



Diocese of Argyll & the Isles

Collated Report



Of the Diocesan Phase of the Synod

2021-2023

Synod Consultation Synthesis.

Introduction—“Indicate the milestones, turning points, spiritual dimension of the journey; difficulties, surprises etc...”

‘The experience of this Synodal Process is new and uncharted territory’ (Vademecum 1.1) These words from Pope Francis highlight the challenge for us of journeying with a new process in a geographically and culturally diverse diocese. Out of 25 parishes, 15 submitted feedback from Consultations.

We supported clergy by regular communication of the synod preparation and sending weekly summaries of the synod documents to share with parishioners. We supported facilitators with an online training session of 1.5 to 2 hrs.

Some parishes had at least one pre-synodal meeting which seemed to lay a clear foundation for the synod consultation. The pre-synod meeting was helpful to vent emotion or difficulties and helped clarify the true purpose of the Synod itself. This also helped the facilitators invest more deeply in their role and the aims and objectives of the Synod.

Training Facilitators: Some parishes seemed to have great difficulty in finding suitable people to take up the role of facilitation. However, those who came forward were for the most part an inspiration. In one sense our synod consultation began with our training due to the depth of faith shared, dialogue and insights revealed, these were enlightening and encouraging. The training revealed a special opportunity to share our faith and to listen to each other, it was encouraging, inspiring and revealed a sense of hope.

In the Synod Consultations we discovered new things about each other in our sharing and listening. There was a sense of togetherness and ownership of a person’s place in the parish community, there was a revealing of giftedness in the sharing and feedback.

There was an obvious encouragement from others when feedback was being heard and a sense of calm and respect. A real listening when others shared. We felt this was a real sign of the Spirit and an affirmation that the methodology of listening in this way is effective.

There was a minority of anger expressed in personal agendas; sexual abuse scandal was expressed as part of that.

Some of the Synod language was difficult for people to access, even after explanation some failed to grasp the meaning of ‘Synod’. However, this was also felt to be a positive – when it came to the actual synod consultation it was a new and fresh experience and opened up a different way of reflecting and discerning. Many were pleasantly surprised by their synod experience and imbued with hope.

There was recognition of need to change and the many challenges a future church must grapple with, however, a deep respect was also communicated for the old traditions still valued and loved.

Body of The Synthesis

Relationships

Great number feel welcomed in their church, some felt their church community was highly inclusive
The people who regularly attend mass are walking together. This is especially true for those who go to the morning weekday masses who feel a bond through prayer, the word, fellowship and the Eucharist.
Our role is to pray for those who do not walk with us

Desire to explore diverse views, celebrate our differences, be non-judgemental

Need for more social interaction and get to know each other better; we think we know our parish community but we don't really know each other that well. More activities for children and involve wider community as well

Support one another more

We don't want people to be left out, to feel unwelcome or to stay on the edges of the church community because they don't feel accepted. It is our duty to look out for each other. Everyone should be welcomed

Consult our fellow Christian denominations; need to be more ecumenical at parish and diocesan level

Encourage greater use of IT (more attractive to youth). Social Media is also listening

Live streaming of mass for housebound

Critical: activity and engagement with youth

While the view is that the laity are listened to at Parish level there is a feeling that at higher levels they are NOT listened to. This is the first time they have ever been asked for their opinion and is a real opportunity to contribute but will we be listened to?

Contact those who feel they no longer "fit in" or do not know that the church has moved on in its understanding of divorce/unwed mothers/suicide etc.

Priestly training should include practical situations such as dealing with addiction

Recognise our failings

On Island communities it is noted that there is a strong bond of community/kinship, community of faith and those with no faith come together for events and particularly great support and care of bereaved where family are supported in their loss by gathering of the community and prayer together. It is a powerful sign of walking together.

Deepening Vocation

Adult Faith Education: catechesis, bible study, prayer, contemplative prayer, discussion groups.

Missionary outlook is needed.

Prayer partners

Explore different music/modern hymns and encourage parishioners who have musical talent

Empower laity to become more involved in pastoral work such as extraordinary ministers visiting the sick

We are called to live our lives in an exemplary Christian manner, showing love, compassion and forgiveness to all whom we meet. This is mission in action. Have the "conversation" and don't hide our faith from those outside the church.

