions based on the 10 thematic nuclei provided by the General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops. The facilitators then submitted a verbatim report to the diocesan synodal team. Each parish priest received a copy of the report from their parish meeting. There was a separate facilitated meeting for the religious of the diocese and a verbatim report of that meeting was submitted also to the diocesan synodal team.

In parallel with the parish meetings, three versions of an online questionnaire were published on the synodal section of the diocesan website. Those completing a questionnaire were urged to begin the process in prayer. The first questionnaire was for completion by individuals; the second by groups of high school pupils and staff in all our schools; and the third by members of the various diocesan pastoral organisations. In total, 709 group surveys were completed, involving 3,901 people. The synodal team also received over 40 written submissions.

A synthesis team of 10 people, comprising lay faithful and clergy, drafted a synthesised report on each of the questions. These identified the main themes that had emerged, the most common practical suggestions for the local and universal church, as well as any discordant points of view. A further team of 6 sought to identify from the 10 syntheses what joys, difficulties, obstacles and wounds to people's life of faith in Jesus Christ had been highlighted during the process, as well as insights and suggestions for change. All of this took place within a spirit of prayer and openness to the promptings of the Holy Spirit.

Bishop Marcus formally received the report from representatives of the volunteers at the Diocesan Pre-Synodal gathering with Mass celebrated in the Cathedral on Saturday 2 April 2022. The report was then submitted, along with the bishop's own discernment and reflections, to the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales.

Key Findings

There were several factors which provided challenges to the synodal process. A relatively short timeframe was given by the General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops within which to carry out the first (diocesan) phase. The consultation within the local church took place during the winter months in our country, when people are less inclined to travel and the prevalence of the Covid pandemic made people nervous of face-to-face meetings. Despite these factors, a considerable number of people did participate, which again showed the desire on the part of the lay faithful and clergy to begin this journey together. It was helpful that Bishop Marcus had already begun to prepare for a diocesan synodal pathway, because the planning which had been undertaken for a listening process served the diocese well and enabled it to begin the first phase in a timely manner.

A great many people who participated in the meetings expressed gratitude for the opening period of prayer and the spiritual atmosphere in which the sessions took place. There was a genuine desire to listen to the promptings of the Holy Spirit, to listen to one another and to engage in dialogue. It is inevitable that a few people believed the process was too rushed, but this is the beginning of a much longer journey of listening and discernment for the whole diocesan family. What has been noticeably clear from the submissions is that the responses received, whether expressed in a negative or positive voice, were honest, sincere, and motivated by a deep love for the Church and concern for its wellbeing.

Joys

When the responses are considered as a whole, there is a strong sense of **a real love of the Church and a devotion to the faith**. Alongside and despite the recognition of challenges, barriers and wounds, a love of God and the joy which that love brings was common element in the vast majority of responses. It was noted by one of the team responsible for drafting the diocesan synthesis that many of the responses have a real depth and enthusiasm and there is a genuine desire is conveyed from many people to participate more fully in the life of their Church.

The joy of the Gospel, the welcome of Mother Church, the sacramental life of the parish, and the nurturing pastoral care present in the local church was voiced as sustaining and nourishing the faithful in a *safe and supportive place* and *with a great sense of community and the presence of the Holy Spirit*.

The responses reveal an authentic sense of **the centrality of the Mass** in the lives of the laypeople in the diocese. A large number of respondents commented upon how the Mass sustains them throughout their day and in their lives. Some respondents praised the Church for the development of Masses which were streamed on-line and allowed many people to feel connected with the wider Catholic community during the isolating periods of the pandemic. Some people commented that during the lockdown the Church had demonstrated *imagination* and *creativity* in reaching out in this way.

Although not necessarily expressed as a joy, there were several prayerful and reflective responses, showing **a depth of faith** and expressing the value which the respondents placed on their ongoing faith journeys.

