

UPDATE OF THE PROGRESS MADE BY THE PREPARATORY COMMISSION FOR THE DIOCESAN SYNOD

Introduction

In December the clergy, religious and laity were invited to make nominations for the Preparatory Commission (PC). Over one hundred people were nominated. From this number the bishop selected 13: John Jackson, Jean Urquhart, Ronnie Convery, Barbara Couper, Jennifer Paton, Angela Deighan, Gillian Polonis, Fr Jim Duggan, Mgr Denis Carlin, Fr John Bollan, Fr John Eagers, Fr Brian McGee and Bishop John Keenan.

The PC's remit is to prepare and organise the Synod. The Church expects the PC to establish a Directory, Secretariat and ensure spiritual, catechetical and consultative preparation. The PC has now met 5 times and the following is an update of the progress made.

Initial Meetings

Since no one had any experience of Diocesan Synods the focus of the first few meetings was on coming to an understanding what a Diocesan Synod is, the Church's rules regarding it and how we could organise one for Paisley. There was much discussion about vision and general principles but this was always done in a positive manner. Gradually, a clearer picture emerged of where we wanted to go and how we could to achieve it. We are now at the stage where concrete tasks are taking place. However, many details still need to be worked out.

The Synod

After much discussion and prayer Bishop John decided that the Synod would have a single topic which is *Evangelisation with the emphasis placed on the laity's role*. Evangelisation was chosen because the Church's basic purpose is to spread the Good News. The focus on the laity is not a denial of the importance of the clergy and religious – their contribution is essential and everyone appreciates this but the equal value of the laity is not always appreciated. The purpose of any diocesan synod is to help the bishop govern. Our Synod is intended to help the bishop reach the decisions which will encourage renewal of the Church and society through evangelisation but with a focus on the particular contribution the lay faithful can make. A title for the Synod remains to be chosen.

The Three Areas of Preparation

The Church expects that spiritual, catechetical and consultative preparation takes places to ensure a Spirit led Synod and an informed Synod.

1 Spiritual Preparation

Prayer is essential to the success of the Synod and must form a natural part of the process. We have already endeavoured to do this. A significant element of the Lenten Catechesis was prayer. It is envisaged that this would also be the case in future catechesis.

Another important happening is the *Pilgrimage of the Icon of Our Lady of Paisley*. The Icon will visit every parish for a week before the Synod. A leaflet for parishioners containing daily prayers and meditations will accompany the Icon's visitation. Apart from the leaflet, Welcoming and Departure ceremonies it is completely at the discretion of the priests and parish communities to decide which opportunities for prayer will be most suitable. However, we will be happy to circulate information about initiatives that parishes found successful. Professional copies of the Icon are being produced at a very reasonable rate which parishes, schools and individuals may wish to purchase.

Several other initiatives for prayer are also being planned for the next year. These will be advertised and people can opt in as they wish.

2 Catechetical Preparation

Sound catechesis will improve the quality of the synodal process. It also presents an opportunity for developing people's grasp of the Catholic Faith.

The Lenten Catechesis provided a catechetical introduction. More than 1,000 people gathered for 6 Sundays to hear about the basic teachings of the Church. However, in order to prepare adequately for the Synod it became clear that further catechesis would be needed on the core topic (a) the laity and (b) evangelisation. It was decided to focus firstly on laity to ensure that throughout the Diocese there would develop a fuller comprehension of baptismal dignity and the privileges and duties that flows from baptism. Having hopefully enriched people's understanding of their vocation a second round of catechesis would explore the call to new evangelisation and the particular and unique role which the laity have in it.

The catechesis will be multi-faceted. To ensure a sound and consistent catechesis a core document will be produced. To allow for as wide a catechesis as possible this core

document will be available to parishioners but will also be adapted for use in Secondary Schools, Primary Schools, parish and Diocesan Pastoral Councils, parish groups, family and friendship groups etc as well as for Social Media. The bishop will also invite people to hear him speak in five centres throughout the diocese. It is also hoped that priests will hold parish meetings and materials will be available to help with this. This will also include social media material for anyone who wishes to use it.

The catechesis on Laity will start mid-August and the catechesis on Evangelisation will be in the autumn. However, there will also be some background information available before the summer about the Synod generally which you may wish to pass on to parishioners.

3 *Consultative Process*

Sound catechesis will inform people and so facilitate consultation. The catechetical packs will include questions to encourage consultation. There will be specific consultation with the priests. We also plan to engage with as many people as possible. This aspiration brings its own challenges including ensuring every voice is heard and avoiding unnecessary work for the clergy.

Therefore, the Secretariat is establishing a network that both allows all relevant responses to be received without unduly burdening priests. Each parish will have a designated liaison person. It will be entirely at the Parish Priest's discretion who the liaison person will be. The parish liaison will take notes at parish meetings and be sent responses from small parish groups, individual parishioners etc. These responses are dissected by the parish liaison who then passes on the *relevant* information by email to a Deanery liaison person. The Deanery liaison collates the points raised from the entire deanery and these in turn are forwarded to the Secretariat. There will also be designated liaison contacts for schools, diocesan groups, clergy, religious etc. This should ensure that everyone has the opportunity to express their opinion and that all relevant responses reach the PC without overwhelming any individual.

After the process of catechesis and consultation is concluded a new document for the Synod proper will be drawn up. The Synod members will not rubber stamp this document but rather it will provide the basis for genuine discussion. It is this very deliberation that will help the bishop to formulate his key principles for his *Declarations and Decrees*.

Secretariat

The PC is obliged to create a Secretariat. This will be responsible for minutes, archiving, handling the consultation process, communication, organising the Synod, budget etc. The PC envisages about 45 people will have a role within the Secretariat. One pool of talent, among

others, is to approach people who were initially nominated from throughout the Diocese for the PC.

Directory

The PC is obliged to create a Directory which will govern the synodal process. It can be adapted through experience. The PC has looked at the Directories which have been produced from dioceses throughout the world. The Directory was the principle point on the latest Agenda and although there is much still to be discussed let alone finalised, real progress is being made. Relevant material for the Directory includes the preparatory stage, number of Synod members, process for selection and election of members, venue of Synod, methodology of sessions, process for speaking during sessions etc.

The Synod

The Synod will start in Eastertide 2016. It will be completed either during the Easter Season or by mid-June at the latest. It will begin with a Solemn Mass in the Cathedral to which everyone in the Diocese will be invited. It is proposed that the synodal membership would number (but no more than) 200 people, including clergy. It is proposed that the Synod meets for 5 sessions, although this could be reduced if all business was completed earlier. The Synod will produce propositions for the bishop.

To allow wide participation the synodal sessions will probably be on Saturdays. The sessions would consist of prayer as well as general assemblies, small group discussions and feedback. Spacing the sessions by at least a week permits further study and reflection. It is proposed that the Synod be held in a High School as there would be a large and comfortable meeting area, class rooms for small group discussion, modern technology, an Oratory, a dining area, car parking and public transport. The Synod would end with a Solemn Closing Mass in the Cathedral.

Post Synodal Document

Having listened to the propositions of the clergy, religious and lay faithful of the Diocese the Bishop is then required to write the Declarations and Decrees. This will guide the future principles and actions of the Diocese. Once completed copies will be sent to the Metropolitan, Bishop's Conference and Rome.