

Listening Exercise for Schools and Colleges – Summary

A listening exercise has been carried out across the secondary schools and sixth form colleges within the diocese. The first purpose is to ask them a number of questions and listen to their ideas and concerns with the hope of shaping youth ministry in the diocese to better serve their needs. This is the first time young people in our diocese have been consulted on this scale.

The views of our young people contributed to the ‘Big Listen’ for the Diocesan Synod.

This report is a summary only. A full *18 page report is also available based on the 9 deaneries. Follow up conversations include the following people:*

- Deans
- Chaplains for youth and young adult’s ministry
- Department for Education
- Leaders of Chaplaincy Life in Schools
- Young people

Young people were asked four questions:

- 1 What do you hope for in life?
- 2 How does faith fit into your hopes and dreams?
- 3 What would you like to see the church doing that would help you in your life?
- 4 What makes it hard to engage with faith?

Contextual information	
Criteria:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Baptised Catholics only • 10-15 students per school/college
Students/baptised Catholics (secondary):	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 30,509/18,305 baptised (approx. 730 practicing) • 8833 (approx 20% baptised, practicing unknown) • 1100 approx
Students/baptised Catholics (Sixth Form):	
Independent schools:	
Number of respondents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 10-15 in each school/college • 29/30 schools • 3/3 sixth form colleges • 2/2 independents • 358 respondents/approx 400/30,509 (1.3% of students)

Summary of Question 1 (What do you hope for in life?)

Many of the young people interviewed, hoped to follow career paths in medicine, engineering, accountancy, computing etc with the majority of them, whatever they chose to do, wanting to make a difference! They felt it was extremely important to be happy both in their chosen career as well with family life and to have the right balance between them both. A number of them highlighted the priority of providing for their family in the future (hence, their hopes and aspirations include having a family of their own).

79% of them aspired to go to university. For those who had not indicated they would like to go to university, either they did not know what they wished to do, or they felt they wanted to ‘just get a job’ and get some money.

95% of young people interviewed talked about the importance of being healthy and being happy. Happy in their chosen career, happy in their family life and happy with life in general.

5% of the young people interviewed talked about what God wanted them to do and using the gifts and talents God had given them.

In one of the sixth form colleges, some of the students talked about religious life and expressed a desire for guidance to explore religious life further.

Summary of Question 2 (How does faith fit into your hopes and dreams?)

This answer created quite a divide.

54% of the young people felt faith did fit into their hopes and dreams in relation to the decisions they make while some talked about knowing the difference between right and wrong and how talking and listening to God helps them. Some of these young people felt, with faith, you have a purpose and desire to achieve and if you trust in God you can achieve anything.

46% of the young people felt faith did not fit into their hopes and dreams but were more led by determination, money, motivation and hard work. Some of this came from learning from parents who don't practice anymore and they have done extremely well in their 'jobs. There was a sense that destiny guides them.

Many of the young people felt it was good to know 'someone is out there for us and can forgive us if we go in the wrong direction'.

Summary of Question 3 (What would you like to see the Church do that could help you in your life?)

The following are some of the main themes within the responses to this question:

Altar Servers – more training and opportunities to be together especially since Covid.

Welcome – the Church needs to ensure all Churches are welcoming and create an inclusive society.

More collaboration with other Churches – to help build up the youth community.

Environment – the young people acknowledged that it is very important to care for the environment but felt that the area should be more clearly connected to our faith. It was remarked that sometimes there is a focus on "doing" an activity rather than asking why.

Pilgrimages/Retreat – 100% of the schools and colleges commented that these create an opportunity to learn more about faith with more like-minded people, but the following were asked to be taken into account: cost was the biggest barrier and the timing – weekends are quite problematic due to visiting other parents/sporting activities.

Social Action – more opportunities for the church to help people in their community against homelessness, poverty etc.

There is a desire and thirst for young people to learn more about the faith - young people would like the opportunity to learn more about the faith through study groups and open discussion with people of similar ages.

Summary of Question 4 (What makes it hard to engage with faith?)

Peer Pressure -this was by far the biggest concern for young people and at times, people felt ridiculed and 'bullied'. This only registered in the secondary schools and was not an issue in sixth form colleges.

Lack of understanding of the Catholic Faith, and particularly the Mass – this was a big concern in schools where there is little opportunity for Mass and when there is Mass, young people don't understand it as there is little teaching.

Lack of belonging – some of the young people had felt they did not know where their place was within the community and especially where they are the only young person in the parish.

Faith and Science – More awareness and education. Young people raised the concern of evidence which challenges their beliefs.

Family Difficulties – Quite a few young people experienced difficulties in their families through divorce and bereavement and either ‘fell out with God’ or that the church did not welcome them. Some of the young people also expressed a feeling of unwelcome due to their sexuality.

Proposed Actions

- The Education and Formation departments note these responses with interest and, as the Synod process continues, are eager to develop strategies to respond to the needs identified."

Further consideration must also be taken to explore ways in which parishes might respond to address some of the points highlighted by our young people in the Big Listen exercise. Over the coming weeks and months, the team will be having conversations with a range of relevant parties to facilitate a robust response to the Big Listen that is supported in parish, school, and family life.

Link to the SYNOD 4 Themes

- The table below, indicates where the young people’s responses fit into the 4 themes.

<p style="text-align: center;">Nurturing Faith for Tomorrow’s World</p> <p>Young people have a desire and thirst to know more about the faith.</p> <p>Young people want to develop their faith.</p> <p>Young people want a sense of belonging and community.</p> <p>Peer Pressure /Ridiculed.</p> <p>Pilgrimages/Retreats.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Building Connections (Spreading the word)</p> <p>Young people would like to see more support for local communities within their parishes.</p> <p>Parishes to work more closely together for joint deanery youth events/pilgrimages/retreats.</p> <p>Not having the confidence or ability to talk opening about their faith.</p> <p>Use of social media to help to evangelise to ‘hard to reach groups’.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Enabling Access (to the Faith)</p> <p>Peer Pressure.</p> <p>Lack of belonging.</p> <p>Family Challenges/Difficulties/ demands on modern life.</p> <p>Lack of understanding/opportunity.</p> <p>Welcome/Inclusivity.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Fostering Christ Like Care</p> <p>Young people would like to be voices of change especially around social justice and delivering action.</p> <p>Young people would like to take on more of a leadership role within the Church within the context of a supportive community of peers and adults.</p> <p>Terminology used.</p> <p>Caring for our common home but linking this more to our faith.</p>

