



DIOCESE OF SALFORD

SYNOD 2023-2025

Theme Summary Three: *Enabling Access*

The Third Theme from the Diocesan Synod Big Listen report is 'Enabling Access'. This leaflet provides a summary of this theme and is designed to support your reflection both individually, and as a parish. However, we do encourage you to read the full report to understand the findings more deeply.

What Happens Next?

1. You are invited to prayerfully discern and reflect on the findings presented in Theme Three: Enabling Access
2. Your parish Synod Member/s will provide you with information on when your parish will meet to reflect on the theme and decide on two proposals to submit for this theme.
3. The leaflet for Theme Four: Fostering Christ-like Care is now also available on the [Diocese of Salford's website](#).



“Every human person possesses an infinite dignity, inalienably grounded in his or her very being, which prevails in and beyond every circumstance, state, or situation the person may ever encounter.

This principle, which is fully recognisable by reason alone underlies the primacy and the protection of human rights. In the light of revelation, the Church resolutely reiterates and confirms the ontological dignity of the human person, created in the image and likeness of God and redeemed in Jesus Christ.

From this truth, the Church draws the reasons for her commitment to the weak and those less endowed with power, always insisting on the primacy of the human person and the defence of his or her dignity beyond any circumstance.” (Dignitas Infinita, 2024)



In keeping with this commitment to safeguarding this innate dignity and allowing each Human being the opportunity to an encounter with Christ, this theme helps us to reflect on the barriers currently affecting people with a view looking at how best we can welcome all to the ‘Lord’s Banquet’.

While access often points towards physical barriers, the Big Listen responses highlight that for the Diocese of Salford ‘Enabling Access’ needs to widen:

Understanding People and their Situations in the Diocese and within parishes

Being understood is a necessary part of feeling welcomed. ‘Welcome’ is something all churches and parishes want to extend. So, what does ‘welcome’ mean for the people of the Diocese of Salford?

There is a strong feeling that the ‘Diocese’ can do better at recognising the real situations that people face. Pointing to the financial appeal and charitable giving requests; many point out that the diocese fails to take account of the capacity or lack of; for an individual or parish to respond to financial appeals. Others point out that their own daily financial worries are further deepened by the Church’s requests for charitable giving. ([Big Listen 3.1 pages 25-26](#))

Respondents point to the timing of Sunday Masses as a failing to understand the challenges facing the modern parishioner. Many state that while it may seem like people do not want to attend Mass, it is the current timings that make it ‘practically difficult’, if not impossible to do so. While working patterns, family and economic factors are alluded as major influences; children and young people highlight that Sunday Mass timing is a major barrier not only to their participation in the life of the Church but challenges even their presence and participation in the wider community. ([Big Listen 3.3 pages 27-28](#))

“Sometimes I just don’t have enough time to go to church because the days that Mass is on I have to go to my football games.”

Part of ‘Welcome’ is also expressed by some as ‘acceptance’ that welcomes all humanity as created in the image and likeness of God. This therefore points the Church towards embracing all who want to welcome God into their hearts/lives and walk the faithful path. Others ask for a Church that is ‘compassionate’ but ‘firm’ embracing the need for welcome and inclusivity, but within the standards or teachings of the Church. ([Big Listen 3.4 pages 28](#))

Awareness of Exclusion

An awareness of exclusion is seen as key for enabling everyone to have access to the Church here in the Diocese of Salford. The Big Listen brings to light several unexpected barriers that are preventing people from full participation in the life of the Church. One such barrier is what is seen as authority that 'is over-invested in the clergy'. This is reflected in the example of one response below: 'Steer away from clericalism and...the parish priest as an authority figure or someone to put on a pedestal.' The failure of clergy and laity working hand in hand is seen as a barrier to full participation. Concerns are also raised against the laity who abuse power within the Church without the priest's knowledge. ([Big Listen 3.2 page 26](#))

Boredom is highlighted by children and young people as contributing to their lack of engagement with the life of the Church. While they look to the Church for hope amid the 'social chaos' and turmoil, they see Church liturgies as failing in their endeavour to facilitate their relationship with God. ([Big Listen 3.2 page 27](#))

The Big Listen expresses a desire for the ease of access to church buildings and the Blessed Sacrament. People expressed their concern on the declining number of churches that remain open and allow people time for personal prayer especially at times of crisis or personal difficulty. There is also a strong sense that the pastoral care and accompaniment of those who are unable to temporarily or permanently attend church varies depending on the clergy in charge of particular communities. People want Holy Communion to be taken to elderly parishioners and for them to still be part of a parish family. ([Big Listen 3.8 page 31-32](#))

Responses from Catholic prisoners show a longing to remain part of the Catholic community. While prisoners are practically excluded, they see themselves as part of the Church and look for prayers for them as well as support for their families and loved ones. They also look to the Church for support to integrate back into their parish communities once released. ([Big Listen 3.10 page 33](#))

Diversity and Differences

There is great recognition of the multi-cultural nature of the Diocese of Salford. Examples are given of clergy from various nationalities serving communities in the diocese. Within these examples are also concerns as to whether issues of lack of understanding of different cultures as well as language; provide a barrier to fuller participation.

