



ARCHDIOCESE OF GLASGOW

**Report informed by
Parish and Deanery Consultations**

Submitted on behalf of the Archdiocese of Glasgow

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Contents

Introduction	3
Synodal Report	5
Appendices	15
1 Reports from Schools	16
2 Special Issues to be addressed	
<i>Children and Adults with Individual Needs</i>	17
<i>The Role of Women to the Church</i>	17
<i>Communication, Technology and Social Media</i>	18
<i>Adult and Youth Formation</i>	18
<i>Church Structures</i>	19
3 1962 Missal (“Tridentine”)	19
Reflection from Synodal Group	20

Synod - Diocesan Document

Introduction

The synodal process is a journey in faith. It is a deep and sincere call to all God's children to listen to The Holy Spirit and so participate in the mission of the Church of the present and future. Those who have been engaged in this have said that they found it a positive expression of their faith and has allowed matters of significance to be raised in a humble and reflective way. It has identified issues that have allowed the Church to flourish in its traditions and practices and also has promoted discussion on those matters that might strengthen the Church as it faces a challenging future.

The principles which the process of synodality particularly promote and encourage are those of co-responsibility, inclusion and open-mindedness. Where any of these are at risk the Church is the weaker for it. In the consultation process it was clear that the love of the Church makes it possible for these principles to characterise the Church in Glasgow. This is not to be complacent, but rather to set in place a continuing process in which the parishes, deaneries and the diocese become alive to a world of hope and care for one another.

The areas in which the Church could be more active include:

- **Ensuring that the Church is inclusive and remedying the impoverishment of Church if any voice is not heard.**
- **Seeking ways of engaging women, men, the youth, the elderly, and those who may be socially or spiritually disadvantaged in the life of the Church.**
- **Seeking ways of making use of women's gifts and talents within the Church.**
- **Providing a more frequent and complete ministry to the sick, and those on the margins.**
- **Having more interaction with other religions, as well as other Christian churches, and being prepared to express with confidence what the Catholic Church offers... socially, pastorally, and spiritually.**
- **Providing wider opportunities for laity to contribute their gifts to the communities of parishes, deaneries and diocese.**
- **Greater care of those who have stopped church attendance.**
- **Addressing with urgency the issues associated with declining numbers and increasing average age of priests.**
- **Addressing promptly and with justice any issue causing scandal such as child abuse, financial mismanagement, etc.**
- **Finding ways of using technology effectively in the service of the Church.**

Each "level of responsibility" in the Church (parish, deanery and diocese) has a specific responsibility on that journey. The synthesis created for this diocesan contribution to the Synod 2023 is a narrative for Glasgow based on the 10 themes identified by The Pope within a framework which suggests priorities for the diocese. It is based on the synodal discussions at parish and deanery level. The process is a genuine attempt to undertake spiritual listening at all levels and in all places where the Church influences our lives. It is not merely a democratisation of the Church, although it does recognise that where the Church excludes listening to any voice it is significantly impoverished. It has to be a Church of inclusion, diversity and equity.

This document is written using language in which the companions on the journey within the Church are recognised to be all God's children, excluding no one. It also assumes that any suggestions for development are the co-responsibility for laity and ordained ministers. It assumes

a unity of purpose, acknowledging the different roles and responsibilities of each person, but seeking a common purpose – that of bringing Jesus closer to the heart of each person.

Emphasis on the Church serving all God’s children and has a special mission for the vulnerable and marginalised. It must reach out especially to “the unchurched” and all who call for help or care. It is an impoverished Church when anyone is excluded. This is not a matter of political correctness but of a fundamental identity of the Church.

The Church in Glasgow has been blessed with over a century of dedicated Catholic education. This is now largely in the hands of a well-educated professional laity and is a significant part of the work of the Church. By its nature education is in constant change and the structures and processes are in place to ensure this will be a continuing source of support and inspiration in the years ahead. The lay leadership in this area has been and continues to be a model of effective lay participation and synodal practices. This is not to be either complacent or satisfied with all aspects of Catholic education as church attendance of young people might suggest. There is a clear need for youth and adult education. The commitment of school age people to matters of social justice is exemplary, but we have to think of the very nature of “Church” for them now and into the future.

This process will only be successful if there is a commitment to listen with care and hear what has been said and follow this up with enthusiasm. This will require coordinated commitment at each level of the Church, and in that regard the diocese will undertake its leadership role with sincerity and conviction. The synodal process requires some action built on this consultative phase.

In Scotland the Catholic community is a small flock and Glasgow Archdiocese is the place where there is the greatest concentration and a continuing vibrancy in many institutions and practices. Yet, like any small flock, there are times when there can be feelings of vulnerability. For many there is the hope that this synodal process will allow a period of renewal, not anxious about the journey ahead, but approaching it with greater confidence.

1. Companions on the journey.

“...there is none who are cast outside our love and care...”

Our companions on the journey are all God’s children. Above all, Jesus is our constant faithful companion. Our companions are the believers and unbelievers, and there is none who are cast outside of our love and care.

