

Summary of points made at a meeting on the Synod process

16 November 2021

Present: Sue Edwards (chair), Brendon Durham, GERALYN COLLINS, Peter Collins, Marjorie Dean, Paul Dean, Anthony Fenn, Lucy Gallagher, Mary Hale, Catherine Knowles, Paul Paniccia, Ivan Scully, Marc Servais, Diana Russell, Tim Wood

Apologies: Sally Brumby, Janet Cahill, Terry Cahill, Minnie Greayer, Maureen Howard, Nicki Williams

Introduction

Fr Benjamin opened the meeting with the *Adsumus Sancte Spiritus* prayer, used at every session of Vatican II and generally associated with synodal meetings. A special version has been prepared for the Synod on Synodality, and may be found, along a great deal else, at <https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2021/09/07/210907b.html>, issued on 7 September 2021. The text is attached at the end of these minutes for future reference. Fr Benjamin then left the meeting.

The meeting focused on the process for preparing the Woolhampton Parish input to the initial diocesan phase of the Synod. Two broad considerations underpin that process. The first is that we must enable maximum participation, in line with the Vatican's insistence that 'while **all the baptized** are specifically called to take part in the Synodal Process, **no one** – no matter their religious affiliation – **should be excluded** from sharing their perspective and experiences, insofar as they want to help the Church on her synodal journey of seeking what is good and true. This is especially true of those who are most vulnerable or marginalized.'

The second is that the process must be guided by the Holy Spirit. We need to allow time, space and care to help us to discern what the Holy Spirit is saying to each one of us. We need to listen to each other, we need to be still, we need to share our insights with freedom, truth and charity. We need to be open to adjusting the process we devise now in the light of what we learn as we go along.

It is easy to feel dispirited by the thought that our voices will be ignored, or not even heard. We should try to resist this, and say clearly what we need to say without worrying too much about what happens next. If all contributors across the country, and across the world, do this, the authentic voice of the Church will be manifest.

Moreover, the Vatican document referenced above states: 'This Synod not only expects responses that can assist the Assembly of the Synod of Bishops to be held in Rome in October 2023, but also desires to promote and develop the practice and experience of *being Synodal* in the course of the process and in the future moving forward. There are excellent resources available from those local Churches that have already embarked along this journey.' So it is the process as much as the formal output that achieves change, and that makes the effort

worthwhile. We learn about 'journeying together' by, well, journeying together. All the questions are subsets of that.

The revised timetable requires us to send in our submission by Palm Sunday, 10 April 2022. Very approximately, we currently envisage spending between now and the end of December in preparation; January and February in collecting as wide a range of inputs as practicable; and March in drafting and building consensus around the submission.

Preparation

The preparatory phase (to end December) should: stimulate greater interest among parishioners in the Synod on synodality and help potential participants understand what it is about; build confidence that our process will enable all to participate fully and fruitfully; and do certain practical things.

It is not clear that the Synod is well understood within the parish as a whole. It is therefore important to give it a good deal of air time, from the pulpit (by the celebrant and/or by others), via the bulletin, through leaflets and posters, and by making appropriate documentation easily available. In addition, the parish website should feature a page dedicated to the Synod, with links to key sites and information about relevant activities at parish and diocesan level.

Confidence in the process is vital. This has to do particularly with openness (easy for people to get involved), transparency (everything is in the public domain), accountability and representativeness. The names of individuals taking on particular roles should be publicised, and teams tasked with, eg, running meetings or drafting a document need to be representative of the parish as a whole. We should make clear at the outset that everyone will be invited to comment on the draft submission before it is finalised.

In these next weeks we should develop the website as just mentioned and create a facility for anyone to post comments publicly (perhaps subject to some moderation process to deal with any purely abusive or otherwise irrelevant material). Marc Servais indicated a willingness to oversee this. We also need to devise a process so that those not online can contribute.

We should develop a short questionnaire [eg 'What do you see as the two/three biggest issues facing the Church now?' 'Which two/three of the "ten questions" associated with the Synod do you feel most strongly about?' 'Do you want to make any other comments about the Synod at this stage?'] to encourage individuals to form and share views. The questionnaire should be made available (both via the website and in paper form) as soon as practicable (ie well before Christmas), and throughout January, so that responses can help shape the preparation of the meetings described below, especially the launch meeting.

