

Finchale Partnership: Synod Meetings 2024

The Synod on Synodality met at an Assembly in Rome in October 2023, and produced a synthesis report. They requested further discussion throughout the church, to be brought together before the next Assembly in Rome in 2024. In the Finchale Partnership we held 3 meetings to discuss Formation, Ministry and Structures and Decision Making.

The average attendance was 27, including students from Durham University Chaplaincy as well as people from the parishes of the Finchale Partnership. The meetings began with *Lectio* and then everyone took it in turns to give their views on the subject being discussed. Everyone was listened to, and there was time for general discussion once everyone had been heard.

Formation: We agreed that Formation is a priority. There is a lot of concern that many people have had no formation since they were at school. People want to know more about Vatican II, Social issues / Catholic Social Teaching, Liturgy & understanding the Mass and how people of faith can deal with the stigmatisation that can come from publicly following faith. Partnership and parishes need to work together, using good material online, and face to face sessions. There's a real need for people with knowledge and confidence to lead sessions.

Ministry: Even if our parishes are smaller than they were in the past, there is a good strong core of people keeping the flame burning for the future, and those who take on roles / ministries find that their whole experience of being part of a parish changes. We need to talk about the joy of ministry. But there's still a view that you don't volunteer – the priest will ask 'appropriate' people.

We need more awareness and recognition of ministries (inc. prison ministry, planning liturgy and music, making the coffee after Mass, as well as reading and extraordinary ministers of Communion). New ministries such as a wider Ministry of the Word would be welcomed, as well as lay leaders of other services and opportunities for prayer – for example the Liturgy of the Hours, and Stations.

We have a deep sense of gratitude for the ministry of our priests, and we need to look after them. And we need to do more to encourage vocations.

Structures and Decision Making: People said that they couldn't explain what the diocesan structures are: it's so opaque we don't know how it works. There have been several different Lay Councils over the years, but people asked if there is one at the moment? Is there someone who supposedly represents me?

We need much better communication between the diocese and the parishes. What are the things the diocese is discussing / making decisions about? Why aren't they asking us about them? What are the things we can make decisions about locally?

We need to be talking about our vision for 10 years' time. We don't need a mission statement – we have one ('Go and make disciples of all nations' Matt 28).

We shared our thoughts with Bishop Stephen and look forward to further discussions on how we take synodality forward in our Partnership and in the Diocese.

Finchale Partnership, Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle.
March 2024