Our companions are those living and those who have passed to a new life; and they are family; and people with gifts and virtues who collectively create our homes, our workplaces, and form our parishes and communities.

We are a Church which readily forms community hubs, undertaking important charitable works within these communities. While some parishes feel they have created an environment of welcome, others feel that they must find ways of creating a culture of love and welcome - showing that companionship to those who feel on the margins, such as, those who feel unworthy, those who are isolated, those in prison, those in ill health, the homeless, refugees, the elderly and the young, those with mental health difficulties, and the vulnerable. In an increasingly dismissive society where people are often only valued for achievements and wealth the Church has a special duty to reach out to include all companions on our journey, especially the wounded and rejected; those without roots; and those far from home. The outstanding work with the poor in the certain parishes (e.g. Duns Scotus) is an inspiration for all.

As a Church we wish to welcome those who are divorced, those who have had abortions; those with alternative sexual orientations, those who lack the inner conviction of realising that they have faith; none is to be ignored. The Church reaches out to everyone.

The companions who come with faith in their hearts are both Christian and people of other faiths. Our relationship with people of other faiths, while sometimes limited, is generally cordial and supportive. In certain parishes there is a significant presence of Moslems, Hindus and people of other faiths and while these previously were in geographically limited areas they now are distributed across many of our communities.

In acknowledging this wish to be inclusive of our companions there needs to be clearer structures that create communities of faith and worship. There can be frustrations in parishes, such as *“Our parish family doesn’t walk together with the poor.”* Parishes are encouraged to ensure that there are ways in which the voices of laity and clergy are heard, where decisions are taken in the common good, and where the values of companionship are clear – respect, love, and collegiality. The lay faithful ought to play a greater role in the Church in Scotland, but this does not mean taking on tasks associated with the ordained, but rather expressing their unique role in the Church, accompanying their brothers and sisters in the faith, and walking with those whose faith is in need of nourishment.

That urge for inclusivity requires the Catholic Church to acknowledge, respect and celebrate the gifts and talents of women in the Church. By failing to include everyone we impoverish the Church and our listening is weakened. Our companions are those with whom we have positive relationships since it is in those relationships that often we meet God.

On the journey of life if one of our companions is forgotten all can be forgotten.

2. Listening.

“...it requires an open mind and heart...”

There is a particular value in listening to the word of God and there were many positive comments received about priests being approachable and helpful. The importance of listening to the wisdom and the traditions of the Christian message cannot be over-emphasised. We also must recognise that these are to be interpreted through reading the signs of our times and not be living in an age that has passed. If the Church is to survive as the authentic word of God, we must listen to the future built on the past. It is not only a matter of listening, but of responding to what is heard.

The synodal process enables us to see the need for “dialogue” and “encounter” in the work and structures of the Church (such important themes in the pontificate of Pope Francis). By implication there are other voices to be heard. When there are people or groups whose voices are not heard the Church is impoverished. An example can be the parents of children with individual needs. (See Appendix 2(b)). The Church may seem to listen but rarely feeds back. An educated laity can readily engage in dialogue and should be confident in doing so.

Listening may be the first step, but it requires an open mind and heart, without prejudice. The importance is of not only listening, but “hearing the other”. This is the process of encounter – meeting the other with an open heart and open mind. This is a central requirement in which we are non-judgemental and open to the other. Of paramount importance in this is the willingness, the openness, to listen to the other without necessarily applying any judgement about their beliefs. This is not just about the sharing of knowledge but the sharing of beliefs; but more challenging, being prepared to alter our own beliefs so long as they are informed by the cleansing light of truth. That can be a very significant challenge because when we are open to change in ourselves, we have to have a view of our own beliefs and the capacity for and willingness to change.

This process of listening and hearing “the other” suggests that we have to pay attention to those companions... those on the margins and those who can rightly shape our thinking and our spirits. In doing so we need to be alert to “fake news” and the range of views that can distort our thinking. The essential place of Catholic social teaching must inform our conscience and our thoughts and the greater use of technology in enabling this is essential.

The listening process cannot stop at a merely physical level; it is listening so that we know God more deeply. A “spiritual listening” requires us to know the difference between “knowing God” and “knowing about God.” In the modern world there are many ways of *knowing about God*. In the main people come to *know God* through relationships with others but opportunities for this at parish level for some are fairly limited.

Different generations listen in different ways, and we have to listen to all. Children in schools feel the schools listen to them in ways that are not always the same in family life and new generations listen to ever-widening sources of information and views. Increasingly we have to pay attention to the social media as sources through which we listen. The Church must recognise this and play its own part – as indeed happens through new media centres, new platforms for listening. It is a global world of listening and media. (Appendix 2(c)) There has to be change- even transformation – through dialogue or encounter – and not maintaining the status quo. By the very process of dialogue/encounter we should be transformed.

3. Speaking out.

“...speaking out is so that there are voices of the whole Church....”

