

The Personal Ordinariate of Our Lady of Walsingham



Synodal report

Opening remarks

The context of the Personal Ordinariate of Our Lady of Walsingham (POOLW) is unique among the dioceses of England and Wales. Reflecting elements of Anglican practice, the POOLW is mandated by its founding document, *Anglicanorum coetibus*, to have structures that promote and facilitate the kind of ‘journeying together’ of the People of God which Pope Francis envisages in the Synodal process. These include a Pastoral Council for the whole Ordinariate comprised of elected lay representatives from the ordinariate communities across the UK; a requirement that individual groups/parishes have a Pastoral Council; a Governing Council which is required to draw up a terna for the appointment of an Ordinary. In addition to these mandated elements of governance, the ordinariate has established a structure of deaneries and pastoral areas, in which clusters of groups work together and support each other. At national level there are also regular gatherings of laity (e.g. Risen, Ascended, Glorified, a conference in Torbay in May 2022), and three clergy plenary meetings per year. Pilgrimages, both local and national, bring clergy and laity together and help foster a common life and mission.

Owing to the fact that many members of the POOLW were received into the Church in 2011 soon after the ordinariate was erected, there is among members of the POOLW very much a sense of journeying together. Ours was a journey of faith, clergy and laity together, under the leadership of our then-bishops, stepping out into the full communion of the Catholic Church, and mindful that we were being entrusted with the task of building the ordinariate, not just for ourselves, but for those of future generations. There remains a strong desire among clergy and laity to fulfil the aims of *Anglicanorum coetibus* together.

In 2015 the ordinariate produced a report entitled *Growing Up, Growing Out*, which was the result of an extensive process of listening to the members of ordinariate groups and parishes. All groups, as well as seminarians and religious, were visited and asked a series of questions about their experiences to date and their hopes, aspirations and concerns for the future. That report has more recently been distilled into another document entitled, *Our Calling and Our Mission*. This is very much intended to engage all the members of the ordinariate in the shaping of our future life and mission. The Holy Father’s invitation to walk the Synodal Way is, therefore, for us a continuation of a familiar journey and way of being the Church.

While there is a continuation of pastoral practice – a pattern of priest and people working and walking together – it is clear from our understanding of the Holy Father’s intentions, that a ‘synodal Church’ is *not* a synodically governed Church in which faith and order are determined democratically.

PROCESS

Selected members of the Governing Council were tasked with producing a series of questions for members of the POOLW to engage with and respond to. The questions, based on the three elements of Communion, Participation and Mission, draw heavily on the document *Our Calling & Our Mission*. Groups and individuals were encouraged to have a copy of this to hand (available from group pastors and the website) when answering the questions. The questions were sent to group pastors and made available on the website. While recognising that a synod is intended to be done in community, and strongly encouraged groups to gather together to engage in conversation, we recognised that the conditions of the pandemic might prevent some people from attending an ordinariate group meeting, and so the opportunity for members to make an online contribution was made available on the website. A short video explaining the Synodal Way was also posted on the website to encourage participation. The Synodal Way formed part of the agenda of a meeting of the Pastoral Council (national) in March and responses were fed into the process. The Ordinary strongly encouraged participation through an ad clerum and a pastoral letter to the laity.

The questions put to people were as follows:

Communion

“The Church, then, is not simply the clergy, but all the baptised. We have a common call and mission; a common responsibility—for each other, for prayer, for reverent worship, for acts of loving service, for witness, for contributing to the community of faith”. (Our Calling & Our Mission, Our Common Life, p6)

- How is the Church’s unity expressed in our Group, parish, deanery, and beyond?
- How is it expressed between those of other ecclesial bodies (denominations)?
- How is Communion expressed between the Ordinary, clergy, and laity: is there sufficient communication via the Governing and Pastoral Councils; the local Deans and Coordinating Pastors?
- How good are we at listening? Our world is full of noise and opinion; full of people making their voices heard, and those who feel that they go unnoticed. Are we good at listening to different voices, especially those of the marginalised?

Participation

“We are all musicians, each contributing our own unique talents to the symphony of holiness. Despite having different gifts, by remaining faithful to the “score” written by the “composer,” together we can produce a beautiful symphony”. (OC&OM, Our Common Life, p6)

- How do I focus spiritually in my personal prayers, and in my experience of the mass? Do I pray regularly for the help of the Holy Spirit?
- The life of the baptized is, *“a call not just to do something, but to live the life God desires for us—a life oriented toward the happiness of heaven.”* (OC&OM, Vocations & Formation, p7) Do I give sufficient time and take opportunities to prepare for divine worship?

