



**INTERNATIONAL ENGLISH-SPEAKING
CATHOLIC COMMUNITY**
PARISH OF LUXEMBOURG NOTRE-DAME
www.catholic.lu

CONSULTATION

Results of the first stage

12 February - 6 March 2022

Synod 2021-2023

Consultation of the English-speaking Community, Parish of Luxembourg Notre-Dame

Results of the first stage

Pope Francis issued a worldwide invitation to all the faithful to help prepare the 2023 Synod of Bishops. The English-speaking Catholic Community of Luxembourg is contributing to this process. We began with a consultation of the people who make up our community, the results of which are summarised in this document.

Between 12 February and 6 March 2022, the consultation invited people to answer some questions about the Church today. It was intended for people who go to church regularly, occasionally or not at all. Announcements were made at all Masses during this period, and posts were published on the website www.catholic.lu and on the Community's Facebook page. In an effort to reach out to those who no longer attend Church, an article was published in the online newsletter Chronicle.lu.

Respondents were actively encouraged to contribute to the consultation online but paper versions were also distributed at Mass. It was emphasised that all questions were optional and that all answers would be treated anonymously.

A total of 117 responses to the consultation were received (114 online, plus three handwritten replies). In addition, a number of responses to a simplified questionnaire were received from pupils of the European School. These will be analysed separately and are only reflected occasionally in the summaries below.

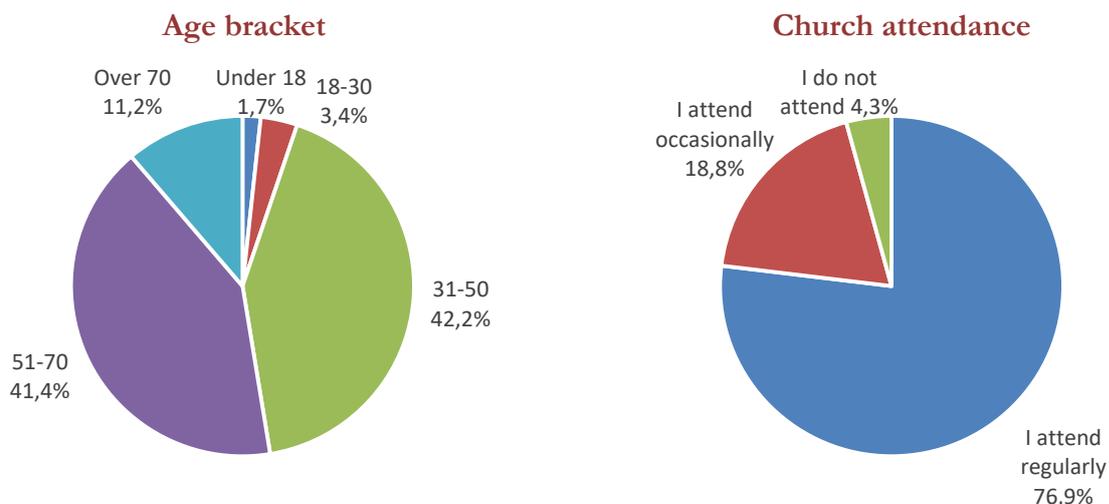
Thank you to the team of reviewers who read all of the contributions and prepared the following summaries: Caren Baviera, John Coughlan, Mairead and Tom Cranfield, Steve McCarthy, Klaudia Michalak-Palarz and Francesco Spreafico. Thank you also to Sebastian Orlander and to Hanna and Tom Zigrand-Dagodog, who prepared the printed and online questionnaires respectively.

Above all, thank you to all the respondents, young and old, for your thoughtful, honest and frequently moving contributions; and for helping us to make our voices heard in preparing the future of our Church!