The responses evidenced a sense of hope and optimism about **missionary discipleship**. Many respondents believe they are living out their missionary role in their lives and are trying to act as good role models in society. Respondents also related their experience of joy when they recognise the Holy Spirit working through them, helping them to do good works and to witness to their Catholic faith. A prayer life, whether in private prayer, parish prayer groups or attending liturgical prayer in church were all expressed as important sources of sustenance and joy.

Another joy that is clearly expressed in the responses is that of **companionship**. Although it is not something explicitly spoken about by all respondents in their parish listening sessions or in their written responses, nevertheless many conveyed the sense that they are on a journey with companions. That companionship ranged in expression from encompassing all humanity, to fellow parishioners, to one or two friends or family members.

Many respondents spoke of their **sense of belonging** to a Catholic school community and some to the local Catholic parish too. Respondents often mentioned their appreciation of belonging to

groups, such as the SVP; some also reflected on how these groups demonstrate the joy of the Gospel through their outreach work. Parish Councils, suggestion boxes, parish meetings, retreats, walking groups, pilgrimages, Mothers Union, consultations (*this Synod is a good example*, read one response), questionnaires, Youth SVP, peer support groups, and social gatherings after Mass: all these are considered as contributing positively to the lives of the faithful. Several respondents expressed the joy they feel in the fellowship of other Christians, mentioning Churches Together and Women's World Day of Prayer as examples.

There were many reports in which respondents articulated their respect, appreciation and fondness for their **Parish Priests**. Some people stated that their Parish Priest listens to and journeys with the parishioners to whom he ministers, whilst others cherished their priests as holy men who care deeply for those whom they serve.

Several respondents, who understood themselves as holding co-responsibility for the life of their parish, expressed *the joy of being able to serve*, in the various roles of catechist, altar server, or member of a parish welcoming team. The responses indicate that well-functioning parish or pastoral councils are seen as very positive instruments of collaboration in some parish communities.

Respondents were pleased and encouraged that the listening sessions had given them the opportunity to meet, to listen and to speak to others in their parishes. Many also conveyed the view that *being asked for opinions* was a positive step and several people got in touch with the diocesan Synod team to express this. Responses communicated a sense that the synodal process was offering an opportunity for the whole Church, with a renewed seriousness, to take the need for evangelisation or personal encounter as a prerequisite for entering freely into what one contributor described as the "*big conversation*."

Difficulties, Obstacles and Wounds

Many responses highlighted a range of obstacles and difficulties surrounding *the role of the parish priest and the nature of the parish itself*. Concerns were expressed about the number of active priests within the diocese at present, as well as an anticipated decline in the number of priests in the future. The conclusion drawn from this by respondents is that there needs to be a change in the way a parish is administered, with the call for priests to prioritise their availability to parishioners and focus on their priestly ministry, rather than spending a disproportionate amount of time on parish administration; to be less directive and to act more as facilitators.

It is clear that the majority of priests are held in high esteem by respondents, but some priests were described as *dictatorial*, resistant to change, *stuck in the past*; to have a *fixed, inflexible* mind-set and were perceived to suppress *difficult conversations*. A number of respondents alleged that some priests were unable to receive constructive criticism and not able to understand *the everyday lives as well as the fears and desires of those they serve*. Whilst some respondents spoke of priests who can be autocratic and aloof, people also recognised that priests can sometimes feel *lonely and neglected*.

A few respondents remarked on what they considered was a low standard of preaching, particularly the homilies of some clergy who they described as having a tendency to *harangue* the congregation. Some responses called for continuity when there is a change of parish priest, deeming that many aspects of parish life can depend on which priest you have as *some listen and some don't*. Some respondents spoke of people being wounded in particular circumstances, such as the refusal by a priest to *baptise the child of an unmarried mother*.

Expression was given in the responses to the hurt caused when pastoral initiatives which have been proposed and led by the laity are closed down in a parish. At the same time, it is recognised that some groups within parishes can feel like cliques, appear superior and remote, and be off-putting to other parishioners.