Youth outreach, interaction with schools

Encourage women and young people to become more involved: give them positions of responsibility within the Church

Respond to poverty in our parishes

Discussion groups and visiting speakers, such as Bishop Brian with question and answer sessions were helpful to facilitate our being 'listened to'

Barriers

Clerical abuse scandal has not been dealt with satisfactorily; people do not feel good enough, hindered and embarrassed for issues such as abuse scandal. Why has there not been some sort of truth and reconciliation initiative?

In the past both clergy and laity who may have had suspicions about sex abuse did not speak up enough. Many did nothing while the problem continued. It was hidden by the Church hierarchy - this has destroyed the church from within and has led a crisis of trust in the clergy. As a result of this, healthy social activities that could have been happening have stopped

Victims of abuses have to be heard and given all the help and support they need

Do converts feel they are considered lesser Catholics?

Since we are all missionary disciples we need to overcome the fear that prevents us from speaking or acting in case it attracts criticism

If the priest is approachable and part of the community, then trust and confidence in being honest and open gets better. The approach of the parish priest makes an enormous difference to the 'tone' of the parish.

Marginalised

Young people (view church as hypocritical?), the elderly, the ill, converts, divorcees, LGBT people, single parents and children. Also those with special needs.

Lapsed Catholics, how do engage

Women ; why don't we have women deacons and priests?

Concern that, for whatever reason, many Catholics are not engaging with this synod

Many choose to walk away for their own reasons but can we help them see the door is always open?

People on the edge may be coping with a range of personal difficulties such as depression, anxiety, addictions, relationship problems, and divorce for example, they may feel that they do not fit with the demands or standards of the Church

Message coming across to divorced people is "God doesn't love you anymore"

Difficulties

Cliques in our parish communities?

People who are further apart may feel that they are more likely to be judged or gossiped about if they come to mass due to personal problems

Church experienced as patriarchal and judgmental

Decisions made by older men who are not in touch with the younger and who block attempts by Pope Francis to introduce reforms

Celibate priestly life; why can't priests marry?

Conflict between old and new ways

A huge amount of hurt from past "teachings" of the church

Lack of support for those marrying outside of the faith

The church has put rules and regulations in the way of people accessing God

Synod 'meaning' and 'language' felt to be inaccessible to many

Divorced and remarried excluded

Some people may feel more comfortable talking to a female about a delicate or difficult situation

Some of the young people in the meetings said that they sometimes 'can't be bothered', that 'mass is boring' and 'there is too much talking and sitting'

Some young people feel embarrassment about going to church. This is in contrast to communities in Africa where young people tend to be proud about making a commitment to their parish. This might change if the Church became more active living out important themes such as social justice, social inclusion, and environmental justice, which are important to young people. Young people feel that other agencies tackle these issues better than the church does.

Participation/involvement from a youth perspective would be supported more by encouragement than perceived threats.

Synod on the Family was not an in-depth consultation and felt top down

Positive Actions

More pilgrimages and retreats and visits to other parishes in the diocese

At a local level many of the initiatives discussed can be implemented now without having to wait 2 years for the Synod to report

Do everything we do with LOVE

The answer is not simply for the priest to do more. The answer is for people in the parish to do more.

Ask young people what they want: dialogue with them and encourage them

Synod Consultation is a good thing; listening sessions like this should be on a regular basis i.e. annually

Offer 'lifts' to church to help housebound and build friendships

Encourage/engage with those who come to mass and go without speaking to anyone

Better communication; parish level and with diocese (Bishop's mass was helpful during Covid), could a diary of Diocesan events be published annually?

Welcome ministry at mass; this works well with some communities

More people need to be involved in ordinary running of the Church; take responsibility and ownership

Encourage parish groups such as Justice and Peace

Pastoral Council should play a greater role in some parishes and needs to be a good cross section – representative of the parish

If sermon touched you then share with your priest

There is a joy in being part of a community, 'a touch of heaven'

The church(es) could do more to help the issue of climate change as they do not have such vested interests as do politicians.

Dream of an all-encompassing church which draws all Christians together.