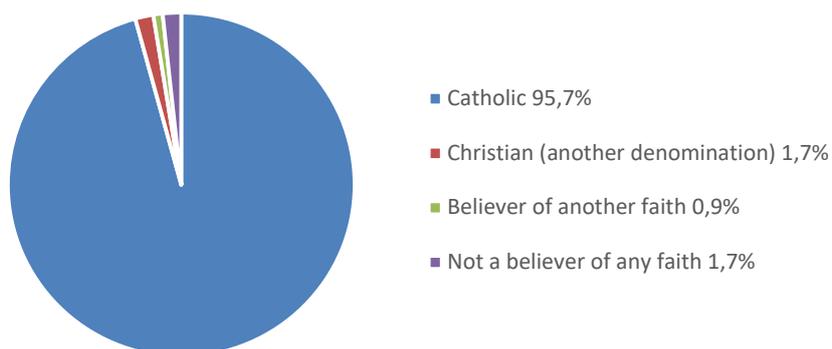
For more information: www.catholic.lu/synod-2021-2023/

Luxembourg, 14 March 2022

A. Profile of the respondents



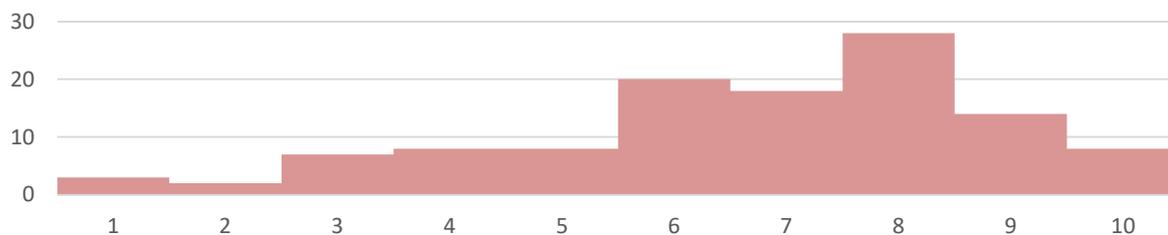
Relationship with the Catholic Church



B. Community

1) How alive do you perceive the community of the Church in Luxembourg to be?

1= not very alive 10 = alive



Why did you give this rating?

Many respondents stress that they are much more satisfied with St. Alphonse parish than with the local Luxembourgish church. The English-speaking community is perceived as “special”, “vibrant”, “international” and “welcoming”, more alive than the Luxembourgish one.

Here are some of the positive traits of our community that respondents called out:

- The community is inclusive and attracts people (weekend masses are often full).
- There is diversity of people (nationalities, age groups).

Responses were mixed when it comes to engagement within our community:

- Some respondents indicated that the community is engaged, organizes a variety of activities and initiatives for different age groups (e.g., Music group / Choir, Charity, Christian meditation, Children's liturgy, FHC, Confirmation, Youth Group, Pilgrimages) and there is a good number of volunteers.
- On the flip side, other respondents called out that not enough is happening beyond the weekend masses, the group of people involved in the church activities is limited, and the offering for young people is scarce.

With respect to the Luxembourgish local church, respondents called out the following downsides:

- Too traditional, old fashioned, distant from people.
- Frequented almost exclusively by the older generation (it doesn't attract young people).
- More activity in charity works than in liturgy and sacraments.

There were a few other general comments about Church today that is worth calling out (although they were more isolated voices/opinions):

- Church doesn't preach the Bible, but politics.
- Church should work more with social media.
- Less people are interested in religion nowadays. Outside church, religion is absent from daily lives
- Nostalgia from the past: more traditional church's activities are no longer happening (e.g., Latin masses, adorations, traditional catechesis).

2) What memory or experience of the Catholic Church do you value or cherish most?

Respondents called out the following memories/experiences as most valuable or cherished:

- Education in a Catholic school or environment.
- Experience of belonging to Catholic groups (youth group, choir, music group), sharing activities and helping others.
- Personal memories of sacraments and important events (wedding, baptism of children, First Holy Communion, confession, Christmas masses). [This was also called out by some of the European School students, who for example remembered a wedding of a relative as a valuable moment.]
- Meeting the vibrant, inclusive English-speaking Community.
- Church as significant support in life problems.
- Considering Church as a family, giving sense of belonging, 'home away from home'. Feeling welcome. [This was called out also by some of the European School students, who for example stressed that going to mass is an opportunity to spend time together with the family.]

3) What memory or experience of the Catholic Church has caused you pain or discomfort?

Abuses and, in particular, sexual abuses (also against children) and violence were by far the most given comments here, but nobody said it was their experience. Respondents called out failure of mission by Church and lack of punishment against the guilty, denial of responsibility. Few people answered that they didn't have any bad experiences.

