



Follow-Up at Community Level to the Synodal Consultation

Between February and April 2022, our Community engaged in a three-stage consultation to prepare our common contribution to the Synod 2021-23. Many ideas, reflections and suggestions were shared in this process. The final document, submitted in early May, provided a synthesis of the messages that our Community wanted to transmit to the wider Church both globally and locally here in Luxembourg.

The consultation also gave expression to concerns and proposals regarding our own Community. The aim of this document is to draw attention to these contributions to the Synodal consultation, which may or may not have found their way into our final Community contribution, but upon which our Community is best placed to act.

The following list was prepared by members of the enlarged Synodal Steering Group (Caren Baviera, John Coughlan, Mairead and Tom Cranfield, Steve McCarthy, Sebastian Orlander, Francesco Spreafico). The group is conscious of the risk in the whole Synodal process that such a “shopping list” may just be handed on and forgotten about. For this reason, we have organised the individual points under sub-headings to make it easier to identify who might be responsible for ensuring that they are followed up.

1. Synodality in the Community

The consultation was welcomed by many as a breath of fresh air, and many would like to see this become a regular feature of Community life. Practical suggestions included:

- providing a box/basket at the back of church to gather ideas, questions and proposals on an ongoing basis;
- making much more use of the physical notice-board at the back of church and the virtual one online to share information about activities and initiatives;
- organising regular “church hall meetings” to present and discuss topics of interest to the Community.

The Pastoral Council is the obvious body to set an example in this regard, though it may also delegate the task to one or more sub-committees or working groups.

Transparency about the work of the Pastoral Council itself must also be part of this process. Its role, membership, appointment system and regular workings are little known within the Community. Greater visibility and communication from the Pastoral Council, including for example the publication of the minutes of its meetings, would be much appreciated.

2. Sacraments and Spirituality

While the consultation reflected satisfaction with the vibrancy of the regular weekend Masses, it also revealed a desire for more ways to express and experience our faith:

- The importance of the Sacrament of Reconciliation was emphasised in terms of its role in promoting both mental and spiritual health - for some in its traditional form, but for many in different approaches such as collective acts (not general absolution) at key times of the year.
- Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament as a focus for contemplative prayer, as part of community activities or as a regular feature before Mass is also valued. This may be one example - among others - of where a lay ministry could be developed to ensure that the burden for organising such aspects of Community life is not placed solely on the priest.
- Celebration of the Eucharist (House Masses), prayer (for example the Rosary) and other spiritual activities in people's homes should be encouraged, especially in areas of Luxembourg that are distant from the city.

People miss the opportunity to bless themselves with Holy Water since the Covid-19 pandemic and ways to restore this would be appreciated.

The importance of rituals in engaging young people was reflected in the responses of school students to the consultation and should not be underestimated. Different ways of engaging with the Church appeal to different people, and offering alternative paths to encounter God should be a feature of an open and inclusive Community such as ours.

As mentioned above, responsibility for this need not lie only with the priest. Where possible, lay ministry should be encouraged for specific activities.

3. Catechesis and Youth

The feedback from the consultation produced a complex picture:

- Outreach to young people emerged as the top concern of respondents to the consultation.
- The number of responses to the online questionnaire from the 18-30 age group was very low. For the age group below 18, the responses from European School pupils provided some insights.
- The Masses in our Community are attended by young people but most did not feel engaged in the Synodal process.
- We have relatively strong catechesis programmes, especially in preparation for the sacraments (Communion, Confirmation), but very little in between and nothing afterwards.

It was strongly felt that our Community should be organising more social and charitable activities for young people to engage them in different ways, especially to bridge the gaps between the catechesis programmes and to involve young adults.

The Community was encouraged to organise a group to participate in the World Youth Days in Lisbon in August 2023. (Contact has already been made with the Diocese about this and a meeting will be held on 21 June.) One question for the Pastoral Council is if the Community would be willing to provide financial support for this.

Referring to the lack of engagement of young adults in the Synodal process, the feedback received from young people in the subsequent discussion groups was that the method of communication did not reach them. The Community should invest more in its presence on social media, drawing for example on Pope Francis' messages.

To develop a more effective youth outreach programme, it was felt important to combine the efforts of the current catechesis and youth subcommittees to ensure a joined-up approach whilst recognising (a) the different talents of individuals (some are better at administrative organisation, others are better at animating activities, and we need both) and (b) the need for a more nuanced approach to age groups, e.g. distinguishing between student (18-25) and young professionals (25+).

If the Community could afford it, the recruitment of a youth/pastoral worker would be justified by the amount of work to be done in this area. Cooperation with the Anglican community on this – and other initiatives – might help here.

4. The Church in the World and the World in the Church

The diversity and inclusiveness of our Community is considered a strength and this sub-heading covers some ideas about how to reinforce this further.

The Community is welcoming to new arrivals and the return of tea and coffee after Sunday morning Mass helps in this process – but we could organise welcome events on a more structured basis. One suggestion was to have a “New to the Parish” moment at the end of Mass, where newcomers could introduce themselves to the Community.

In particular, it would help to explain to newcomers how to volunteer in different ways. There are people within the Community who would be interested in contributing to particular ministries but do not know how to. There may be good reason to be discreet about recruiting new volunteers but if there was a proper training/preparation programme – which would be good in its own right – it might be possible to make the process more transparent.

One current issue in society that is of concern in particular to younger people is gender identification. The Synodal group faced the issue when preparing the questionnaire and discussed whether to ask if respondents were male or female. In the end, we decided that this information was not essential and so the question was simply not asked. We could be sensitive to this issue, for example when gathering applications for confirmation candidates, by not asking about gender if it is not essential.

Finally, many participants in the consultation feel that our Community should be more visible in the public realm, with a spirit of outreach to other communities and wider society.

5. Somewhere to meet

This is a mundane issue but it has such an impact on the ability of groups within our Community to organise and to implement many of the ideas mentioned above. As an alternative to the lack of available rooms at St Alphonse, some suggestions could be:

- Making more regular use of the Convent of the Franciscan Sisters in Belair;
- Asking if we could organise events in the Archbishop's residence;
- Composing a list of all the options in Luxembourg City (capacity, cost, how to book);
- Renting a shopfront...?

6. Topics for discussion with the Diocese

The following two issues arose from the concerns of our Community and could involve us but it would seem that they should be discussed with the Diocese first:

- University chaplaincy: the university attracts students from around the world for whom English is their lingua franca. As the English-speaking Catholic Community in Luxembourg, could we be more involved in their pastoral and spiritual care?
- Masses/celebrations for LGBTQ community: inclusiveness is important, especially for younger members of our Community, and in other countries (e.g. England, Germany) the Church is active in reaching out to this community. Given Cardinal Hollerich's reported views on the topic and the readiness of our Community to be demonstrably inclusive, could we support an initiative sponsored by the Diocese?

Luxembourg, 1 June 2022