

FESTIVAL & CONFERENCE 2023: FEEDBACK REPORT

Sunday/Monday finish after lunch. There was a majority view that favoured finishing on Monday after lunch.

Monday finish after breakfast. The comments suggested that two factors were in people's minds about this (1) the need for a worthwhile conclusion to the weekend (and/or prayer service) after breakfast, and (2) the need to get home at a reasonable time i.e. those with further to travel would like to get going sooner.

To offer bursaries for accommodation cost(s). Almost unanimously the view was that we should offer bursaries to those who need them, if the Deanery could afford to do this. Some comments stated that those with the resources to do so should be encouraged to contribute to a Bursary Fund.

To offer bursaries for travel cost(s). There was a clear majority in favour of doing this, where it was needed, and if Deanery funds allowed for it. People who live a long way from the venue were singled out as most possibly deserving help. However, booking in advance, and discounted fares (for those eligible) were also mentioned as ways to reduce the cost of travel for those dependant on public transport.

Sharing a double room with another. Just under half of all the comments received expressed an outright, 'No!' with only one comment expressing an unqualified, 'Yes!' A majority of the comments expressed a willingness to consider sharing, but only under certain conditions e.g. a married couple, or friends who were single; and a majority of those with conditions expressed a preference for not sharing.

En suite single/double/family room. Almost without exception the responses favoured en suite accommodation, whether single or double, and that it was possibly necessary for families. Although shared bathrooms were not entirely ruled out, there were conditions e.g. 'ladies-only'.

Questions and/or comments to a speaker. A majority of responses expressed a view that speakers should be guided to leave enough time for questions at the end of their talks. There were some negative comments about the 'concluding plenary session on the Monday': the view was expressed that the focus was too much on Fr John's talk, and that Spyridoula seemed to be overlooked.

Opportunities for discussion. The comments give the impression that whilst discussion in general is valued, a structured version - e.g. with group leader – is not everyone's cup of tea. One comment expressed the view that (as compared with workshops) a group discussion kept the focus on what had been developed by the speakers.

Children. A majority of comments indicated that they were from people who had no children: however, the view was expressed that it was 'essential'/'important' for children to be there, and that they should be 'well catered for'.

Parents. The comments mainly focus on how good it was for the children to be there, although, 'Probably very helpful for parents who have young children with them ...'.

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High Leigh. There was a majority of comments in favour of this as a venue for this event, with the main reservation being its distance away from those living in the North

The Hayes. The number of comments wholly favourable to this venue equalled the number that were negative about it, but only in comparison to High Leigh. The majority of comments expressed views that were both appreciative of it as a venue, but also had certain reservations when thinking about the experience of being there e.g. the overall size ('too big and impersonal') with considerable distances between the hall and the chapel; a 'confusing layout'; the distance of the location from London; and both the quality and the quantity of the food were the subject of negative comments.

What might be a possible theme for a future event? There were two suggestions along the lines of living as Orthodox Christians in a world of turmoil: (1) 'Faith in a time of conflict'; and (2) 'Stillness of heart in a frantic world'. 'Orthodoxy in the 21st century/the contemporary world' was a suggested title(s) for some exploration of Orthodox Christian engagement with some contemporary issues. 'Birth and Death' was suggested as a theme for a programme to include a 'consideration of the prayers and services' of the Church, and what they teach us (about both?). Some people were forward looking with 'Children as the future of the Church', and also – perhaps – a more practical approach to 'trying to keep a parish going'. 'Understanding Christ in the scriptures', and how 'to approach the feasts with the understanding of the Passion' might represent a more theoretical/considered approach; and 'British saints and holy places' could entitle a programme composed of pictures and words.

What change(s) in future would attract new participants from your parish/community? The comments suggested two areas of concern (1) publicity/communication about the event, and (2) bespoke programmes (parallel to the 'main'?) aimed at two groups (i) 'young adults', and (ii) 'those more recently received (or perhaps not yet received) into Orthodoxy'. A number of comments evinced a recognition that 'word of mouth' – 'personally encouraging people' – is 'still the best method' of communicating how good and worthwhile the event is. There were a couple of comments about 'young adults', but nothing at all definite about what might constitute a programme for them. There was a suggestion that we organize a workshop for those new to the Orthodox Church, 'as a chance to find answers' to the questions that 'are likely to arise'.

Any other comments? In answer to this there was a majority expressing appreciation of - and thanks for – a very satisfying and enjoyable event. There were a few comments about our worship: apparently some singers said that 'they would appreciate being sent music in advance' ('this could reduce the length of the rehearsal'); 'could someone be appointed to switch the lights on at the appropriate moments in the Vigil and Liturgy'; 'the censuring of the Church with an empty censer ... would have preferred not to have it at all'; and someone 'was not impressed with the lack of breakfast after Liturgy'. Given that The Hayes was a new venue for this event, there was a comment lamenting that we had failed to specify in our advance information where our various activities would take place – 'e.g. where the talks were, where the party was, that we were using the Chapel'. Although the 'children's outing' was 'much appreciated', someone asked, 'Could we consider ways to integrate the children more into the conference and festival?'