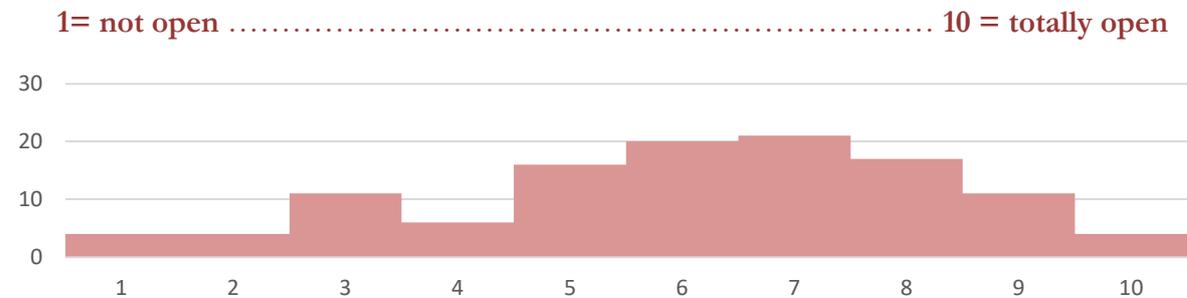
Other common themes were:

- Scandals of the Curia, covering up the mistakes and lack of transparency. [People felt a sense of discouragement because of these events that are affecting the Church, especially young people – European School Students, called out this aspect.]
- Lack of inclusion, rejection of some groups (women, unmarried couples, divorced people, LGBTQ+). This concern was particularly vivid in the feedback of the young respondents.
- Culture of fear: there is judgmental attitude instilling fear in people.

- Clericalism, arrogance and avarice of priests, strict, rude treatment of lay people.
- Too conservative, politicized attitude.

C. Participation

1) How open is the Church to the concerns, questions and problems of people in general?



Why did you give this rating?

The highest ratings were given by people who had personal experience of being listened to and helped with serious problems by Church clergy. Others cited the good done by the Church and its charitable organisations for the poor and sick in the world. Many mentioned the openness of the English-speaking community and its priests here, but were aware that the situation varied in different countries. The majority concurred that while a lot of individual priests were open and understanding of the concerns of people, the Church as an institution seemed remote from the realities of life for Catholics in a secular materialistic society. Criticism was levelled particularly at the Curia and bishops seemingly interested in power and its trappings, and «ruled by elderly, supposedly celibate priests who understand little of real life». The Church is seen as more interested in rules, particularly in relation to sexual ethics, than in the problems of people in general.

Those who gave low ratings focussed on the Church's teachings or practices in relation to divorce, gender questions, the role of women. Particular mention was made of the Church's response to paedophilia, «hiding its perpetrators and unwilling to acknowledge it in each country until forced to».

However many took hope from the openness to concerns of the people shown by Pope Francis and actively followed by many priests, including our Cardinal Hollerich, in the last year, and were encouraged by this initiative of consulting the laity, which they prayed would bear fruit.

2) How can our Church be more welcoming and inclusive?

a) in our own community and in the local Church in Luxembourg

Only 9 people did not reply to this question. There is a marked difference in the perception of how welcoming and inclusive the Church is in our own community and in the local Church in Luxembourg.

IN OUR COMMUNITY: Almost all respondents found the International English speaking Church at St Alphonse very welcoming and inclusive «because we are almost all foreigners who know to accept each other and how important it is to be welcomed». Tributes were paid to the priests we have had/have in this context.

Pre-Covid parishioners request re-instating coffee/tea after Mass and social gatherings such as summer outdoor Mass and picnic «because they were introduced to other parishioners and made friends, and those social encounters reinforce spiritual community». New parishioners suggested similar initiatives and also mentoring of new arrivals by longer term residents, Bible study groups, prayer groups, community service groups for those in need, international food exchanges, cookery sessions, monthly walks, welcome

days for newcomers, a welcome kit. One respondent asked that newcomers be listened to and respected to avoid discouragement. Other suggestions were for increased visibility via media sessions to learn to communicate in public, to write concisely and convincingly on media and create relationships, to represent a voice that shares our values. Several requested a place to meet manned by volunteers, where people could meet for coffee, discussion, ladies groups, social and spiritual activities. Several suggested celebrating national Feast Days, occasionally hymns in the other main language groups even screening Mass from other countries.