All are invited to speak with courage and parrhesia, that is, in freedom, truth, and charity. This is an essential aspect of the dialogue which is to be encouraged. If the Church is to be a listening and welcoming Church, the people in communities need to be able to speak out – in truth and without fear.

This implies a dialogue of integrity and responsibility – speaking out on matters of significance with humility, passion, and respect for others. That speaking out should mainly be in dialogue and where appropriate with a prophetic voice. Speaking out on matters of importance should not be constrained other than by seeking truth, exploring matters of significance, and avoiding “cover-ups” within the Church. This is not the freedom to voice what is irresponsible or damaging to the Church or to anyone. Indeed, the opposite is the case where speaking out is undertaken to improve the spiritual health in God’s kingdom. Young people do not lack generosity or openness as some occasionally assert, but voices in society contradicting Church teaching are strong and ever present in social media. Yet speaking out does require courage and an inner strength.

This also requires openness by everyone and avoiding being secretive and demonstrating honesty regarding what is happening within the Church. More openness would be welcome. The clergy need to encourage the lay faithful to avoid the fear of openly expressing their faith and not to feel abandoned by their pastors- as they are too often silent when the Church is attacked. *“The hungry sheep look up, and are not fed.”* (Milton)

The specific areas in which the Catholic population wishes to speak out certainly include:

- **The role of women in the Church; and at the participation of the Eucharist and other church services, where men normally form the minority.**
- **The crisis of global warming and the destruction of the environment.**
- **The striving for peace in all parts of the world.**
- **Eradicating poverty in a chaotic world of consumerism.**
- **Discussing the possibilities of further married clergy.**
- **The historic scandals of abuse.**
- **The scandal of accumulated wealth in the face of poverty in society.**

The importance of the laity speaking out is so that there are voices of “the whole Church” – avoiding the perception of clericalism and the voice of the Church being only that of the magisterium or ordained clergy. Of course, their voices are significant and need to be heard, but there are also many other voices that need to be heard and have a right to be heard. We are all the poorer where we do not hear the voices of women, of young people, and of those “on the margins”. It is in the collective choir of humanity where the voice of God will be most clearly heard.

In general, it is thought that people feel comfortable discussing their faith within close groups of people to them but not in the wider community and feel that they would benefit from more encouraging and positive input from clergy. Comments were received that many people do not feel they know enough about their faith to speak out to others. The Church is again urged to pay attention to the power and value of the social media. It has become imperative that the Church uses all appropriate means of communication to enable legitimate voices to speak out. There is an argument that there should be a greater acknowledgement of the changing values in society, speaking out about the nature of those changes and interpreting them within Gospel values.

4. Celebration.

“The increased participation of laity in liturgical practices is welcomed...”

Celebration is an integral part of Catholic life and formation. The importance of community coming together to celebrate is rooted in the life of Jesus himself. Faith development largely comes from relationships with God and meeting God through other people. These meetings, and these encounters are to be celebrated, and so through these do we grow in faith and in community. Most people find these events uplifting and joyous occasions. People also commented on their desire to express their faith in ways as well as Mass attendance such as faith sharing groups and bible/scripture study groups. There is widespread appreciation of high quality sacred music and literature during celebrations.

Some 60 years after Vatican II much more has to be done to encourage the authentic active participation of the faithful both within Mass and in celebrations other than Mass. Some people still understand “active participation” too reductively (i.e., only in terms of exterior activity). Attendance at Mass and the sacraments are vital influences on faith development at all stages of life. In parish life the centrality of the Mass and liturgy is a very clear focus for companionship of the community. Through these celebrations we are transformed, and this should be the wellspring of our lives. *“Walking together”* is only possible if it is based on communal listening to the Word and the celebration of the Eucharist. Yet attendance at Mass alone is not a sufficient mark of the Catholic; good works are also required.

During the period of the pandemic (from March 2020) there has been a burgeoning of attendance at online and this has continued as the pandemic wains. Masses and other celebrations. For some, during the pandemic, the rhythm of the liturgical year being interrupted brought about a deeper realisation and appreciation of the richness of the faith community’s celebration of the liturgical seasons.

We welcome any opportunity that encourages prayer and reflection and are grateful for the efforts made to allow people to participate in these celebrations – and in particular those who would find it difficult to attend in person, the sick, the elderly, the infirm, the vulnerable. However, we are a Church of community and in-person participation in the celebrations is a vital part of building community. Different generations can interpret “celebration” in different ways, and indeed the nature of that celebration can take different forms.

The increased participation of laity in liturgical practices is welcomed, although in some parishes finding willing volunteers in lay ministries is not easy. There is scope for expansion of certain ministries and in areas such as preparation for the sacraments, and at funerals, etc.. Families and schools often provide important contexts for confident relationships, and as such can be powerful influences on faith development in childhood. Some consideration needs to be given to the value of the Sacrament of Reconciliation – with a better understanding of its value to the individual and to society.

One area which is a regular source of debate and discussion about celebrations is the timing of when the sacraments should be received. Consideration of the perceived absence of a sacrament for young adults may merit some attention since this is often a time when people of that age are seeking to play a fuller part in society e.g., through employment.