- *“We can help our communities to grow and develop by ensuring we have good administration and communication and also use a range of different and appropriate media to communicate our message effectively”* (OC&OM, Evangelisation, p8).

Do I have gifts and talents that could be used in helping our group/parish grow and prosper?

- How much responsibility do you have as an individual within the life of your Group?

How do you currently participate in the life of your Group / Parish?

Mission

“Missionary activity, then, is not just for priests and religious. Each and every one of us is called to make a wholehearted commitment to the Lord and, by His grace, to grow not only in holiness but in confidence and knowledge of our faith, so that we can become more effective in carrying out His work in the world”. (OC&OM, Vocations & Formation, p7)

- How welcoming do people find us when they encounter our groups/parishes? What might we do to address the particular needs of the local community and deanery?

- How do we move from the mentality of ‘Maintenance to Mission’?

- How do we live and speak for our faith to our families, workplaces, schools, places of recreation and socialization?

- *“Effective proclamation of the gospel proceeds from a life of faith, hope, and charity; from a personal relationship with God in His Church”* (OC&OM, Evangelisation, p8). What formation do we need to give us confidence and courage to answer for our faith in discussion with others?

A modest percentage of members submitted responses, via groups and individually. This might be explained in part by people’s perception of the process as resembling synodical government, which was not a satisfactory experience for them as Anglicans. Resources sent to groups did attempt to draw a distinction between a ‘synodal way’ and synodical government, but the consequences of democratic governance of Anglicanism remain stark to members of the POOLW and are not easily forgotten.

EXPERIENCE

Feedback suggests that the groups that engaged with the questions benefitted at the local level. Questions remain in some people’s minds, it seems, about what the outcome of the process of the Synodal way universally will be, but there is optimism that local conversations will be beneficial to the life of groups and parishes, not least in emerging from the effects of the pandemic on communities of faith.

FEEDBACK

Communion

A strong sense of happiness and contentment at being members of the Catholic Church was expressed. With that also a recognition of the importance of remaining distinctive, in fidelity to *Anglicanorum coetibus*. It is important that we maintain a strong sense of belonging to the ordinariate and to one another as members of it. This will ensure the success of our mission. It is recognised as important for the future health of the ordinariate that groups/parishes use the distinctive liturgy proper to the ordinariate, though this will vary from group to group according to context.

Communication in the ordinariate is key. While people speak of the Ordinary being very approachable and accessible, and their clergy as very pastoral in their approach, groups can sometimes feel isolated because of lack of communication within the ordinariate. There was also the recognition that members and groups do need to be pro-active in seeking out communication from 'the centre' via the website, subscribing to the regular e-newsletter etc. and keep abreast of the wider life of the ordinariate via the monthly online publication, The Portal. It is recognised that there is great value in members participating in ordinariate events locally and at a national level e.g. ordinations, conferences, Westminster Festival, annual pilgrimage to Walsingham. It is felt that the organs of communication are in place in the ordinariate, but need to be developed and used to their full potential, in order to maximise their effectiveness. A new member of one of the groups commented on the fact that the website could be clearer. This is important to get right, since the website is often the first place of enquiry. Pastoral letters from the Ordinary to the laity are appreciated, but perhaps they might be more frequent.

Concern was expressed about the need to reach out to those whose pattern of worship and engagement with groups/parishes has been adversely affected by the pandemic.

The need to teach the faith 'in season and out of season' was expressed, as challenges to the faith threaten the unity of the Church.

Livestreaming has been employed by some groups during the pandemic and will be continued either for the foreseeable future or permanently.

As groups are generally small, there is a natural sense of community within groups, though the danger of becoming too cosy and insular always needs to be avoided. On the whole groups are welcoming to newcomers, but this is an area for improvement/development.

Regular social/devotional meetings of groups are beneficial and appreciated as a way of holding a group together and of facilitating listening within groups.

There is a feeling that the Pastoral Council (national) needs a clearer purpose, perhaps with particular matters to focus on and advise the Ordinary on. It also needs to meet more regularly, so that momentum is not lost. Following the disruption of the pandemic new elections of members need to be held, the hope being that this will re-energise the Pastoral Council and make it a more effective organ of communication for the laity.

Communicating the *raison d'être* of the ordinariate to other Catholics, including in arrangements where an ordinariate group is a distinctive part of a diocesan parish, is a challenge and needs to be developed. Communication is always key to aiding the process and avoiding misunderstandings.

Participation

There needs to be a focus on enabling people to return to the regular celebration of the Eucharist after the pandemic and on rebuilding our groups.

Smaller group activities would be welcome and advantageous – prayer groups, rosary, spiritual reflection e.g during Lent. Where these have been weakened by the pandemic, they need to be strengthened and developed.

