

THE PARISH OF ELLESMERE PORT AND HOOTON

St Saviour and St Mary of the Angels | Our Lady Star of the Sea and St Bernard

Rt Revd Mark Davies
Bishop of Shrewsbury
13 Belmont
Shrewsbury
SY1 1TE

Dear Bishop Mark,

Re: Synod 2023

The parish of Ellesmere Port and Hooton is comprised of St Saviour and St Mary of the Angels, Our Lady Star of the Sea and St Bernard of Clairvaux. We have almost 8,000 Catholics in our parish of four churches and five schools. According to recent estimates, of these 8,000 Catholics, around 500 come to Sunday Mass regularly.

In response to the invitation of the Holy Father to participate in the preparations for the Synod of 2023, I asked the parish to share with me any views on the ten areas of reflection, listening, and discussion that have been circulated by the Synod Secretariat in Rome. I celebrated a special Mass and following facilitated a structured time of listening and discussion. In addition, before and after this parish meeting, I invited views via the parish office and through suggestion slips and boxes at all the churches of the parish. I also invited local ecumenical ministers and communities to share any views they might have. 33 attended the Mass and discussion. The youngest participant was 16, the eldest participant, 93. The gender balance was 60% female, 40% male. 22 submitted views outside of this discussion, whether through the website or the suggestion boxes.

What follows is a summary of our Synodal process to contribute to your discernment and able to be shared with the Holy Father. I will also share this letter and summary with the people of the parish.

With my best wishes,

E. Montgomery

Fr Edmund Montgomery
Parish priest of Ellesmere Port and Hooton

Copied to: Barbara Davies, Diocesan Synod Lead

SYNOD 2023: ELLESMERE PORT AND HOOTON

This summary of the Synodal discussions in the parish was prepared by the parish priest, circulated to the people for any comment, and then sent to the bishop's office.

The people wish to make clear their support for, and admiration of, the ministry and leadership of the Holy Father, Pope Francis. Since his election in 2013, the people expressed that they have been encouraged by his vision and his determination to reach out to those on the peripheries and the marginalised. When the people were asked: 'What one thing would you say to the pope, if you could?' several replied: 'Stay in good health!', hopeful that the course he has set for the Church will be realised under his leadership.

The people expressed how significant damage has been done to the Church's moral credibility with the scandal of sexual abuse of minors throughout the universal Church which both erodes the Church's moral authority and the morale of the laity, who invariably have to give an account to their families, friends, and work-colleagues of this failing, when they are known to be Catholics. Moreover, the desire for reform of corruption (moral, financial, personal) within the Church hierarchy and that the pope guard against listening to bad counsellors, were also identified as priorities for the Church in the years ahead. The role of women featured significantly in the discussion, as it was felt that the Church was out of step with modern understanding of the role of women and men, and that it was felt that women ought to be able to assume leadership roles and governance within the Church at all levels: parish, diocesan, universal.

The shared vision and priorities from the discussion were a desire to make the Church close to the communities in which it lives and is present; to reach out to those groups and individuals for whom the Church has become distant or foreign or even aloof or condemnatory. There was a desire to move from a simple repetition of doctrine to a creative and dynamic engagement with the lived realities of people's lives in such a way that God becomes present, even in situations that might be complex or not allow for immediate or simple 'solutions'. Our Catholic schools, and raising up both a new generation of Catholic leaders within them, and engaging with school communities were seen as priorities for the whole Church.

The ten points of structured conversation were reviewed and of the ten areas, 40% would give point 3 priority (Speaking Out); 40% would give point 6 priority (Dialogue in Church and Society); 20% would give point 2 priority (Listening).

In conclusion: the Synodal process in Ellesmere Port and Hooton allowed space for a sharing of views, concerns, hopes, and encouragement of each other for the years ahead. The people's hope is that the themes of reform, renewal, and reaching out, so associated with Pope Francis' pontificate, may be truly embedded in a pastoral and theological vision for the local and universal Church. This vision might be the beginning, it is hoped, of a genuine and humble engagement with the marginalised, those on the peripheries, and those who no longer feel a connection with the Church.