

**Catholic Parish of Walsingham**  
**Synod 2021-24**  
**Response to Working Document for the Continental Stage**

**Contextual note**

*The Catholic Parish of Walsingham is made up of four church communities, based in Walsingham, Wells-next-the-Sea, Blakeney and Burnham Market. In three of the four communities, the age profile of Catholic residents is heavily biased towards the retired elderly. In Wells, Blakeney and Burnham Market, a large number of attendees at Sunday liturgies are holiday-makers and those with second homes in the area. In Walsingham itself, the parish church has a more 'normal' age spread of residents and is extensively used by pilgrims to the Catholic national shrine. (From our response to the initial consultation.)*

Our parish is fully committed to the synodal process and welcomes the opportunity for further involvement.

**Consultation on working document for the continental stage**

- The Parish Representative for the Diocesan Synodal Way process received an email from the Diocesan Synodal team on Friday 2 December, asking that the parish be consulted on the working document and a brief response be provided to the Diocese by 16 December.
- A further email at the end of Friday 2 December appeared to suggest that this was no longer required, but as everything had been put in place by then for such consultation as was possible within the timescale, the parish priest decided to go ahead with this.
- The document was made available on the parish website; a section in the parish bulletin requested responses to it by email; a meeting was arranged on Friday 9 December for those members of the Parish Advisory Group who were free to attend, and an invitation extended welcoming all parishioners to join the meeting.
- An initial draft was discussed at the meeting and amended to form this response.

**Concerns**

1. The working document is difficult to read. Much of it is written in language dependent on a knowledge of Church jargon, inaccessible to the ordinary educated and committed parishioner. It is recognised that it was not intended as a consultation document for parishioners, but the issue of appropriate language is one of much wider concern throughout the Church.
2. The process is, perhaps inevitably given current structures, dependent on the diocese; the diocese as the 'local church' is not a concept which has much meaning to most parishioners, given its geographical spread. For parishioners, the local church is their own parish.
3. The idea of a continental stage for the document may be useful for the process, but it is unrealistic to think that the issues across a whole continent are homogenous. The document itself comments on this challenge in para 9, referring to what emerges from the consultation so far as 'a profound re-appropriation of the common dignity of all the baptised' and observing that 'This is the authentic pillar of a synodal Church and the theological foundation of a unity which is capable of resisting the push towards homogenisation'. The Parish of Walsingham identifies with this.
4. The section on scripture in the document is rudimentary. Reading and reflecting on Scripture is central to the whole process of growing in synodality; its place should be recognised and celebrated.

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**The three questions in para 106**

**1. What positive comments resonate with our Parish?**

Listening and welcoming: Our experience of the initial consultation highlighted the balance between the need to build up our own community and the need to go out to others. The quotation from EC Germany in para 31 resonates: we are called to go out 'leaving the comfortable position of those who give hospitality to allow ourselves to be welcomed into the existence of those who are our companions on the journey of humanity'. The emphasis on the importance of the peripheries (para 32) is welcomed, as is the recognition of the need for the removal of 'structural obstacles' (para 33) and the need to ensure support for those in ordained ministry (para 34).

Mission: Para 41 states 'The Gospels present the fullness of life and the fullness of the Kingdom of God not as separate realities or spheres of action, but always as dynamically intertwined movements.' The Parish acknowledged this, but there is much within the Church that appears to contradict it; the lack of use of appropriate language which connects with people today is only one example. Mission will be ineffective without real communication.

Shared mission: The Parish supports the need to engage with other Christians and other people of good will in addressing the challenges faced by societies across the world. The Parish is actively committed to working ecumenically, in response to need and in worship.

Cultural contexts: as already noted, the recognition of diversity, and the opportunities this presents, is essential in all areas of the Church's life. The Parish demonstrates in microcosm the difficulties and possibilities presented by diversity.

Women's participation: the Parish would generally welcome the greater involvement of women in decision-making and governance roles within the Church. Ordination does not have to be a qualification for decision-making. Many also wish to see their inclusion in ordained ministry. It is noted that the Church is seeing the involvement of women as a possibility, whereas in the UK it is taken for granted in the public sphere.

Formation: the Parish agrees that there is an urgent need for formation in the synodal approach, both for lay people and for ordained ministers.

**2. Which difficulties are present in our part of the Church?**

Young people: the Parish has few young people; we are actively trying to involve them, and it is a challenge to do this creatively. Para 35 of the document needs development. What does it mean to 'make a preferential option for the young'?

Charisms: the Parish finds para 70 unclear. It appears to suggest that the Holy Spirit can only work through the hierarchy. This is not the case. Prophetic voices in any institution are always in danger of being suppressed by those dependent on the system.

Structures and institutions: see note 3 above under 'Concerns'. The Parish disagrees with the suggestion that continents are homogenous. The experience of the Parish is that the 'synodal dynamic' is emerging

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across its own four churches, but there is so far no evidence of how this might extend even across the Diocese of East Anglia.

The Parish regrets that there is a lack of openness to radical reform of structures; the reference in para 76 to 'the ordinary ways of exercising episcopal ministry' suggests that there is no consideration that these might be transformed by 'ecclesial synodality', but that these are to be 'harmonised'.

In general, the parish finds the paragraphs on hoped-for structures and institutions unhelpful and unconvincing. Not all Church institutions are at present 'fully participatory bodies' (para 80).

Liturgy: as Walsingham is a place of pilgrimage, many visiting the Parish are attracted by 'popular religiosity' or are Christians by culture more than by faith; the statement in para 90 from Panama is supported.

Para 92 reflects the sadness of division over the celebration of the Eucharist which is also experienced in one of the churches within our parish.

#### **3. What are the questions or issues that should be considered in the next steps of the process?**

- a. How to get rid of the use of 'Church' language and jargon; how to communicate the joy and challenge of the gospel in ways which connect with the experience of people today. (Perhaps a glossary for any necessary 'technical' language might assist towards this.)
- b. How to loosen the ties created by structures in order to give parishes – or whatever local groupings work – a greater degree of autonomy to respond to local needs.
- c. How to reflect the reality that in many cultures, women are already equal participants, and that their continuing exclusion from authority within the Church is contrary to the gospel. Most active participants in most Christian churches are women.
- d. How to ensure that adequate attention is given to the climate crisis (para 45 in the present document is very limited) and how to emphasise the need for the Church to challenge economic injustice at structural level, and to provide a frame of reference for issues arising from globalism. Laudato Si provides a reflective treatment and superb resource for both these areas.
- e. How to develop an inclusive approach to all people, whatever aspect of their lives or circumstances may lead them to feel unwelcomed by the Church.
- f. How to build on existing ecumenical links to develop fuller engagement (England and Wales).
- g. How to involve those dioceses and parishes which have chosen to exclude themselves from participation in the development of the synodal way (para 19).
- h. How to offer effective evangelisation to young people, and to their parents' generation which is now often missing from the Church in Europe.