

Catholic Parish of Walsingham

Summary of responses during Masses of 27/28 November to questions for Synod consultation

Total number of responses received to date: 100. Points from three individual email responses also included.

Do I see myself as on a journey with other members of the Church?

Yes	73
No	14
Both	1
Partly/difficult	7
No response	1
Unclear	4

If not, what needs to change to make this possible?

Responses were received not only from those who replied 'no' to the first question, but also from those who recognised a need for change:

Community: More sharing of various kinds. Praying together, sharing our experiences of the journey, supporting one another, developing community spirit. More opportunities to meet as a parish, bring people together for discussion, social events, shared projects. There is a disconnect between those who feel deeply committed and others. More community spirit. Make it more relevant to young people. Spiritual retreats, evangelisation through mass media and social media, visiting of jails, people sick and in hospitals – to evangelise. More collaboration with churches across various dioceses.

Individuals: Not just the community – individuals may also need to change. 'Verbal negativity' unhelpful. Awareness of others' points of views: 'we are at different points, many routes to the same end. My experience may not be that of another, so I need to learn to listen and be interested in the person in front of/next to me'. Our differences need to be accepted and celebrated. 'I need to feel like I will be accepted as I am, rather than having to meet someone else's standards'. Need lots of give and take. We have to learn that we may not be right and need to learn from each other. Many who go to Mass are distant. More welcoming and belonging instead of the lack of charity.

Communication: sharing information about the working of the parish would unite whole congregation better.

The Church and its structures: People need to be less possessive of roles within the church. More lay involvement. Drastic changes needed in wider Church; ,more lay preachers, women priests, priests allowed to marry and experience family life. More inclusion. There are many changes occurring in society; the Church sometimes

appears to be inflexible and not accommodating to some groups/individuals. Change from a 'rules based' approach to a 'personal relationship with God' approach. Return to orthodoxy: the Church needs to reclaim her position in teaching the world about Jesus.

Availability: Find it hard to get to the parish groups if they are during the day, that's important for me to be 'journeying'. Mass times during the week at 8 am so people who work can attend daily Mass.

What opportunities are there for dialogue (serious exchange of opinion, especially among people or groups that disagree)?

Responses ranged from 'none' to 'many', although most people felt that opportunities were limited.

Some responses mentioned the parish advisory group, but there was some uncertainty about its purpose and membership. There is a need to raise awareness of parish structures that already exist. Special meetings were also mentioned. Wednesday Bible Study group – would be good to have more like this, on eg encyclicals; session on Sacrament of Reconciliation a few years ago was much appreciated. Prayer groups would be supportive. Informal/social meetings can often explore serious issues. We should provide opportunities for people to share about controversial church – and other – matters

Issues about meetings were mentioned: there can be difficulty for some people in speaking up; meetings can be a waste of time if people are unable to accept what others say. Opinions can be polarised, and a lot may be left unsaid. One response said that a more traditional view would not be tolerated. It would help if some groups/meetings were held in the evening, for those who work; of afternoon, or after Mass. Fewer face-to-face opportunities due to Covid at the moment but virtual/email still available – often down to the drive of the individual.

Inadequate communication from the Diocese.

If I speak, who listens? Who should be listening to me? If others speak, do I listen?

People responded with honesty about their own efforts to listen and what prevents this, and in some cases about the difficulty of speaking, and of being heard. Small, rather than large, groups were seen as helpful. Challenge is not always welcomed.

God, parishioners, priests, friends, neighbours, non-religious people, spiritual director, community members were mentioned as listening.

Comments:

'In my experience everyone I have spoken to has been very receptive and open and I am learning a great deal from Father Keith and other Church Community members.'

‘The listening is happening more on grass roots level among people of the parish or communities.’

‘The decision makers of the church need to listen for fundamental changes to take place.’

‘I rather shy away from areas of conflict and dispute.’

‘I live in a religious community. It is my primary place of listening/speaking. Entering and staying in that process is a challenge but life-giving.’

‘I’m a woman and relatively young – no-one listens to me!’

Who decides about things in the parish?