Importance of a parish hall or space to gather to meet and greet: open to everyone

We need to be more open and transparent about everything in the Church

Highlight various groups and organisations in our parish or in the Diocese

We need to welcome the stranger and listen and help

We all have to play our important part in the church. Everyone has a part to play in the church, young, old, male and female, married, single, religious everyone has their important role to play and for everyone to learn from one another and learn how to live the “good news” of the Gospel

There was agreement that women already play a vital and hugely valuable part in and make a massive contribution to parish life, the church community, and the liturgy. It was also agreed that this should be acknowledged and supported

As the faithful, despite the negative press about the Church, we should not be discouraged – we need to lead by example – shine our light. We should ask ourselves if we are a force for good in the community

Young people said that they would be motivated to be part of supporting meaningful projects that helped other people

Can we organize for young people to be involved in events such as World Youth Day, pilgrimages, etc. These experiences can be formative – staying with people for the rest of their lives

More senior members of the hierarchy to be more visible at a local level

Top down nature of communication makes it less accessible to the lay person.

Create a culture that enables proposal of change without it necessarily being seen by the Church as a threat

Look for small opportunities

Seek input from those in other areas who’ve successfully implemented outreach programmes – learn from success

Themes Recurring

Ecumenism

Divorced: Are those who are divorced and remarried truly welcomed? There is a need to help those who are divorced to know that the church has not shut them out

Youth: Listen to our youth. The Young need their platform to be listened to in what they need help with. We need a good catechesis to help our young to find their way

LGBT: The Church needs to do more to help and listen to those in the LGBT community and help them feel a part of the Church.

Women Priests and Deacons: Among the school group, about half of the young people felt that having women in the priesthood would be a positive change

Some Thoughtful Submissions:

Cliques in our parish communities?

If the ‘Church’ is Christianity should we not all join together as one Church regardless of Faith?

Some young people feel embarrassment about going to church

Young people said that they would be motivated to be part of supporting meaningful projects that helped other people

Except for this synod consultation I am not aware of ever being asked anything about any decisions.

More people need to be asked their opinion

Facilitating these conversations was a wonderful and inspiring experience and a great privilege

We need to welcome the stranger and listen and help

Some people may feel more comfortable talking to a female about a delicate or difficult situation

More people need to be involved in ordinary running of the Church; take responsibility and ownership

Dream of an all-encompassing church which draws all Christians together
There is a joy in being part of a community, 'a touch of heaven'

Conclusion.

Good facilitation is key to the consultation, some parishes were unable to find suitable facilitators, for this reason, and others, some parishes did not contribute to the synthesis. With hindsight another approach to support clergy and facilitators may have worked better.

We noted with gratitude that positivity and hope are by far the greatest thoughts discerned by the various parish synod consultations although many challenges, difficulties and barriers were expressed with sadness, loss and sometimes anger. The engagement of our facilitators, for the most part, was a wonderful experience with enthusiasm, hope and expectation shared in our preparatory meetings. Their investment in the synod process was an inspiration.

From one facilitator: *"Facilitating these conversations was a wonderful and inspiring experience and a great privilege"*

Some expressed the language and meaning of the Synod as challenging, however, for others there was a pleasant surprise, once the consultation happened they found the sharing and listening authentic and new and they had much to contribute.

The following statement from one participant expresses this: *"Synod Consultation is a good thing; listening sessions like this should be on a regular basis i.e. annually"*

Abuse Scandal: Although the Catholic Church in Scotland has made exemplary efforts in safeguarding and transparency, this is overshadowed by the greater difficulties in the wider Church. This is a deep and open wound for our Church communities and expressed in our consultations as such.

Steps to be taken in response to the call(s) of the Holy Spirit and points requiring further discernment.

"At a local level many of the initiatives discussed can be implemented now without having to wait 2 years for the Synod to report"

Greater effort needed to include those on the margins; divorced, LGBT, lapsed Catholics: *"We don't want people to be left out, to feel unwelcome or to stay on the edges of the church community because they don't feel accepted. It is our duty to look out for each other. Everyone should be welcomed"*

Critical: activity and engagement with youth

Greater listening to the laity from higher levels in the Church: *"This is the first time they (laity) have ever been asked for their opinion and is a real opportunity to contribute but will we be listened to?"*

How to give greater encouragement to clergy and laity to engage more in the Synodal process?

More support for Adult Faith Education: catechesis, bible study, prayer, contemplative prayer, discussion groups.

Missionary Outlook: hindered by lack of confidence on many levels

Women Priests and Deacons: although not on the agenda, expressed in most parish consultations and by all age groups

Church experienced by some as patriarchal and judgmental

Greater effort for ecumenism expressed in every consultation feedback
Do we exclude others because of who they are?