Many responses expressed a perception that the *hierarchical* nature of the Church resulted in the laity tending to be marginalised from conversations and parish and diocesan decision making. Some responses expressed the opinion that *the Church's moral teaching is uncaring and unkind*, or felt that *the Church is oppressive – it doesn't take situations into account. It's too absolute – not everything is black and white. It limits people more than it helps them grow.*

Other responses conclude that *communication within the Church* is generally one-way: coming from the top down, rather than a dialogue. This some believe can cause the Church to have a closed mind-set, a lack of creativity, a lack of listening to *modern values* and an approach that says *we've always done it this way.*

Some responses expressed the view that the Church, including the parish, is *not always as welcoming to new members or new ideas* as it should be, and that interaction can be restricted to a particular interest group or to the congregation of the Mass they attend. The importance of welcoming people was mentioned often by respondents, suggesting that there can be *a lack of welcome* in some parishes, resulting in people feeling they do not belong or even unwelcome.

Many responses expressed the view that *the Church appears to be judgemental and condemning* and that there should be more focus on commonalities with others (denominations, religions, backgrounds etc.) rather than differences. Young people particularly responded that *Church's teaching was not reflective of modern life or how young people think*. One respondent stated that *it feels like it's all about what we are doing wrong rather than realising that the Church is out of touch with our generation and modern issues – contraception, euthanasia, abortion, homosexuality, marriage.*

A good number of responses acknowledged that there were fewer young people and families attending their churches today; some over-18s saw this to be because they tend to find other churches (but not necessarily other denominations) where they are more welcomed, have opportunities to engage and can discuss their relationship with Jesus in a meaningful way. Some responses thought that *very little is done to support young people in formation* after they receive the sacraments, and that there needs to be more encouragement for young people to take on responsibilities in a parish. However, some of the young people who responded declared that they are unsure of the roles that they could undertake in a parish and were uncertain about what exercising responsibility would mean for them. It was acknowledged that young people, and indeed adults, often lack time to contribute meaningfully and people have many other demands from education, work, and family on their time.

Some young respondents identified their Catholic school as the place where they are able to put their faith into action rather than in a parish setting. Many of the young people stated that they do not feel connected to the Church and often feel that they are not taken seriously, alongside the anxieties they have of being judged or ridiculed for being a Catholic. The view was expressed that there need to be more opportunities for occasions where young people can see other young people within the Church and feel that they belong (the diocesan annual pilgrimage to Lourdes being one such occasion).

Another recurring theme in the responses was *the role of women in the Church*. Many deemed women to be *denied any meaningful role in the Church hierarchy* and do not consider that the contribution of women to the life of the Church has been properly acknowledged. Some expressed the view that women's opinions were not taken seriously or felt judged to be *second class*. One respondent said they felt *depressed about the Church's oppression of women* as it is *exclusively male led* and *it is becoming increasingly irrelevant to the 21st Century*. Many responses called for women to have a role within the hierarchical structure of the Church, with some stating that the discussion of women's ministry is *not allowed* or is *shut down*. It was found that among the respondents who raised the issue, there were approximately an equal number of people calling for women to be admitted to the ordained ministry as those who called for the current and traditional teaching of the Church to be maintained. A similar division of opinion was found among those respondents who expressed that they would like to see the opportunity for more married men to be ordained to the priesthood and those who recognised the value of a celibate priesthood.

Many responses stated that a *lack of formation for laypeople* (and priests) is often an obstacle to growth in the faith. This lack of formation, alongside a lack of confidence in knowledge and understanding of the Catholic faith, has led to a fear amongst the laity of being open about their faith for such reasons as: feeling too shy or reserved, feeling judged or ridiculed and feeling embarrassed about scandals in the Church and the damage this has done.