5. Responsibility for our common mission.

“...a mission of social justice, love, and of stewardship of the world...”

Being a member of the community of God’s children should mean that there is general acceptance that through one’s baptism there is a commitment to live one’s faith in an overt way. By our baptism we are welcomed into the family of the Church, and this brings with it certain responsibilities. Those responsibilities are not to be undertaken as passive spectators attending services (e.g., Sunday Mass) out of a sense of obligation, but to be active participants offering what gifts we have to the service of the community and so of God. This sense of responsibility is potentially much richer and more challenging than simply viewing the Church as simply “welcoming home” but is an acknowledgement of the special community in which ALL of God’s children form the Church - and none is to be ignored.

Within parishes a significant number of people feel “commissioned” to express their faith whether in family, through education, or in other ways. These ways are always unique to the person, but together they contribute to make the community more complete through their commitment to love one’s neighbour. The contribution to many pastoral and social services such as the care of single parents and pre-school children; supporting parents preparing for baptism of children; managing foodbanks; attending to the sick and housebound; the work of *SVdP Society*; contribution to Jesuit mission work; contribution to *Mary’s Meals*; etc are some of the expressions of the common mission in practice. We must lead by example and, as lay faithful, must nourish and deepen our personal holiness- especially through the frequent use of the Sacrament of Reconciliation and frequent reception of the Eucharist. There is scope in the Archdiocese to offer education and training for those motivated to serve through such activities.

Young people may have a different perception of “the common mission.” They see the Church offering opportunities for responsible social action and they are prepared to contribute to this with charity and care of others. Some young people become disengaged when they feel the Church has nothing to say to them. So not everyone feels there is the same “common mission.” (See Appendix 1 on Schools).

Relationships with others was a consistent theme to being involved in parish life and this was supported by strong leadership and inspiration from the parish priest. Although parishes take different approaches to engaging parishioners in activities, the role of the clergy and their relationship with the laity in ensuring parishioners feel their skills and knowledge are adding value (i.e., parishioners felt they had something to offer) is seen as a key vehicle for people becoming or remaining involved. Co-responsibility is at the heart of the synodal process.

This mission includes not only the care of others but care for the environment. It is a mission of social justice, love, and of stewardship of the world, its people, and its resources. This means being prepared to bring our gifts, however humble, and personalities to our communities. To share “our common mission” is to recognise how those different gifts are carried through in day-to-day living. *Synodality* is at the service of the mission of the Church, in which all members are called to participate, avoiding exclusivity, cliques and arrangements which limit participation. Even those who feel disempowered bring to a community a unique presence.

6. Dialogue in Church and society.

“... the Catholic Church is counter-cultural...a good message but the means too often ineffective”

The Church should increasingly consider itself as a Church of dialogue, speaking out from the basis of the values of the Gospel. It seeks to be not just an agent of change, but a spirit of change in an often-hostile world. It must include young people in that dialogue; and there is almost a sense of a lost generation who do not fully understand the richness of the teaching of the Church.

The Church engages with the modern world, sometimes successfully, sometimes appearing superior, sometimes overly defensive. Characteristically it engages in dialogue in some of the most serious issues of our time. The dialogue which has been successful in the papacy of Pope Francis has included his urge to be greater fraternity (“*Fratelli Tutti*”), to be more respectful of the planet (“*Laudato Si*”); his pleas for peace (Easter 2022– “*Urbi et Orbe*” message); his concern for the homeless and those without a voice; the refugees; those in prison; victims of war and violence; etc. It is consistently concerned with the dignity of the human person, including the rights of unborn children.

The dialogue is consistently and constantly concerned with social justice, ethical morality in public life, and moral issues. This should be especially attractive to youth and young adults, but often the messages are clouded by a context in which the message is only given from church pulpits – and therefore not heard. **The message is good; the means is too often ineffective.** We must listen to others’ opinion not to be judgemental, pray about conflict, share views, and generally be more courageous in sharing our faith.

The Church also engages in dialogue with certain specific groups. For example, it engages in multi-faith schools; with nurses and other medical practitioners in ethical matters; with scientists who are working at the frontiers of our understanding; and with professional groups as they engage with the unknown. It is concerned with the intrinsic search for truth and what is right. This is not an “idle curiosity” but a disciplined and intense search for truth. These are important aspects of dialogue, and the Church is always prepared to offer a view that helps us understand God more deeply.

Dialogue also suggests that the conversation is not only about what the Catholic Church wishes to say, but what it might hear. There is little doubt that the Catholic Church is counter cultural. It offers values and ideas and engages in actions that often challenge the norms of society. By its very nature it challenges a world of materialism and consumerism. Its role is to break down division and separation in society. Too frequently it is criticised for its hypocrisy on these matters. Too readily does it slide into a world of secularism and greed. Then dialogue with society seems empty. Members of the Church could be more vocal in speaking out about such issues.