Information on services to immigrants, before Mass activities, discussion groups, catechism groups by age, including adults. Two suggested standardising when to kneel/stand /sit during Mass.

IN THE LOCAL CHURCH in LUXEMBOURG: it was not clear in several responses which answers were directed at our Community and which to the Luxembourg Church. Some of the above are relevant here also.

Some said they did not know whether the local church was welcoming or not but had the impression it was not. They felt that with such a high percentage of foreigners speaking/understanding French/English, there should be more Masses in French or English in parishes, and broadcast Masses in EN and other languages. They did not feel welcome in parishes where Mass was only in Luxembourgish/German. One respondent felt that no effort was made by the priest to welcome him/her after Mass when they were obviously new. Another felt that the Luxembourgish Church should be more welcoming and open to other cultures. One had the impression that the local churches did not need/want foreigners, so no real effort is made. One praised individual priests and another suggested the local Church be more proactive in accommodating the use of facilities where possible for causes complementary to Church goals. One was aware of local Church actions to help homeless and immigrants. Another suggestion was evangelisation training to get out and visit communities.» The local Church needs to be inclusive to foreign communities in word, language of communication, action and interaction at ground level, truly recognising that the People of God includes all residents in Luxembourg» and have clear programmes to welcome new people to Church. The point was made that churches should be made handicap friendly by ramps and rails.

[ED Note; it would appear that most respondents are unaware of all the activities organised by the diocese and bodies such as Caritas. Is this because communication, websites etc are rarely in English? It would appear that it is difficult to join in these without knowledge of, at least, French.]

b) towards families and especially children and young people

This was almost universally interpreted as to how our St. Alphonse Community could treat families and youth.

Two main trends were apparent in the answers.

1. The family is where children learn about the teaching of Christ and are given the example by how their parents live their faith. But parents need the help of the Church Community to reinforce Christ's message of love and the tenets and practices of the Catholic Church. Homilies making linkages between scriptures and topics relating to everyday life help. Priestly visits to families would be welcomed.
2. Children and young people need to belong to groups where they can safely develop in an interesting and lively way their relationships with each other as they learn more about the teaching of Christ and how it relates to their lives.

Many suggestions are made:

- a safe space for our young people to meet
- activities suitable for different age groups, play, organised games
- a football team to play other parishes or religions,

- a youth music group
- a children's choir
- a monthly children's Mass
- non judgemental discussion groups where doubts can be raised and treated honestly
- excursions/pilgrimages to Christian heritage centres
- one day retreats
- team building events in preparation for the sacraments
- trying to keep the groups together after Confirmation
- including them in projects relevant to their issues and concerns e.g. social justice, climate change

Young people are generous and should be encouraged to join in church organised activities, making like-minded friends to support them and to counteract a peer group brought up in an anti religious or agnostic secular society

A Church where the youth sees everyone is made welcome and can play a responsible role (women, LGBTQ+, non-traditional families) will be a Church they will want to be part of.

... in the global Church:

c) Diversity among Church members

Five respondents did not answer this question and six took a firm view supporting the Church's present teaching vis-à-vis the family, divorce, and homosexuality.

All the other respondents in some way sought to open our Church to all people. The theme of homosexuality was present in a very large number of responses and frequently widened to include divorcees and re-married. The Church should teach to accept and love all people just like Jesus did. It should exclude nobody. Several respondents wished to see an approach by the Church to divorced, re-married people and what is called the LGBTQ+ communities that was all-embracing. The Church is perceived as separated from reality.

We must be an all-inclusive Church regardless of our make-up. Remove all rules of exclusion. Violence in the home should be sufficient grounds for annulment.

«By actively including people of all communities, regardless of sexual orientation or marital status or gender, to take part in all sacraments and all aspects of Church life.»

d) Diversity in ordained ministry (priests and deacons)

Three respondents did not answer this question. Several wrote that the subject needs further work and study.

There was a very substantial majority of responses, at least two thirds, explicitly in favour of women and men, married or single being able to become either priests or deacons. The question of the priest's gender is an irrelevance; what counts is the faith, goodness, piety and competence of the priest.

About 20 responses were against any change to the present arrangements. Among the views was that the doctrine is settled, and the subject is not on the agenda, it would be unfair to women, not in the Bible, women are equal but different, might lead to schism... possibly for unmarried women only or maybe only women deacons or maybe married men only who already have adult children.