Most responses recognised that, because of his responsibility for the parish, the parish priest is required to make decisions. Many also referred to the Parish Advisory Group and to input from parishioners. There is a place for individual initiatives.

Who decides things in the Church as a whole?

Most responses referred to the Pope and the hierarchy, Bishops’ Conferences, and some noted input from the faithful, with the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Several commented that decisions were taken by unmarried male clergy, by remote people in Rome, and that senior clerics are now disagreeing with the Pope.

‘This is not a business but the Church.’

‘Christ and his infallible teaching through the doctrine and magisterium of the Church.’

‘Most decisions seem to be pre-made hundreds of years ago and rarely genuinely revisited.’

‘We do as we are told. In matters of faith and morals this is good, otherwise not necessary.’

How can we make it possible for everyone to take part in this decision-making?

In parish:

More parish get-togethers and meetings, involving as many people as possible and listening to their views. Greater communication about things that parishioners are doing to support the parish. Invitation to be involved, let people know they have something to offer. Encourage open discussion and socialising and make sure that the ‘little’ ones have a voice. Community building – small group meetings where people can speak freely. Remember that people are able to contribute in different ways as they journey through life. More opportunities to gather and discuss as a parish family and at times more accessible for ‘9-5ers’!

Written suggestions/questionnaires for those who don’t feel comfortable speaking. These forms are a good starting point.

Lots of different media eg online, zoom, in person, in the evening, during the day, after Mass, with cake and tea, at the pub. Host committee meetings over video calls.

Newsletter is good.
Perhaps quarterly meetings with specific points.
Maybe a parish secretary.

Wider Church:

Ask parishioners for their views on key issues such as women priests and married priests and take account of what they say.
More embracing to the voice of women
Devolution of power (from top down to bottom up)
We need more dialogue between different levels of our Church organisation. Dialogue is the key.
Monthly parish or local churches meetings (could be virtual eg Zoom) with agenda set in advance, including church leaders providing updates.
The Diocese could hold meetings – even via Zoom if necessary – where matters could be discussed. This is lacking at present – we have little contact with the wider Diocese.
To open bishops' conferences to people with other experiences.
Elect/choose good, orthodox bishops who listen but also know the teachings of the Church.
I do wish the Church would soften its preposterous stance on contraception and allow abortion in the case of medical need and rape/incest.
More obvious involvement of lay persons in episcopal gatherings of all kinds
The Holy Father's current effort could be repeated at arranged periods.

Challenges:

A lot of people like to attend Mass but then not get involved with other things.
Every area different so difficult.
Those who have authority have to come to see that this is valuable first.
Very difficult – because Church not a democratic body.
I find it difficult to engage with the traditional language of the church.
We shouldn't be involved – let the shepherds advise the flock
Act like new decisions are an actual option and make people believe that change is actually possible.

Other

PR, by referendum, have a census (via email?).
Maybe by each parish voting.
Except for faith and morals, we need a democratic decision making process, parish councils decide, not the clergy.
At diocesan level a democratic council, not a talking shop.
Poll church members, and make sure wider opinions are reflected in the leadership.

How can we help people to learn about the Church and how it works?

Meetings

Educational meetings.

Outreach to housebound (so important just now with Covid)

Prayer groups, discussion groups. Perhaps a retreat.

Courses or talks similar to Alpha group, where we can get together over a shared meal.

More gatherings with definite objectives

More sessions outside of Mass.

Communication

Better communication and welcome to all

Use all means of modern communication, mass media, social media.

Leaflets, newsletters, radio, TV

Building up a network of influencers who help to inform/communicate.

Witness

By example, living our daily lives as a witness of faith and love, being more open and transparent; involving people and not talking down to them; showing friendliness and encouragement to all

Missionary work

Return to acknowledgement and true reverence of living body of Christ in the Eucharist

Education

Make ongoing 'adult' formation appealing and accessible. Make people aware that they should be interested in deepening their faith – it's not static – and that includes the Church and how it works.

Proclaim the truth of our faith, undiluted. People need the truth and beauty of our Catholic faith. Learn the catechism – have classes once a week in the evening.