This work needs to be further developed however, there are considerations within this which could create barriers to development. Some barriers highlighted include:

- A lack of knowledge or understanding of about who the communities of faith are, their level of approachability, who they represent, and who the main contact people are.
- A lack of effective communication system through social media (See Appendix 2c).
- A lack of adult formation and therefore a reluctance to engage in dialogue.

7 Ecumenism.

“the willingness to respect and celebrate the differences across all denominations.”

Ecumenism has to be an integral part of Catholic social practice. The dialogue between Christians of different denominations, united by one baptism, has a special place in the synodal journey.

Ecumenism is not just the search for what beliefs different denominations hold in common; but rather the willingness to respect and celebrate the differences across all denominations. It is essentially an attitude of mind that is welcoming of all - and not just those who believe in Jesus Christ as God. It is part of the dialogue with our companions in faith and fraternity. Christ asks for His Church to be One. We all have a responsibility to work for unity, but the Catholic Church needs to be confident with its identity in order to have authentic dialogue.

While it would be noble to believe that there is intrinsic interest in Christians wishing to explore the beliefs and practices of other denominations experience suggests that personalities and individuals play a significant role in most ecumenical advances. Too much is left to the priests and other individuals to motivate this spirit of ecumenism. It is an area in which the laity could and should be more actively engaged e.g., in having joint discussions and meetings on matters such as social justice and the dignity of the human person, would be beneficial in promoting a spirit of ecumenism.

Ecumenism requires cordial relationships to initiate dialogue, and robust structures to sustain it. We have to be brave in exploring our own beliefs and those of our faith companions. There is little doubt that most Christians are “good people” generally with noble intentions. There are increasing opportunities to engage with other Christian denominations at local level. It must be clear also that with the diminishing numbers of those who attend churches on a regular basis, that there would be value in a greater amount of inter-denominational dialogue, celebration, and other activities. There are some good examples of this taking place (e.g., *Glasgow Churches Together*) but numbers actively involved are sadly very small. In some cases, the number of people engaged in parishes is such that the faith experience is fairly negative, and certainly not encouraging of participation by younger generations. The example of “*Bridging the Gap*” – set up in the Gorbals by local churches- has supported a lot of people of different faiths – asylum seekers/refugees etc. It has tackled difficult issues and provided a lifeline in material ways for these people. It is an ecumenical venture of considerable value. Another group is the “*G52 Churches Together Group*” which undertakes joint activities in that area.

In addition to Ecumenism, the Church is concerned and actively involved in inter-religious dialogue which brings benefits and healing to all believers. (In the West of Scotland the *Council for Christians and Jews* offers opportunities for meeting together and sharing faith which is enriching for both faith communities.) Extremism in any form has no place in the Church and can be a barrier to dialogue and encounter. It generates fear and suspicion.

Locally, Christians are respectful of each other’s beliefs, what unites and what divides. Perhaps this has been stimulated by recent social movements highlighting the wrongs of discrimination – e.g., based on gender and race. West of Scotland Catholics seem to be less apologetic and more able, encouraged by their priests, to assert their love of God and the Church. We cannot ignore that in Glasgow there is a particular social concern for a deep-seated bigotry and sectarianism. This characteristically shows itself in football tribalism, and this can easily spill into other areas of society and be a force for destruction. The Church should be more consistent in condemning what can so easily develop into hatred and irrational feelings of disrespect and distrust. These have no place in the Church.

8 Authority and participation.

“...Appropriate participation is not a matter of political correctness but of human rights”

A synodal church is a participatory and co-responsible Church yet the structures of the Church still reflect its hierarchical nature. For many lay people this is a somewhat confusing model of the Church. Few lay people fully understand the nature of “Church.”

What is needed is a clear vision of the Church as a creation of God alive and living in the modern world. (...” *On this rock I will build my church...*”) So, the Church is not simply an” institution” but a community; that it, it is a living, spiritual and social entity, constantly changing and engaged in “the real world.” It derives its ultimate authority from God, and we are called on to be participants in this great work. This poses questions related to how we abide by the laws that govern the Church (Canon Law), the role of the Archdiocese and how the Church as a whole could or should develop and modernise to address priest shortages and acceptance of those who felt detached from the Church.

What is needed is education in leadership among the laity. There are people and organisations capable of offering this and this should be encouraged. Perhaps more could be done in schools to educate young people with a positive view of participating in Church activities, especially in relation to Church members who feel unwelcome within the Church due to personal circumstances or life events that are beyond their control.

Part of the synodal process should promote discussion of broadening both the roles of the laity, in general, and of allowing deacons (who are chaplains in hospitals) to administer the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick, and impart the Apostolic Blessing, to those who are in danger of death; foster ministries (existing) of Lector, Acolyte, Deaconate (permanent) even for younger people; and use the spiritual gifts of the laity in ever more constructive ways, so that there is constant encouragement to become actively co-responsible for parish life and the Church more generally; this may include such service as engagement in “Funeral Ministry”. This requires structures such as pastoral councils working at diocesan, deanery and parish levels. The shortage of priests and ordained ministers in our parishes calls on the need to review parish, deanery, and diocesan structures and practices. It is clear that this shortage coupled with the increasing average ages of priests adversely affects their capabilities to undertake some pastoral duties of some priests, and this should be the subject for wider open discussion inside the Church and the diocese. The prospect of increasing numbers of married priests is a perennial matter of discussion.