Members of groups participate in the liturgy in various ways – serving, reading, choir etc.

There is a culture in the ordinariate of people getting involved. This is partly out of necessity (and often was in the Anglican context of small congregations), but is done willingly and brings an energy to the groups and to the wider parish where the group is based in a diocesan parish. Parishioners notice this and comment favourably on the contribution an ordinariate community brings to a parish. This is good, but hopefully we are welcomed for more than the jobs we do.

Concern is expressed that there needs to be more lay participation in areas of group work, such as finance, plant maintenance and administration to free up clergy to fulfil their pastoral duties and obligations.

Some concern was expressed about *Traditiones Custodes* in relation to Divine Worship: The Missal. Will ordinariate rites be suppressed like the ‘Latin Mass’? Questions were raised about how we might introduce and encourage more widely the use of the liturgies proper to the ordinariate, as well as Anglican music, including hymns beloved of the Anglican tradition.

Concern was expressed that, for good reason (the pandemic), there have been few large-scale national events in the last couple of years. The three-day conference in Torbay in May 2022 will be a welcome step forward, and perhaps a model for future regionally-organised events, with a particular emphasis on the needs of the laity. We need to meet again regularly nationally and regionally. It is important that members - clergy and laity - support and participate in ordinariate-organised events, and that the ordinariate is well represented at events organised by the wider Church.

The issue of communication was raised in this section too. It is seen as important that there is regular communication with members of the ordinariate, especially the laity, so that people continue to feel they are part of something bigger and which has a definite purpose in the life of the Church.

Mission

“Catholics need to be helped to have a personal encounter with the Lord – without that relationship it is difficult to advance and to encourage others.”

It is seen as important that we uphold the teaching of the Church, while at the same time welcoming and accepting others non-judgmentally.

In some groups there is a formal welcome team. New families, visitors and those with children are warmly greeted. Social events e.g. coffee after Mass and coffee morning, are a valued opportunity for people to meet and talk and get to know one another.

Comment was made that the clergy are understanding, approachable and have a good level of pastoral care, treating parishioners as part of ‘God’s family’ and trying to know them by name.

People want the Church to grow, and growth is happening in some groups, albeit slowly. There is a feeling that in a context where a group is based in a diocesan parish, some parishioners see the ordinariate group as a separate entity only interested in itself. Groups are keen to stress that their mission

is the Church's mission and want to work with the whole parish to further it, whilst being clear about our distinctive contribution to it.

A greater understanding of the ordinariate and its purpose is needed by members, so that we can be confident in explaining it to others and in being part of it ourselves.

Comment was made that when one has deliberately and consciously chosen Catholicism, it is frustrating to witness such a degree of nominalism in practice of the faith; also bemusing that many Catholics don't appear to believe that their faith is something others need to hear about.

There is concern about disengagement of the under-40s and the recognition that some creativity in group life is needed in remedying this situation. Groups need to run Evangelisation and Faith Formation courses. Also Youth groups for the encouragement of younger members.

Catechesis and faith formation opportunities are greatly appreciated, but more is needed.

Difficulties have been experienced in advertising ordinariate services in a parish in which an ordinariate group is based, as this seems to be regarded as competition for people and money.

A concern was expressed that some of our priests are based many miles from their groups, which can make it difficult to engage with the local community. Perhaps lessons can be learned from the neo-catechumenal way, and the way in which priests relate to their groups/base parishes.

ASSESSMENT

As noted earlier, synodality and walking together is not new to members of the ordinariate, so this process has perhaps not generated the same enthusiasm as in other dioceses. That is certainly not to say that synodality can not be improved upon in the POOLW. The POOLW has the particular challenge of being very far spread across the UK and small, therefore it is important that we seek to improve channels of communication so that voices are heard more effectively.

FUTURE GROWTH

Comments recorded under *Feedback: Mission* respond to the question of future growth and will help the Governing Council and Pastoral Council to reflect on how the ordinariate moves forward effectively in mission.

The desire to evangelise is clearly evident in groups, not simply for the sake of preservation of groups, but born of a desire to pass on the fulness of Catholic faith and practice which members of the ordinariate now enjoy. The formation of a dedicated Mission Team is already in the early stages of development following insights offered and encouragement given at the Ordinariate's 10th Anniversary Festival at Westminster in November 2021, attended by laity and clergy.

Regular participation in the Mass, more catechesis and faith formation, are clearly expressed as pre-requisites for effective evangelisation.

The ability for an ordinariate group to engage in mission locally and further afield is in no small part determined by the circumstances in which it finds itself in relation to diocesan parishes, and by the working agreement between the Ordinary and the diocesan bishop.

1st April 2022