Weekly newsletter. Ponder on the reflection given and share with family and friends.

Make published resources available. A 'tract stand' perhaps?

By having sessions that teach and inform us so we are well equipped to pass it on.

A parish mission.

Offer books people can borrow and return, online resources, reading material eg Tablet and other Catholic papers

Initially as part of the homily at Saturday and Sunday Masses. Change homilies to debate one issue per Sunday?

Children are the future of the Church – a lot of them attend non-Catholic schools.

More 'summer camps' and opportunities for them to meet children from other

parishes would help. It would help if children were encouraged in some way (maybe a children's Mass once a month). If children are being made to feel bored and ignored,

parents will take them to other churches where they are being welcomed.

For families I think a printed 'booklet' of simple prayers for various occasions would be a useful 'door to door' handout.

What about the 'unchurched' around us? Is that area covered by this question? Invite them to special times and places set aside for 'in depth' teaching.

Visits to Walsingham/the Cathedral/visiting the sick/fundraising for the Church and other charities

Open our doors – take the church out to the people. The church is the people, not the building.

It might be better to put the house in order before showing people around!

How can we help people become as educated in their faith as they are in other aspects of their life?

Initially as part of the sermon at Saturday and Sunday Mass.

By reading and reflecting on the scripture text in weekly newsletter. Lectio divina.

Bible study.

How do we know how educated people are? Offering meetings/courses to people may be helpful.

Make them feel involved in the greater good. Encourage the journey. Keep new converts interested and supported.

It used to be the schools! Now church discussion groups? Not necessarily in church.

Access to internet is good for people who don't feel able to attend groups. There are some great opportunities at Walsingham Shrine – on their website to listen to talks Reading lists? Reading groups? Talks – bible study, meditation (which I would really enjoy) Lending them convincing books! Sharing of good speakers. Push use of the 'library' that we have. Use of contemporary music and resources.

Make ongoing 'adult' formation appealing and accessible. Make people aware that they should be interested in deepening their faith – it's not static – and that includes the Church and how it works. Also, are they educated in other aspects of their life? Or only in those areas they deem important. Helping them to understand that their faith should be their first priority.

Better adult formation opportunities which accept the need to question and doubt.

There are already systems in place in the diocese but more 'popular' systems could be set up in parishes.

Ask them what they want to know. Talk to them and ascertain their current knowledge.

Has to be from schools/children onwards. A continuous process.

Good homilies and scripture sessions here. Over-emphasis on popular devotions.

Priestly formation which recognises the context of life today.

Give guidelines to teachers and educate them on the teachings of the Church.

Provide examples about how people can implement learning from the readings in modern day life.

Study sessions in groups lead by the priest focussing on history of the bible and the church.

Discussion groups – difficult in this scattered parish – but perhaps occasional face-to-face meetings supplemented by Zoom sessions – most people have access to computers now.

This needs more than a weekly Mass with readings and homilies. The missionary work of the church needs to be more active at a local level both in the church community and outside.

Making the church a place that a wider cross section of modern society wants to identify with/attend.

We can begin with: church – leaders – influencers (media/social media) Politicians who are Catholic. NGOs that practise Catholicism. Leaders in every town/community/city etc.

More Catholic hymns that are full of theology.

Perhaps that should begin at the top and filter down. With the abuse crisis as it is it's often difficult to even be Catholic. The actual problems in the Church need to be addressed.

Encourage more people to attend and listen and partake in parish discussions – after Mass 20 minutes?

By preaching in a conversational way – speaking about faith, conscious that the message needs to land amongst people living in the grubby realities of life – where Christ came to find us.

Chances to talk and ask questions.

Further points

Consultation document clumsy and incomprehensible.

Catholic church remains male dominated.

Fear of change.

Journeying together means being companionable, friendly, interested in each other.

Have a common purpose; put our beliefs into practice and support one another.

Little contact except with a few people.

Those too ill or frail to come to Mass may feel left out.

Add more readers to the list. Include opportunity for congregation to add bidding prayers.

Address issues of communication within the parish. Info from PAG?

Charitable work brings people together and helps ecumenical links.