Not only do the responses reveal that there is an apparent lack of understanding of the Church and its teachings, but also a general lack of understanding of the structures within the diocese. Many stated that they were unsure about the current decision-making process. An observation also made in the responses was that not everyone wants to be involved in decision making. A number of responses stated that there were *no clear, formal channels and structures for voices to be heard within the Diocese* and there was a particular need for clear procedures for complaints. *The Church does not listen and the Church does not hear*, was one comment similarly repeated.

A sizeable number of responses expressed a longing for the Mass celebrated according to the 1962 Roman Missal and it was felt that restrictions on the limited number of these celebrations can cause hurt. At the same time, several responses expressed the opinion that there was too much use of the Latin language in celebrations of the Mass and some believed that this had the consequence of alienating young people.

Many of the respondents, including young people, *called for the Church to be more inclusive* particularly of women, those who are divorced and remarried but whose previous marriage has not been annulled, and those who identify themselves as LGBTQ+. Although it is the Church's teaching that all people are made in the image and likeness of God, and are equal in dignity as children of God, some respondents expressed their difficulty in *feeling connected with a community that doesn't openly accept everyone*. Several practical examples of exclusion and discrimination were given by participants in the listening process. When looking at the Synodal responses as a whole, it seems that *almost everyone feels marginalised in some way* and this causes feelings of exclusion, rejection, hurt and frustration.

Many divorced and remarried people feel excluded. A sense of injustice is felt among them concerning the Church's position, particularly where the innocent party is concerned: *Why should the innocent party be penalised?* In such cases, there was a feeling that preventing people from receiving Holy Communion is divisive, unnecessarily dogmatic and hurtful on the part of the Church.

Many of the lay faithful who attended parish meetings and responded online or in writing, felt hurt by the Church or knew of others who felt wounded by the Church. The listening process provided an important opening for the feelings to be taken into account by the Church, especially those who are often excluded and forgotten.

Amongst some respondents, a sense of despair and loss of hope for the future of the Catholic Faith was voiced. Many respondents mentioned the hurt and shame caused by *abuse scandals* that have come to light in the Church and there is much sadness and pain at the scale of the damage inflicted on the victims and survivors of abuse. There is a recognition of the harm done to the Church herself by the few who are responsible for the abuse and by those leaders within the Church who have failed to respond properly to the needs of victims and survivors of abuse.

Other obstacles to the development of people's life of faith in Christ included the subject of *communication* and various forms of distributing information. Some respondents felt that the parish, the diocese, and the Church generally does not make itself well enough known using the means of contemporary communications and information media.

Another observation was that most Masses are celebrated around the same time, with very few early morning Masses available for workers to attend regularly. Some respondents wanted parishioners to have more opportunities to participate in the celebration of Mass whilst others felt this may have a detrimental effect on the Mass and didn't want it to be dominated by a select few. Most responses called for change but acknowledged a fear of change on the part of both parish priests and laity.

Insights identified by respondents

Overall, the responses reveal that people believe they can bring to the Synodal process insights which they have gained from their own lived experience, both within and outside the Church; insights from the experience of other, different types of organisations and from developments in wider society, even though admitting that this has now become highly secularised.

The involvement of laypeople in the governance and management of institutions, organisations and societies outside of the Church lead them to make comparisons with the way the Church is governed and managed. This results in some respondents describing the Church as being out of step with modern day expectations about how things are and should be done, and consequently are calling for change in the Church, both locally and universally.

The insights identified by respondents are grouped around five themes detailed below:

- Listening
- Leadership
- Participation
- Formation
- Communication

Within the responses, the feeling is expressed that '*the Church doesn't listen*' and that what is needed for the future is *a listening Church that hears and responds to the prophetic voice of its people*. Similarly, communication within the Church tends to be regarded by some as one-way, downwards from bishops to the people; with no sense that dialogue, discussion and listening are taking place and with the voices of the marginalised seldom heard. A desire is voiced by some respondents for the Church to engage with those of its members who disagree with elements of the Church's teaching, to dialogue and learn from it. There is an appeal for the Church to become a Listening Church as

well as being a Teaching Church. Such expectations in the responses call for a *cultural change*, moving to one that is listening, trustful, invitational and inclusive; it also requires the *development of structures* in the Church at every level which encourage and facilitate dialogue and listening in an open and transparent way.