Catholics arriving to the UK from other countries speak about the way in which they negotiate the differences between the spiritual and social dimensions of their country of origin and those they encounter here. For example, a young Polish person explains how they incorporate differences between their Polish Catholicism and British Catholicism into their own practice, effectively following both traditions at the same time. The Cantonese community highlight how having access to a community of people who understand where they have come from and appreciate the issues they face has been key to their feeling welcome. ([Big Listen 3.7 pages 30-31](#)).

There is broader agreement by respondents that learning from different cultures could bring valuable change. They point out that ‘their strong spiritual identity and deep faith knowledge’ which can seem alien at first; can enhance parish communities. An example of the other cultures tradition for social gathering and sharing of meals after Mass, is given as something that could allow children, young people and adults to build parish communities.

The Big Listen has also brought to light a variety of opinion, concerns and hopes on how the Church ought to engage with LGBTQ+ Catholics. Many LGBTQ+ Catholics highlighted how they often do not feel safe to be part of the wider Catholic community due to the opinions of many within the Catholic Church. Similarly, parents of LGBTQ+ teenagers do not understand why the Church cannot love LGBTQ+ people in the way that God loves us. While some responses criticise ‘extreme behaviours’ within the LGBTQ+ community, and what they see as sin or heresy in the response of some

within the Church, they are looking to the ‘Bishop’ for catechesis on the diocese’s position. It is clear from Big Listen responses that what is seen as the exclusion of the LGBTQ+ community is preventing a much wider group (families, relatives & those who see it as homophobia) from engaging with the Church. (Big Listen 3.5 page 29).

Another key element of recognising and welcoming differences is illustrated by how participation in the life of the Church is affected by how people with disabilities are supported. A response highlighted how a child’s parents cannot attend church or take them to church ‘due to [their] brother’s learning difficulties.’ This scenario raises the question why an entire family is prevented from accessing the Church.

Accessing the Teaching and the Information

People’s experience of full and active participation at Mass can be impaired when they do not properly understand what is happening or fail to understand what is being taught. Many people describe that their level of education or lack of it creates a gap that is preventing them from understanding the theology and liturgical processes prevalent in Church. This, they feel; forms a barrier to faith which people are looking to the Church for help in breaking down.

While there is greater recognition that the Church is adopting modern technologies to promote access to information, there is no agreement on what media most meets the demands of a modern Church goer. While many parishes have a visible presence online, children and young people see their presence on ‘Facebook’ and ‘Twitter/X’ as ‘old-fashioned’ and ask for the Church to meet them where they are.

The Big Listen clearly sees technology and social media as valuable tools for the promotion of faith and Church teaching. They cite it as necessary ‘to lead people to God without the obsessions and disputes of the centuries.’ People want the church to cultivate its position and reputation both inside and outside the diocese. They want transparency and honesty,

but they also want the diocese to share positive news stories. They feel that the Catholic Church needs to do more to ‘promote itself...as a positive influence, improve its image [and] spread the word’ via media representation. People want the Church to be more prominent to compete against what is currently filling the information void and influencing people through social media.’ (Big Listen 3.13 pages 35-36).

Questions

In the light of what has been raised specifically in the Big Listen, how can we enable everyone to have access to our churches, events and liturgies here in the Diocese of Salford? Please note that the following questions are only designed to guide and prompt your reflection and do not seek in any way to limit your prayerful discernment.

·Thinking about the context of your parish, how can it support those with different nationalities and those for whom English is not their first language?

·How can the parish make better use of the diverse worship cultures of its communities to ensure that those who come from abroad feel welcome and accepted, and their gifts are fully utilised for the building of the community?

·Reflecting on the modern demands of working shift patterns, childcare and family life (including those from who have responsibility for wider family or communities - local or abroad); how can the parish make provision to support the full participation in the life of the Church for children, young people, families, the elderly, those who work night-shifts and those suffering financial hardship?

Questions (continued)

- How should the parish accompany LGBTQ+ Catholics and their families?
- How can the parish provide full access to the Church building while maintaining safety to prevent people from ‘being shut out of church’ during times of personal crisis or difficulty?
- How can the parish support people who depend on sign language, hearing aids or are visually impaired?
- How can your parish offer provision for mental health as well as children and adults with additional needs (ADHD & other neurodiversity) ?
- Thinking about your own parish, how can it support Catholic prisoners and their families so that they too can feel part of the Church community?
- How can we better support people to better understand scripture and the teachings of the Church?
- How can we make better use of online platforms to teach the Catholic faith as well as provide information to children, young people, adults and people who are sick or housebound?

Notes