There was a wide acceptance that more priests and deacons are required and in one case a denunciation of hypocrisy, supposedly celibate priests with secret lovers (male or female). Another suggested priests should leave their offices and get out and do door to door visitations.

Two respondents suggested a development of the theology of the priesthood of the laity might provide the framework for development in this field.

3) How can we be listened to more effectively and encouraged to participate in the life of the Church, including in all its decision-making?

a) in our English-speaking community in Luxembourg:

20 respondents either did not answer this question or replied « Don't know. »

The responses were very wide ranging. Several called for more information on the pastoral council or Parish Council. Publication of its members names and contact details, publication of agendas and summaries of minutes, calls for more transparency, democracy, Church Hall meeting. How are decisions taken in the parish ?

A considerable number requested regular questionnaires of this type, quarterly, annually, on-line surveys with the need for published results and a follow-up plan from the parish Council.

There were very many requests for more social activities, not necessarily linked to Mass, a newcomers meeting, youth activities (not with parents).

There were several suggestions for personally encouraging people to volunteer as readers/ministers of the Eucharist/choir.

One felt the sacrament of Reconciliation was neglected.

b) in the wider Church in Luxembourg:

29 questionnaires were blank on this subject. The responses were wide-ranging with no dominant big idea. Many expressed the view that this consultation was a very good start.

There were several requests for more Latin Masses, and more ecumenical activity. The need for more religious education and the need to promote knowledge of the Bible were raised... The need was raised for voluntary service for youths at diocesan level helping the needy and elderly. The absence of youth facilities and a place for them to hang out were indicated.

Language was recognised as a major obstacle. No Luxembourgish, no interactions. The diocese could use English in more communications and should listen to the faithful as opposed to the paid officials of the diocese. English is now the dominant language for daily purposes for work and social activity in the city and the Church and the number of English Masses do not reflect this.

The Luxembourg Church could have a segmented structure weighted by language and the number of practising Catholics rather than a hierarchical one. Our community could have a regular meeting with our bishop. The diocese could nominate more lay people to represent it on various bodies. Luxembourg priests seem to be comfortable and removed from reality. There could be a regular diocesan synod. We should build on the Octave to bring English speakers into the life of the Luxembourg Church. The minutes of the meetings of the Notre Dame parish/pastoral Council should be published .

c) in the global Church:

31 respondents did not answer this question.

A very large number of respondents asked for a repeat of this consultation with various ideas. Every ten years? With a lay majority? Follow up on consultation important, Church should recognise strength of local community, more use of social media. Local churches could run ahead of Rome on many matters.

There were also suggestions to empower the local churches and parishes with democratic structures. Laity should be consulted on appointment of bishops. Local parishes should be in contact and evaluate with comparable entities elsewhere.

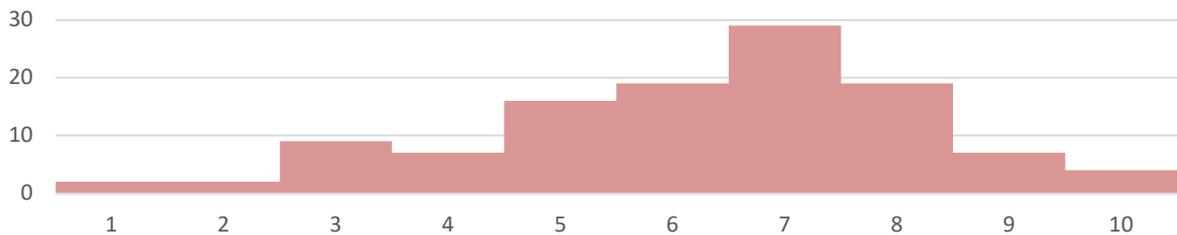
The Vatican should be downsized. Vatican should be transparent: where is the money spent? Get rid of pomp. Zoom meetings with the Pope: The Vatican was found remote and bureaucratic. Its meetings could be minuted and published. Staff should be majority lay and on maximum six year contracts...no jobs for life. Vatican committees should be diverse in nationality and gender, clerical and non clerical. Remove the limitations on nationality and gender.

The Church should be less “woke”, there should be more pilgrimages and the Church as a rule should support Trade Unions and others who defend the weak. One respondent sought more Latin Mass, Gregorian chant and traditional catechism. There was a reservation expressed about the place of Opus Dei and Camino Neocatechumens.