Some respondents feel there are serious *shortcomings in the leadership of the Local and Universal Church*, suggesting it is remote and 'out of touch' and not representative of the People of God, notably in the absence of women from positions of leadership. The feeling is expressed also that the 'Joy of the Gospel' is being lost, *resulting in a Church that seems judgmental, uncaring and unkind*, with a consequent sense of despair and loss of hope for the future of the Church.

Other respondents call for leadership qualities in the Church that are: contemporary, pragmatic and *open to change*; willing to *learn from the serious mistakes of the past*; operate within a flatter model of leadership that promotes *shared leadership and the empowerment of the laity*; and, a large number are calling for discussion and listening forums.

Some of the responses indicate that people feel excluded from participating in the *decision making* in the Church and wish to have more involvement in the process, whether it be *greater consultation or empowerment*. To exercise their responsibility to ask questions, *structures* need established, such as parish pastoral councils, to widen participation in the parish and diocesan communities.

What the majority of the responses evidence is a real *desire by people to participate more fully* in the life of the Church, with its leaders promoting among laypeople an understanding of *their baptismal dignity in Christ* and their apostolic vocation. There is real appreciation that the insights and charisms of the laity are a gift to the Church and need to be harnessed. Respondents believe there are many people with *untapped talents and skills* waiting for the invitation to be active in the mission of the Church, and that all the faithful should be helped and encouraged to discern and nurture their particular gifts.

To participate effectively and to mobilise the laity's knowledge and skills will require much more formation than is provided for them by the Church at present, and this is something that respondents recognise very clearly. They use different words – *catechesis, education, formation, and training* – but what they are expressing is *an appetite, indeed a hunger* for improved knowledge and skills, not least to have the knowledge that inspires *greater confidence* to profess their Catholic Faith. That confidence is not evident at present.

The responses also demonstrate a need to *address confusion and misunderstandings* about some teachings of the Church, and some respondents argue that well-crafted homilies could be a means of doing this. Recognition is given too for the need to develop *practical skills* such as communication, decision-making, leadership and teamwork in order to put into effect the kind of changes that people wish to see in their parishes, the diocese and in the Church more widely.

There is a consensus within the responses that *communication is the key* to improving the laity's experience of engagement with the Church and that the Church needs to communicate much more effectively at every level. Locally, parish and diocesan communication of decisions is not seen as happening – *the Diocese* is felt by some to be remote to people in parishes and the local Church is not considered to have sufficient 'visibility' in the wider community. The basic point that is made is that *communication is a two-way process*, and this does not characterise the Church's internal communications at present. Strategies need to be developed to enable this change to take place.

Some responses reveal a concern about how the Church communicates with young Catholics, who may often feel disconnected from the Church or even alienated from it. There is a call to think about communications in terms of *the message, the language used, and the medium*. There is a common view that the Church has yet to fully explore and exploit the possibilities presented by *social media and the internet* in general.

Conclusion

The present synthesis will be submitted to the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales as the contribution of the Diocese of Leeds to the Synod of Bishops in 2023.

Bishop Marcus has also requested that a second phase of listening be undertaken to fulfil his original initiative, presented at the Leeds Diocesan Pastoral Council in 2019, for a synodal process to assist in planning for the future mission of the diocese. This will entail further listening sessions in each parish, to be completed by the end of May 2022. As part of this process, there will be another series of online questionnaires to be completed by individuals, school staff and students and diocesan pastoral organisations.

