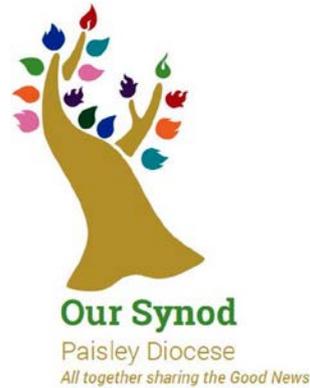


Our Synod: All together sharing the Good News



Report on responses from the consultation period

"The new evangelization that can make the twenty-first century a springtime of the gospel is a task for the entire People of God, but will depend in a decisive way on the lay faithful being fully aware of their baptismal vocation and their responsibility for bringing the good news of Jesus."

*Saint John Paul II
5th June 1998*

"...prepare an articulate and well-informed Catholic laity, able and willing to carry out its mission".

*Pope Benedict XVI
5th February 2010
(To the Bishops of Scotland)*

"In truth, the laity who have an authentic Christian formation do not have need of a 'bishop-pilot' or a 'monsignor-pilot', or of clerical input to assume their proper responsibilities, on all levels: from the political to the social, from the economic to the legislative! They have, rather, all the need of a shepherding bishop!"

*Pope Francis
19th May 2015*

Period of preparation

Spiritual, catechetical and formational preparation

Throughout the preparatory year care has been taken to not only hear the recurring themes and messages, but also to be sensitive to the quiet voices that raised issues of hope and concern.

The preparatory year was intended to reach every part of our Diocese and the methods of prayer, catechesis and consultation were deliberately varied in order to be accessible to as many people as possible.

*"the secret of the success of the Synod, as of every other ecclesial event and initiative, is in fact prayer", the diocesan Bishop invites all of the faithful, clerics, religious and laity, and especially monasteries of contemplative life, to a "common ongoing intention: the Synod and its results"*¹

The year of Spiritual preparation used the pilgrimage of the Icon of Our Lady of Paisley as an initial means to invite the prayerful participation of every parish. The physical journey of the icon was accompanied by a spiritual journey with a specially written Novena, prayer guide and copies of the icon for families to use in their homes. Schools were encouraged to pray with their pupils when the icon was visiting their associated parishes. The Religious orders of the Diocese also played a unique role in maintaining a calendar of prayer throughout the preparatory year. In addition to the pilgrimage of the icon, the spiritual preparation involved the development of a unique prayer book and designated days/evenings of prayer, reflection and participation in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. It is hoped that this carefully planned programme of Spiritual preparation meant that all members of the Diocesan family, no matter what their circumstances, were able to make an invaluable contribution to Our Synod journey.

*"The celebration of the Synod affords the Bishop a privileged opportunity for the formation of the faithful. It leads to a well articulated catechesis of the faithful with regard to the mystery of the Church and the participation of all the faithful in her mission."*²

The catechesis materials to accompany the preparatory year were written to encourage all of the laity in the Diocese to learn more about the themes of Our Synod. A core document, which unpacked Scripture, theology and Church Teaching through the decades on the themes of 'Evangelisation' and 'The Laity', while also reflecting the contemporary issues faced within Scotland, was written as our focal point for learning, discussing and sharing our understanding. The core document was well received, however in order to make it accessible to all academic and theological backgrounds, a version was produced that distilled the main points and opened up the dialogue in a more 'day to day' way using group activities and discussion questions. Further versions of the materials were made available for our primary schools, which included fun activities. Most importantly, the key questions asked remained constant within all of the versions of the core document. The magazine format of the catechesis materials meant that they could be used in a flexible way, depending on personal circumstances. Some people chose to take them home, read them individually and reflect and respond to the questions on their own, others decided to form small groups and used the materials as a catalyst for prayer and discussion, others again preferred to

¹ CONGREGATION FOR BISHOPS: CONGREGATION FOR THE EVANGELIZATION OF PEOPLES - *INSTRUCTION ON DIOCESAN SYNODS*
http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cbishops/documents/rc_con_cbishops_doc_20041118_diocesan-synods-1997_en.html

² *INSTRUCTION ON DIOCESAN SYNODS* (see foot note 1)

attend parish open evenings, where the parish priest took them through the content, explaining the key points. It was hoped that, while people could access the materials in a format that best suited them, the consistency of questions would allow us to hear what people had read and understood about the Synod theme and discern what the focus of the Synod sessions should be.