D. Mission

1) How well does the Church manage to live out Jesus’ message of hope today?

1= poorly 10 = very well



Why did you give this rating?

The ratings given in the first part of this question were generally positive; 30% in the range 1-5 and 70% in the range 6-10. There seemed to be no systematic differences in the answer according to the age of the respondents, though there is a significant absence of people in the 18-30 age range.

In answering the question itself many respondents combined positive and negative views in a single answer, while about a third were either blank or difficult to interpret in a useful way.

On the positive side, factors which were frequently mentioned were:

- **The message of Hope** which Jesus’ teaching and the Church can or does offer the world (12 responses)
- **The example given by individual Christians** engaged in ‘good works’ of one sort or another (12 responses)
- **The leadership of Pope Francis** (9 responses)
- The example of our local parish and our priest, or priests over the years (8 responses)

Among the – fewer - negative answers those that stand out are:

- **The image of the institutional Church** – rich, detached from the real needs of people, internal disputes and squabbling, too engaged in politics, though also a few comments that it should get

more involved in politics. This ambivalence perhaps best summarised in this comment that the Church: *'has spoken on vital issues such as inequalities, the environment and refugees, but it seems to be messages from behind the palace walls.'* (11 responses)

- **The sexual abuse scandals** and the 'cover up' of these (10 responses)

Interestingly only one person specifically mentioned discrimination against LGBTQ+ people (whereas in the school pupils' questionnaire, where the questions were somewhat different and will be analysed separately, this issue comes up frequently in the answers.)

2) What inspires you in the life of your parish community to bring the love of Christ into the world and to live your faith as a member of society?

As expected **almost all of the replies were positive**, with a few that were negative for different reasons. But again only about two thirds of the replies could be interpreted, or classified, in a useful way.

With these caveats the overwhelming response concerns **the sense of community** (specifically mentioned in 17 responses), diversity and acceptance in our parish. To break this down a bit further:

- 24 responses referred to **the contribution of our priest** (Fr Michael and previously Fr Ed) in building this sense of community, not least in his homilies (relevant and to the point).
- 13 people mentioned the **active volunteering of many parishioners** both within and outside the parish community itself as a source of inspiration
- 10 responses specifically mentioned **the diversity of our parishioners** from many countries of the world and how this actually enhanced the sense of community.

Added to this were comments on the singing at Mass, the scriptural readings, catechesis, the Eucharist itself, a personal relationship with God and so on.

Again there was no obvious variation in the answers by the age of the participants.

3) What discourages you from bringing the love of Christ into the world and living your faith as a member of society?

(95 /117 respondents)

a) The main reason for discouragement, given by 45 respondents, concerns the negative attitudes (or, at best, indifference) to religion and to the Catholic Church that they experience from the people they encounter in daily life. 10 specifically refer to the sex-abuse cover-up scandals as the main reason for this negativity. 5 refer in more political terms to a generalised anti-Christian polarisation in society at large, ("Godless society"/ "woke' propaganda").

b) The pressures of modern life were cited by 7 respondents as the reason why it is difficult to live out their faith as a member of society; another 6 attributed their difficulty in this area to personal shortcomings. 5 respondents point out that the best way of living one's faith is in any case by actions rather than words.

c) 13 respondents do not feel discouraged from living out their faith as members of society. One pithy response was: "Nothing. Being a Catholic can be discouraging for all the known reasons (sex abuse crisis, rigid - and often hypocritical - rules, etc.) - but faith, love and hope are strong enough to overcome that".

4) Where should the Church be more involved today?