There were suggestions of the Diocese providing support to have more catechists within parishes and training the laity to provide support for RCIA, children's liturgy, bereavement groups and Eucharistic ministers. There were also suggestions for specialist support to be made available to parishes to enable support to individuals and families who have been affected by addictions such as alcohol and substance misuse.

Although it was felt that support is very good at parish level, it was highlighted that oversight from the diocese could help improve parishes that do not or cannot provide similar levels of support for a variety of reasons. It was also suggested that parishes could pull resources to provide some services to those in need. This would maximise the skills and experiences available ensuring parishes have access to the right level of support, by a person with the appropriate skills and knowledge at the time it is most needed. Some thought might be given to “RCIA for practising Catholics” – a plea for adult and youth formation to facilitate participation such that we might see “*Mother Church*” offering to all solace and inspiration.

9 Discerning and deciding.

“...See, Judge, and Act...”

Discernment is a distinctive process within the Church – often not well understood. In a synodal style we make decisions through discernment of what the Holy Spirit is saying through our whole community. This is a process in which we “See, Judge, and Act”, doing so with trust in the Holy Spirit enabling decisions which are advancing the common mission.

Do we fully understand what it means to discern? Making good judgement within our faith, intuition, listening to God and deepening our understanding of our faith. It is not by any means the idle reflection of one’s own thoughts, but rather a rigorous process based on certain principles and processes so that we might better hear and understand what the Holy Spirit is saying. The Church could provide direction and support in order that this is exercised effectively at all levels. It is thought some people might wish to be seen as intentional disciples, taking forward certain roles within parishes and beyond.

There may be value in considering a more widespread interest in spiritual discernment, particularly for adults. In schools pupils are encouraged to discern their life choices and their values. After school there is something of a void and having adult education for spiritual reflection is rare. Since the days of parish retreats focusing on “discernment” is unusual. In Glasgow there is an Ignatian Spirituality Centre and the Craighead Institute which use Ignatian spirituality for supporting those who wish to use this method of discernment. There are other approaches to discernment.

How can we grow in communal spiritual discernment? Sharing with others our faith, listening, attending faith-sharing and prayer groups. There would be much to be said for prayer services relating to discernment, including, for example “*Holy Hour*.” There is clearly scope to join voices with other faiths to share the common beliefs; to discern what is in the common good; and give stronger voice and witness to the world on faith issues. That “common good” is not to be restricted to Christian thoughts and beliefs. Yet opportunities for inter-faith dialogue are not well developed. More adult ongoing formation at both parish and diocesan level would be welcome. We need to be realistic and face the fact of the declining numbers of those who attend Church. In that context there is a clear need for planning which pays attention to Church structures (see Appendix 2 (e)) and to the effective use of technology (Appendix 2(d)),

There is a feeling that decisions concerning the Church are taken by the parish priest or, as appropriate, by the Archbishop (and his advisers). It is rare to feel that there is any corporate decision-making, and deaneries are rarely used for decisions. For there to be more distributed decision-making would require a change of culture. This would necessitate a willingness for parish councils to be established and led in a way that was more in accord with the idea of a “synodal Church.” Having a diocesan Pastoral Plan allows the community of a parish or deanery or diocese to make judgements about progress towards its enactment. The process of discernment is a significant aspect of leadership in the Church. Some thought should be given as to how that leadership can be formed, educated and organised.

10 Forming ourselves in synodality.

“... a commitment to engage in a Church that serves the needs of all humanity. ”

Synodality entails being receptive to change, formation, and on-going learning. It requires an adherence to the central tenets of the Christian faith and a preparedness to read the signs of the times and act in accord with what we discern is appropriate for strengthening our faith and service to others.

This requires us to “know God” more completely, and not just “know *about* God”. The formation of the person is not only an intellectual exercise, but centrally it is a spiritual one. We must try as best we can to see the face of God. How we do that will vary from person to person, and the Church should provide the lenses for us to see His face more clearly. So, forming ourselves requires self-reflection, a sense of our own gifts and talents that can contribute to the common good, and a humility that places us before God conscious of our own sinfulness.

At a practical level reading and meditating on scripture, and inspirational spiritual literature would encourage us to grow and change. The purpose of this is to allow Christ to increase while we decrease, forgiving others as Christ forgives us; re-discovering the gift of the Holy Spirit in our Church and our lives. Forming ourselves in synodality is not only a matter of acquiring or reflecting on greater knowledge and understanding; it requires a spiritual open mindedness to discern the work of the Holy Spirit; a willingness to be respectful of “the other”; and a commitment to engage in a Church that serves the needs of all humanity. A change of outlook and culture will be challenging for many. This is a form of inner renewal – not deviating from the truths of the faith, and not imposing a rigid mould for all. We are part of the Church committed to diversity, inclusion and equity as part of our spiritual DNA.