The core document and the complementary materials were further explored through a series of Deanery events from Bishop John. During these evenings he took the central elements of the themes and encouraged us to deepen our knowledge and understanding of what they meant and challenged us to consider how we live our vocation as Christians in today's world.

“The faithful should be afforded the opportunity of expressing their needs, their desires and their opinions with regard to the topics being dealt with in Synod”³

The comprehensive programme of catechesis led into a time of consultation. As mentioned, throughout the catechesis key questions were asked. These were intended to give a broad picture of 'where we are now' so as to identify 'where God wants to lead us'. Each of the first two elements of the preparatory year, prayer and catechesis, were crucial in order to ensure that the consultation was Spirit filled and sign-posted us to the needs of the Diocese and the direction of travel we should take during the Synod sessions. It was therefore vital that every person in the Diocese felt that their contribution was valuable. In order to reach every person in the Diocese and hear their individual and collective voices, the existing structures of the Church were used. Every parish nominated one (or two) members of their parish community to be the personal connection for the individuals of their parish. The parish contacts encouraged participation in the catechesis and consultation process and in many cases they also organised parish events and distributing the materials. They then collected and collated all of the responses from their parish and shared it at deanery level.

All of the responses were read and they contributed towards this final report.

It is a testimony to the hard work, dedication and commitment of the parish contacts that, through the consultation process, responses were received from every parish, as well as individual responses from priests and parishioners, Diocesan organisations, Religious orders and schools.

In addition to the parish contacts, the Synod sessions will include members of every single parish in the Diocese, as well as members of Diocesan organisations, the religious orders and the priests of our Diocese.

Discerning the message:

The interim report⁴, produced after a year of prayer, catechesis and consultation, highlighted that a number of issues were important to the Diocesan community including: *communication, inclusion, mission, challenges and the roles that we are each called to undertake.*

Having reflected on all of the submissions received before and after the interim report, the preparatory commission considered how these issues connected to the theme and scope of the Synod, and what further information would be needed to discern the questions for discussion at the Synod sessions. In addition to the written responses received, an online survey was undertaken.

³ As above

⁴ http://issuu.com/diocesepaisley/docs/draft_interim_report_1.docx/4?e=19578034/33165598

The People of God:

Responses from parishes and individuals referred to terms such as hopeful, inspiring, stimulated and excited when discussing the opportunity that the Synod may have for our Diocese. People were confident in expressing their Christian vocation within the family, work place and in social situations and articulated that they were happy to talk about, explain and witness to their faith in the various parts of their life. While the responses gave an indication of the confidence of the laity to be openly Christian, there was also an underlying request to be 'built up' through appropriate learning, training and catechesis. The responses indicated that while the laity had a clear understanding of their role as a Catholic in the world, they sometimes struggled to understand their role within the Church and in particular their parish. Comments indicated that they respected their parish priest and were aware of the commitment that he makes to their community, but that in some circumstances the structure of the parish does not allow the laity to make a contribution either at a personal or professional level.

Those who responded were aware of the need to continue their own spiritual and faith journey, nurtured by the Sacraments and guided by the Holy Spirit.

Homes and Families:

Responses varied in terms of what people wanted for their families and expected to achieve. There were strong views regarding the rightful place of the parent as first educator of children, however, responses also indicated that a partnership was necessary between parish, school and home for an holistic education in the faith. The online survey suggests that people are confident in passing on their faith to their children and in sharing a positive witness of Christian family life.

There was recognition of pressures on parents with busy lives as well as a very full curriculum in primary schools with academic pressure to succeed throughout the educational system. However, it was indicated that young people need to be involved in liturgical experiences and must be given time for adequate catechesis in school if their faith is to be an encounter with Jesus.