In this initial period we should form (ie select and convene) a small team to facilitate meetings [Geryl Collins offered to lead this team, and Tim Wood offered to be involved]. We should also form a second small team to prepare records of meetings and to draft the eventual submission [Peter Collins offered to be part of this]. The members of both teams need to be identified early so that people know who they are and so that they can be actively involved throughout the process and thus have a first-hand sense of what is being thought and said.

Collecting inputs

The idea of a synodal journey embodies a sharing of ideas and experiences, enriching our understanding by listening to others. So public meetings of various sorts will play a key role in developing and collecting inputs to our parish-wide discernment. The meetings will be held at various times and places throughout the parish, but it is axiomatic that everyone will be welcome at every meeting they choose to attend. This is a parish-wide exercise.

At the moment, we are envisaging the series of meetings set out below, though of course this may change in the light of experience. The three individual churches will set dates and times for the meetings to be held at their respective premises, and will set the agenda for those meetings (in consultation with each other). Fr Gabriel and Fr Benjamin should take part in as many meetings as they wish, especially those scheduled for 16 January and 6 March. Participants will not be required to book places at the various meetings in advance, but may be invited to indicate an intention to attend in order to help the logistics.

Sunday 16 January, 3pm (rooms already reserved)	Douai Abbey	Launch meeting. Some discussion of the overall process, but main aim is likely to be taking soundings about the relative strength of feelings on the ten questions and about anything else participants wish to raise. Break-out groups if numbers warrant.
w/b 23 Jan	St Mary's	We could work our way through the ten questions, two or three per meeting; or we could work our way through just those questions that seem of greatest concern to parishioners; and/or we could, eg, focus on other issues of greater concern. Details to be confirmed nearer the time.
w/b 30 Jan	St Luke's	
w/b 6 Feb	St Bernadette's	
w/b 13 Feb	Zoom	
Half term; no public meeting; drafting team working on ideas about key messages to go in the submission in the light of what has happened so far.		
Sunday 6 March, 3pm (rooms already reserved)	Douai Abbey	Meeting to review emerging key messages ahead of the submission being drafted.
		Scope for additional meeting if needed to finalise the submission.
Before 10 April		Submission sent to diocese, put on our website, perhaps sent to <i>The Tablet</i> , and shared with anyone else we can think of.

The launch meeting will, necessarily, be a learning experience for all involved, and planning for the subsequent meetings will take account of that. But the dates for those meetings should be fixed as soon as possible.

Each meeting will be supported by one or more facilitators, to help especially with the discussions of the main Synodal themes. One key function of the facilitators will be to manage opposing views and to ensure space, and respect, for all views expressed. Another will be to

establish groundrules for how meetings will be conducted. A facilitator is someone who helps a group to work together, to understand their common objectives, and to plan how to achieve them. The facilitator remains neutral.

Each meeting will be summarised in writing by an appointed individual; these summaries will be placed on the website as soon as possible after the meeting.

Individual contributions submitted directly or via the website or in response to the questionnaire will also constitute a key source of input. They will be placed on the website alongside the meeting summaries.

The 11.00am Abbey congregation should be strongly encouraged to participate. This will require, eg, repeated announcements from the pulpit and making the questionnaires etc available in the Abbey church. Visitors to the Abbey church should be encouraged to add their contributions too.

Collecting inputs from those on the margins is really important, and not straightforward. Marjorie and Paul Dean offered to begin a process for interviewing people who had left the Church, in order to build up understanding of how things appear from their perspective. We may also need to take special steps to engage with younger people.

Drafting

The drafting team will review all inputs during the February half-term break and present a summary to the meeting on 6 March. They will then prepare a written draft, taking account of comments made on 6 March, and circulate it for further comment before finalising it and sending it in to the diocese by the deadline of 10 April.

It is likely that the draft will try so far as possible to relate its messages to the most appropriate headings within the “ten questions”, but that it will not set out to answer each question in full. It may express a spectrum of views on some issue where that is what has emerged from the collective discernment.

We will aim to make the document as succinct as possible.

ADSUMUS SANCTE SPIRITUS

**We stand before You, Holy Spirit,
as we gather together in Your name.**

**With You alone to guide us,
make Yourself at home in our
hearts;**

**Teach us the way we must go
and how we are to pursue it.**

**We are weak and sinful;
do not let us promote disorder.**

**Do not let ignorance lead us down
the wrong path, nor partiality
influence our actions.**

**Let us find in You our unity
so that we may journey together to
eternal life
and not stray from the way of truth
and what is right.**

**All this we ask of You,
who are at work in every place and
time,
in the communion of the Father and
the Son,
forever and ever.**

Amen.