Forming ourselves in synodality allows us to discuss and debate the key issues which face the Church, and which sometimes cast a bleak shadow over it. We need to have confidence in our faith and speak out to achieve justice where there is injustice and bring hope where there is none. Synodality is as much about our attitude and approach to being a member of the Church as it is about exploring its rich teachings and traditions. Sometimes that exploration might best be undertaken in same-sex groups; or same-age groups. These approaches would need well managed, say through liturgical councils with members who are well-informed.

Building on the spirit of the Synod there should be opportunity for collective reflection on the impact and direction of the work of the Church, and what services it provides. This would allow parishes to share best practise and help each other to understand and navigate the challenges presented when implementing new ideas or finding new ways of approaching existing initiatives. The greater use of technology at all levels could significantly facilitate this.

The Church is commonly seen as a sound place where “help” is available. This can take the form of help for those in need – and particularly the vulnerable and those suffering from addictions and mental health problems. It should be a place, not of last resort, but where the generous hand of God is always outstretched. A synodal Church has this at its heart.

Appendices

These Appendices are presented in this Report firstly to highlight the significance of the issues raised in the consultation of the Synod and to provide coordinated comment on the issues that are referred to in the main text of the Report.

1 Reports from Schools

2. Special Issues to be addressed

a. Children and Adults with Individual Needs

b. The Role of Women to the Church

c. Communication, Technology and Social Media

d. Adult and Youth Formation

e. Church Structures

3. 1962 Missal (“Tridentine”)

Appendix 1 - Reports from Schools

The synodal process engaged the school communities. This brought an interesting range of responses about the significance and importance of the Church in the lives of young people.

Universally there was an expression of the love of the Church. That love should motivate wider and more active participation especially at the later stages of schooling. For many young people the school rather than the parish is the primary experience of Church. Within the context of schools much important work has been undertaken in developing programmes such as the “*Caritas*” programme.

In Primary schools it is clear that there is a very significant engagement of the schools with the parishes notably at times of “first sacraments”. The committed work of teachers in Catholic schools is much appreciated. However, it is also clear that the attendance at parish Masses is weak and the pupils often find a disconnect between what they experience in school and the experience of faith development at home.

The widespread use of “Children’s Liturgies” during parish Sunday Masses is welcomed. This often does not extend to children beyond about age 8, and thereafter there is a void.

As parents are the “primary educators” of their children there would be value in considering parental formation and education to strengthen the bond between home and parish.

In Secondary schools there is a less secure relationship between school and Church. The idea of “a common mission” needs to be re-considered at this level of faith development. There is a very significant and welcome engagement of pupils in matters of charitable works and faith motivated by undertaking good works and developing relationships with those in need. The widespread prevalence of such pastoral concerns and socially responsible projects is to be commended. School pupils also have a passionate interest for the stewardship of the environment and often lead thinking in this area. There is much to be welcomed and admired in relation to socially responsible action. This is a motivator but not the full spiritual life of a young person.

Church attendance by young people of secondary school age is low. Many believe that the Church has little to say to them in the form in which is at present. Young people are suspicious of hypocrisy and “coverups” in the Church. They must see a Church of integrity and open honesty.

Schools are also places where young people learn about and meet pupils of other faiths. This is universally a positive experience.

The sterling work of the St Andrew’s Foundation at Glasgow University in the education and formation of Catholic teachers is an important contributor to the education system and might be encouraged to consider developing its work in adult and youth education. It is a significant asset for the diocese.

Appendix 2 Special Issues to be addressed

These issues are clustered together because these are thought to be areas which if not addressed impoverish the Church in its mission. Where anyone is excluded the Church is impoverished.

2 (a) Children and Adults with Individual Needs

The Church has to be a community of inclusion. It has a particular responsibility to the vulnerable and those who feel on the margins. There is always a danger of ignoring people who have individual needs that are not visible (e.g., hearing impairment), and this can give those who seek help a perception of an uncaring Church. This unintentional exclusion is a serious concern for a Church that makes claims of inclusion. This concern is not met solely by the inclusion of “hearing loops”, or “disabled access” or other essential adjustments to buildings. There is a need for a mindset of inclusion that instinctively addresses the needs of all people. The regular education of priests on the changing needs of society in this regard would be welcomed.

It is encouraging to see the hearing-impaired community participate fully in the synodal process. We also welcome the work undertaken by SPREAD to give voice to the adults and children with individual needs and also to give voice to their families. The Church has a special responsibility to pay particular attention to people with these individual needs.

2(b) The Role of Women to the Church

One area of considerable concern in the synodal consultation was the contribution of women to the Church. When we do not hear the voices of women, and enable participation in every way possible, we simply do not hear the whole Church - and we lose the richness that the Church deserves, and Christ would wish.

This is not just a matter of listening. It raises fundamental issues which range from having a voice in decisions of the Church at all levels to the access to and carrying out the ministries in the Church. Some views expressed are seeking ordination of women as priests and deacons and this needs considered at the highest levels of the Church. Appropriate participation is not a matter of political correctness but of human rights; the balance of men and women in the structures of the Church is disproportionate.

