

C 3 Sunday of Easter 5 May 2019: Sermon on the Synod

Good evening, I'm here tonight to update you on the progress of Synod2020 and to tell you how you can now help to inform the generation of the proposals to be considered at the Synod in 2020.

Three years ago in October 2017 the Archdiocese of Liverpool began a Synod journey. Archbishop Malcolm began this journey with a year of prayer which culminated in the National Eucharistic Congress that took place in Liverpool last September. At every mass, we have continued to pray the Synod Prayer asking God to 'help us to become the Church He is calling us to be' and to 'help us to respond to the challenges of our times in new ways to bring His love to all our sisters and brothers'.

The Synod Office has now appointed approximately 500 members; some members have been appointed to represent each parish and some parishioners are members representing the deaneries in the diocese. I have been appointed together with Fr Jonathan and Fr Bernard as representatives of St Marys parish and Kevin Flanagan and Jason Crompton have been appointed as Deanery Representatives. The same applies for all parishes.

Pope Francis has called for us to be a Synodial Church. So, what does this mean? The word Synod comes from 2 words in Greek which can be translated as "together on the road" or "together on the way", so a Synodial church is one which journeys and the path we take is formed as we journey together. The path will be formed by us and we will be formed by our journey. Discernment is at the heart of this journey, this is more than just listening, it is allowing the Spirit of God to shape the way we hear and the way we act.

The Congress that was officially opened last October marked these months to be the start of an extended listening time to take place, a period of discernment. This is a time for the local parishes, laity, clergy, religious orders, schools and others of good will to participate. The Archdiocese is very keen to capture *your views* and for us to help in developing a Vision for the Church in the future.

Here in Leyland we have a vibrant church community. Through our liturgical services, community life and the many parish pastoral support services and lay associations we strive to respond on a daily basis to the needs of the people here and further afield, often with the help of friends in other faith communities. Each day we, that is you and I, are presented with unique opportunities in our lives, through our work, on the street we live in, through our friendships and in our families - *to be*

the face, the hands, the eyes and the voice of Christ to others. Therefore the “Joy of the Gospel” is very much alive in our church and parish. However, we also recognise that there are struggles, hopes and fears people have, some expressed and some that people hold in their hearts and lives that may be unspoken. This is now a chance to share *any views* you have and to help us shape the church. Remember, in the Synod 2020 prayer we say; “**help us to become the church that you are calling us to be?**”

This stage of Synod 2020 *is very important to the process.* It is about listening carefully, listening with love and from the heart to *your response* to four Synod questions that the Archdiocese has presented to us as a Survey and that we are all invited to respond to. This is about hearing the authentic voice of the people and those who look to the Church to answer some of the needs they have expressed.

This is not just about dealing with decline, but is a positive step; as Christians we know that God always has a *good* plan for us, and is asking us to discern the way ahead by reading the signs of the times. This listening exercise aims at including all the people who are a part of the Archdiocese in the widest sense. It is very important that we hear from all of you here today but we ask that you also help us to hear from the people that might not be here with us in church.

So, what is *our* Hope for the Church going forward? Where do you find love, hope, truth, goodness and Joy? What causes you concern or worry for the future? What do you think is the purpose of the Catholic Church in the world today? These are the first 3 questions that the Synod office asks us and which form the Synod survey.

Having reflected on these questions; we are asked what topics we would like to see on the Synod 2020 Agenda when the Synod representatives, including those from Leyland, gather together next year to vote on proposals.

There are several ways that you can respond to the Synod survey. The first and probably easiest way for most of us to respond is to complete the survey online at www.synod2020.co.uk This address is in the weekly bulletin. I would urge you to encourage the people you know that aren't attending church to complete this online survey as well.

The web site also contains very good introductory talks given by inspirational people and those who analyse the situation of the Church today, both in the UK and in Liverpool in particular. These Synod resources may help inform your own responses or you may want to share them with friends to encourage participation.

(Choice number 2). There are other ways to pass on your views: this includes doing the survey by hand and returning it to the parish over the next few weeks. You will find the Survey forms in a box in the Narthex. You might want to take some time to complete the survey, listening to and sharing your views with friends or family members before completing, but remember that all views are important and the Archdiocese wants to hear YOUR views. Please take extra copies of the survey for your friends or family members to complete that may not be attending church, we would like to hear from them as well, they are part of the wider flock we are called to serve. Please note, all written copies of the survey must be returned to the Church by 23 June.

Choice no. 3 There is also the invitation to come together with others and with our Parishioners who are members of the Synod. With the help of the parish Synod representatives and in a prayerful atmosphere we will listen to each other and gather the thoughts expressed to the survey questions. After these listening sessions we will be sending all the surveys and our responses to the Diocesan Synod Office. The listening sessions will be held on the evenings of Tuesday 4 June, and Thursday 6 June in the Parish centre so you can choose which date best suits you. Details of these meetings will be in the bulletin in the coming weeks.

Remember that the Synod has been defined as “Walking together on the Journey” so please join us by participating in this process.

In summary there are several ways you can participate:

1. Fill in the Survey on line through the Synod 2020 Web Site. Details are in the bulletin.
2. Complete the Survey Forms that are available to you today and return them over the next few weeks to the parish – there is a box in the Narthex for this purpose.
3. Attend **one** of the two short evening Listening Sessions on June 4th or June 6th in the Social Centre.
4. Finally, we invite the associations ‘and other groups in the parish to look at the Survey and respond accordingly and /or participate in one of the two listening meetings in June. There are listening sessions for Schools and with young people.

You can put in as many ideas as you wish, whichever way you chose to respond your responses will be anonymous.

Please note the online *survey will close on the 30th of June 2019*. If you wish to use the written survey forms your thoughts will be sent to the Synod Office from the parish and they must be in by 23 June. There is a box in the Narthex for you to put your written replies.

So what will happen after you have given your views to the Archdiocese

In October this year all the Synod Representatives from the Archdiocese will gather to get feedback on the findings of the listening exercise and the survey. This work is being undertaken by Hope University: They will identify the Synod themes that have emerged from what you and others have said. This will be shared with you on *Sunday 13th October 2019* (Synod Sunday) when there will be a Pastoral Letter from the Archbishop informing you of progress to date.

This will be followed by a further process across the Parishes and areas to decide on the *proposals* that will be presented to the 500 representatives at the 2020 Synod itself in October 2020.

Thank you for listening, the Parish Synod representatives are here to help this process, so do not hesitate to contact us if you need assistance at any stage. I will be stood at the back of church if you want to speak to with me, or to collect hard copies of the survey for either yourselves or your family members after the Mass today.

Please keep praying for the work of the Archdiocese and the parish during this important process.