Proactive suggestions about ways to form families were included in some responses and these ranged from opportunities for families to meet, pray and learn together to families working in particular fields of apostolate within the Diocese to nurture and accompany others. Concerns regarding the sanctity of marriage, the obligation to attend Sunday Mass and the commitment to be in full Communion with the Church were raised. While these were not exclusive to home and family life, they were particular concerns of some parents and grandparents. Connected to the obligation to attend Mass was the perception that priest can sometimes be a barrier to someone returning to Mass.

Our Catholic community:

There were some responses which expressed a concern that parish life was no longer the same as it had been in the past and anxiety that it could be worse in the future. This was not limited to acute awareness of the number of priests, but also a sense that parish life was not as vibrant and varied as it had been in past decades. Responses indicated that spiritual, catechetical and social activities in their parish were often limited both in the range offered and the people who supported them. It was felt that a loss of many of the traditions and habits of faith were adding to the erosion of the Church. Other concerns included the place of fasting and holidays of obligation, perceived lack of reverence for the Blessed Sacrament by extraordinary ministers, greater numbers of girl servers compared with boys and an ignorance of our Christian Heritage.

Further consideration of whether these responses were indicative of how people would like the parish to be in the future, or simply a reminiscing of the past would need to be undertaken to establish which 'habits' of faith mentioned are crucial to the future of the Church in Paisley.

There was also an indication that some people felt there was an inequity across parishes. This was expressed as being due to a number of variables, including the person of the parish priest, the support structures for planning and development, the inclusive/exclusive nature of the parishioners and the commitment of those who lived in the parish boundary to their own parish.

Through the on line survey people expressed that Mass was a moment of encounter with God. However, in the formal submissions the point was made that often the Scripture readings are not explained in any great depth and there is no connection made between what has been proclaimed and living the Christian life daily.

Reference was made to links between school and parish and people expressed that this was a vital relationship in order to make the parish community vibrant.

There was also an indication that support for the young people of the parish and the Diocesan community was crucial to the growth of the Church and that investment in youth work and peer evangelisation would be important to bring this to fruition.

Adult formation was also included in the submissions with a calls for training for transformation, as well as planned Catechesis on Holy Mass, opportunities for Spiritual formation to nurture a personal relationship with God, the study of *Evangelii Gaudium* (and other Church documents), and Diocesan celebrations such as a day's celebration of Our Lady of Paisley, practice of Divine Mercy Devotion.

The Margins:

Responses reflected that the majority of people have experience of family members and friends who have left the Church or find themselves on the margins. Views were expressed that it was important for those who practise their faith to know how to 'meet people where they are' without judgement or condemnation. It was also felt that parishes could be more proactive at occasions like First Sacraments, weddings and funerals to first of all be welcoming, but also to evangelise.

It was felt important to not think of the 'margins' as only those who are on the fringes of the parish, such as infrequent attendees or 'lapsed' Catholics, but rather to have a wider view of who counts themselves as a member of the Church and be mindful of how they may feel about the opportunities afforded to them to participate.

Welcoming new members of the community was raised on several occasions as something that could be improved. Consideration could be given to what makes someone feel part of the Church who then maintains a faithful commitment Vs someone who is new and feels isolated or invisible and subsequently leaves.

Workplace, culture and world:

In line with expressions of hope and optimism was a willingness to be agents of change for the Church. While people were aware of the challenges there was also an expression of commitment to 'rebuild my Church'. People felt that this time in the Diocesan history is being inspired and guided by the Holy Spirit.

Consistently people expressed a view that they were confident in witnessing to their faith but would like to be more informed about current topics, so as to be able to engage in meaningful dialogue with others.

People felt that they were respected for being a person of faith and that the “secularisation” of the world was not a threat to their personal faith.

It was suggested that church structures may be a barrier which limit the ability of the laity to be as effective as they could be. Some organisations in the church seem to be set in their ways so that things happen slowly and people become frustrated. Lay people, as part of the local community can offer support in ‘real time’ because they know people’s life circumstances.

There was a strong appeal to be forward looking with rapid reactions to crises; not simply being proactive but having a vision with aims, words and deeds to back it up.

The on line survey indicated that many people feel that their gifts and talents are not called upon to be used for the service of the Church, either within the parish life or in the wider world. In addition to this there was a feeling that they were not recognised, or encouraged to be leaders within the Church.