We do not wish to leave this as a worthy statement saying that women need to be included. This is not the place to elaborate on this vital matter, and there is an urgent need for establishing a policy that respects the integral place of women in the Church. While this is an issue that requires wider consideration, the diocese is encouraged to take a lead in developing such a policy and following through on the enactment of it.

2(c) Communication, Technology and Social Media

Living in an age in which technology affects every aspect of life there is a clear need for the Church to develop its infrastructure of communication through the effective use of technology. The synodal process has shown that this is an area in need of development in the Church.

It would be inappropriate at this point to outline what a diocesan plan on technology and social media would encompass. Reading the signs of the times this is an aspect of life which will continue to develop and change. We shall lose generations of people if there is not urgent action to utilise the technologies now available to almost all people. Through this synodal process it has been suggested that at least it would include the development of a “*Diocesan App*” providing basic data about life and events in parishes, deaneries, the archdiocese as well as events and opportunities nationally and internationally. It is thought that the diocesan newspaper, “*Flourish*” has served a useful purpose but is no longer an adequate vehicle for communication.

The future also requires us to think of how technology might be able to broaden the participation of the laity in celebrations, the sacraments, and other events. During the period of the pandemic (from March 2020) many people accessed Mass through live streaming, not only in their own parishes but in other parishes and other countries. There is an appetite to develop the use of technology and the social media in supporting and enhancing the spiritual lives of all.

It is suggested that a task group of expert advisers (both lay and clergy) consider appropriate developments in this area as part of the synodal process.

2(d) Adult and Youth Formation

A consistent theme running through the synodal process is the need to have better developed youth and adult formation opportunities. With education after the school leaving age there is a dearth of opportunities that address the needs and interests of youth and adults. There are some opportunities within and beyond the Church, but these are sporadic and very much part of special interest groups. Societies such as the *Newman Society* have interesting programmes, but these are small scale, “elite” and rather specialised. There are also examples of parish-based initiatives which can be built upon.

The diocese should consider establishing a working group to explore what possibilities there are for future developments in this area. The important use of technology must be part of that initiative. There are agencies and organisations which could readily contribute to a coordinated structured plan which takes a comprehensive view of the needs of youth and adults. Many of these agencies would benefit from a coordinated approach to planning in the diocese.

2(e) Church Structures

One issue which has been a matter of considerable interest is the question of the structures of the Church to facilitate the synodal process. This includes consideration of the adequacy of the parish as the basic structure for the Church in the future. For many the parish is still “the Church”. For others the Church is not only the local provision, but wider relationships generated through special interests.

Within the parish the structure of significance is the parish council. These are not uniformly strong in the diocese, and it is thought that some direction might be given to establish necessary structures to maintain the synodal process. The current arrangements are varied and over-dependent on the personal convictions and interests of the parish priests. A diocesan policy on parish life would be welcomed so that parishioners can expect a degree of commonality of provision and service.

“Extended deanery meetings” have been a strong part of the synodal process. The deaneries became alive and provided an effective structure for discussion. Some attention might usefully be given as to seeing this structure continue in a planned way.

At diocesan level there is clear strength in the strategic overview of many aspects of Church life in the diocese. However the average age of priests is increasing and the number decreasing so that the synodal process is placed at risk. The co-responsibility demonstrated in the synodal process suggests the need for a strategic overview of structures in deaneries and parishes such that there is maximum opportunity for participation by the lay faithful and a realistic expectation of the priest as a pastor and not largely as an administrator.

Some attention should be given to considering broadening the engagement of laity in areas such as “funeral ministries” and other areas where their service would be valuable.

Appendix 3 The 1962 Missal (“Tridentine”)

During the consultation on the Synod there were a number of submissions received concerning aspects of the “Tridentine” interest specifically related to the adequate provision of the celebration of Mass. These submissions did not come through the parish and deanery structures and were received as individual submissions. The diocesan group constructing this synthesis have read these submissions in the interests of inclusion and justice.

REFLECTION FROM SYNODAL GROUP

These brief reflections are offered by the Diocesan Synodal Group as comments on the process of preparing the Synod Diocesan document.

It is clear that in all the information received and exchanges undertaken that there is a great love for “Mother Church” in Glasgow. The spirit of co-responsibility urges a continuation of action and encounter at parish, deanery and diocesan levels.

A particularly successful aspect of this has been the dynamo of deaneries becoming alive and contributing so fully to the diocesan endeavour.

This opportunity to be engaged with the process of synodality has been a privilege and has given a glimpse of what could be possible for so many people in the Catholic Church. This, however, will need commitment and structure if it is to survive and thrive.

For those charged with the development of the diocese this group urges the wide distribution of the diocesan response – not because of its specific contents, but because it might bring a renewed sense of hope to the people of Glasgow. It is not through a document that change will take place, but through the same Spirit that has allowed this document to be created.