The purpose of this second phase is to encourage all members of the diocesan family to continue to discern what, in light of this report, are the pastoral priorities for the diocese. In order to guide this listening exercise, the following questions will be considered in the light of a parish's mission:

"The parish is the presence of the Church in a given territory, an environment for hearing God's word, for growth in the Christian life, for dialogue, proclamation, charitable outreach, worship and celebration. In all its activities the parish encourages and trains its members to be evangelizers." (Evangelii Gaudium 28)

1. What, within our current practice as a parish and diocese, helps to fulfil this vision?
2. What would our parish and diocese look like if this vision was being fully lived?
3. What practical steps can we take to move towards that fully lived reality?

As before, the listening sessions will be facilitated by trained volunteers and will begin with a substantial period of prayer. There will also be opportunities for the clergy of the diocese to gather for facilitated meetings to assist them in discerning how their ministry can most effectively serve the pastoral needs of the diocesan family.

The years ahead will present many challenges and there will be a need for generosity in letting go of some of the models and structures that have been held dear. However, there will also be new opportunities for the diocesan family to come to know Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ more intimately, to serve him in new and courageous ways and to bring others to him.

Building on what has already been established, *inspired and sustained by the spirit of truth*, individual members of the diocesan family will be better able to foster a true sense of communion with one another, participate in the life of the Church together, and live out our baptismal mission to make Christ known.

A synthesis of the responses from the diocesan listening sessions and online contributions will be prepared by a synthesis team comprising members of the lay faithful and clergy. This will then be presented to the bishop. In a parallel process, members of the steering group will work with the various departments of the diocesan curia to bring together statistical information packs for each parish, vicariate and the entire diocese. This will enable the people of the diocese to see clearly what resources are at their disposal. It is envisaged that there will need to be a third phase of listening

where the diocesan family begins to discern how it best places those resources at the service of the pastoral priorities identified in the preceding phases.

Bishop Marcus' Concluding Reflection

In my homily for the Opening Mass for the Synod in Leeds Cathedral on Sunday 17th October 2021, I included a quotation from the great St Augustine of Hippo: "What I am for you terrifies me; what I am with you consoles me. For you I am a bishop; but with you I am a Christian. The former is a duty; the latter a grace. The former is a danger; the latter, salvation."¹

I have taken to heart this profound reflection by Augustine as together we have commenced this Synodal journey: a bishop walking amidst the lay faithful, religious and clergy of the diocese he serves and united by the royal priesthood which they share through their baptism. Fundamental to that journey has been to create space for the guidance of the Holy Spirit through listening to God our Father in prayer and listening to each other as brothers and sisters in His Son Jesus Christ.

In the diocesan phase of the Synodal pathway, we were encouraged by the Holy See to focus on: initiating "processes of listening, dialogue, and community discernment, in which each and every person can participate and contribute"²; creating the "maximum inclusion and participation, reaching out to involve the greatest number of people possible, and especially those on the periphery who are often excluded and forgotten"³; making, "every effort to involve those who feel excluded or marginalized"; and, ensuring that "participation in the listening process treats each person equally, so that every voice can be duly heard."⁴

Having read and listened to the large number of voices expressed in the responses we have received from across the diocese, I believe we have indeed drawn together an "Accurate syntheses that truly captures the range of critical and appreciative perspectives of all responses, including views that are expressed only by a minority of participants."⁵ In this enterprise we have been well served by those who formed our diocesan synod team, the volunteer facilitators and those who helped to compile the synthesis of all the responses from the parishes; we owe them a great many thanks for all the work that they have done.

This synthesis constitutes our diocesan contribution to the Synodal journey of the universal Church. However, the work of discernment must continue. We must explore much more deeply how the joys, difficulties, obstacles and wounds to people's life of faith in Jesus Christ which have been expressed in the responses can inform our diocesan journey as we seek "to renew our faith and find new ways and languages to share the Gospel with our brothers and sisters"⁶.

¹ St Augustine, Sermon 340

² Synod Preparatory Document, §9, General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops

³ Vademecum for the Synod on Synodality, General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Joint Letter to Priests about the Synodal Journey, Secretary General of the Synod of Bishops & Prefect of the Congregation for the Clergy, 19 March 2022