(102/117 questionnaire respondents)

a) 25 respondents consider that the priority for the Church must be children and young people; youth outreach should be associated with education and catechesis. Suggestions include calling for the return of RE classes to schools (6); engaging, practical approach to catechesis using all possible media; programmes for young people.

b) 22 respondents urged more involvement with the needy and the marginalised. It is not always clear whether ‘marginalised’ is intended as socially/economically deprived people generally, or as categories of excluded people within the Church. In the former case, increased outreach to the needy was also seen in the context of strengthening the sense of community, referred to in paragraph d).

c) 13 respondents want to see greater emphasis on inclusivity; both within the Church (women, the divorced and remarried, LGBTQ+) and without (ecumenism, interfaith dialogue, bridge-building to people of no faith). A desire was expressed for more ecumenical involvement at our community level.

d) 10 respondents placed the priority on Community-strengthening: a faith community should “help its members to bring religion to bear on everyday life decisions by creating a community support network”. Suggestions include organising discussion events, fun/sporting events, devotional events in homes; promoting participation in local charitable outreach (visiting elderly etc); providing clear information on support available to less fortunate members of the community.

e) 6 respondents urge greater involvement by the Church in the public arena; some in the sense of reasserting its traditional stance on faith and morals (but through “calm and rational communication”); some in the sense of fighting for the environment and for social justice, and of combating the politics of hate.

E. Other suggestions

What else would you like to say about/to the Catholic Church?

Of the 117 respondents to the consultation, 93 answered question E. The answers to this section were inevitably diverse. The topics are listed below in order of the frequency at which they were raised – but no single issue was raised more than a dozen times. When respondents chose to raise an issue, the direction of their comments was often similar - with one or two notable exceptions.

It should be noted that many contributions touched on more than one topic or reflected the complexity of individuals’ relationship with the Church. Perhaps the most striking example of this was a single answer in which the respondent expressed pride and joy in their faith, yet hurt at being unable to remarry in church after being divorced; who prayed for new vocations, yet hoped that those priests would not feel themselves superior to the laity.

1. The most frequently expressed sentiment in this section was **happiness and pride in belonging to the Church**, which brings a sense of beauty and meaning to people’s lives. Pope Francis was singled out for praise.
2. The next most frequent comment was that **the Church needs to be more connected to the world** in terms of being more “in touch with real life”, more relevant in both the content and form of its message, more present in people’s daily lives.
3. Several respondents emphasised that **the Church needs to change** and that it should have confidence – not fear – in developing to meet the challenges of the modern world. In these answers there were some tensions between those who don’t want a modern Church and those who think that the Church must not be left in the hands of those who don’t see the need for change.

4. One powerful message – and a way perhaps to overcome such tensions – was that **the Church should focus on Jesus**. Christians can unite around Jesus and, by asking what he would have done, find a common way forward based on love.
5. In this spirit, a number of respondents called for **the Church to be more open, inclusive and tolerant** in terms of its teaching – particularly around issues of sexual morality – and of the roles played by women and other marginalised groups (divorced, LGBT).
6. Several respondents wanted **the Church to be more vocal in the world**, standing up for its beliefs, for social justice, for the environment, for the value of spiritual life, for Christians who are persecuted for their faith – and not always to leave it to the Pope to do this for us.
7. **The laity should assume more responsibility for the Church** alongside the clergy, according to a number of respondents. The Church is made up of individuals and the clergy should welcome the support of “talented, generous and faithful people”. The Synodal process itself was much appreciated, and one respondent made a heartfelt plea in this respect:

“Please, bishops and clergy, listen to this consultation of the laity, do not try to water it down, ask the Holy Spirit for guidance and have the courage to take the decisions necessary to keep God’s words relevant to His people.”
8. Two distinct but related messages emerged with regard to the **priesthood**. A few respondents expressed concern about **the lack of vocations** - but one pointed out that if the Church focused on the needs of the faithful, the vocations would follow. Others underlined the need to address **“the cancer of clericalism”** by reforming the way in which priests are trained and managed.
9. Several respondents expressed the need for a **lifelong approach to catechism**. Some felt unsure about their knowledge and would appreciate greater clarity and refreshment about what the Church teaches.
10. A few respondents felt that **the Church needs to do more to atone and apologise** for sexual abuse and other wrongs committed by its members.
11. **The Church should be more transparent and better managed** in terms of its internal governance, including at the level of our own Community and Parish.
12. There were some individual comments about the **liturgy and music**, some calling for it to be more lively, others for it to be more reverent, but agreeing that the aim should be to help people speak to God.
13. On the **sacrament of confession**, there were two opposing comments: one calling for regular individual confession to be promoted more; the other saying that it should not be a must.
14. Two respondents emphasised the common wealth of spirituality in the world and encouraged **the Church to engage more with other churches and religions**.

There were also a number of very specific comments by contributors, which are not included in this summary but will be shared with those responsible in our Community.

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