

Diocese of Ossory



Our Synodal Journey FIRST STEPS



Introduction

The synodal experience in Ossory began with the invitation of the IEC and Pope Francis to be part of the national and universal synodal journey. As we began the work those who were asked to be delegates quickly assembled with them a larger group of people to try capture the mood of synodality in working to bring this to life. This group gathered on a weekly basis with a great energy for the task and an obvious commitment to try ensure that the voice of all in the Diocese was heard.

The journey then was quickly shaped into three phases: phase one, making synod known wherein we tried through media, posters, parish newsletters, social media channels to increase awareness of what synod meant and how people could be involved; phase two, Listening Lent wherein through thirteen public meetings, online surveys, written surveys in parishes and letters to the synodal team, we invited people to have their voice heard - this phase worked from the core belief that “every voice makes the parish”; phase three, the synthesising of the material gathered through gathered responses and allowing, by means of the quotes in this document, the voice of all those who spoke in phase two to be represented.

During phase one, as we tried to make synod widely known, we also had trained, by a professional facilitator, forty synodal facilitators over two nights. This training, we felt, was key to ensuring that the synodal meetings were best positioned to hear accurately that which was being said and also to ensure that the facilitators could manage the gatherings so as to allow all to have their voice heard. We quickly realised, as the process began, that the better the facilitator the better able the synodal gatherings were to allow people to speak and to be heard.

During phase two we attempted to hear, as clearly as possible the voices of those gathered, while “still trying to throw the net out wider”. The numbers for the gathering varied from 8 to 80 but the “success” of those same gatherings was, we quickly realised, not dependent on numbers but the honesty of those who were gathered.

Phase three was marked by a realisation of the tensions that exist in our church with many believing passionately in opposing ideas. It is in our holding these together that we are possibly most fully church. In working to ensure that we accurately capture in this synthesis the voices of our parishes the public meeting was a most helpful affirmation that, insofar as is fully possible, this document does hold together that which was said.

Thankfully, prayer was a key element to our synodal journey and the Diocesan Faith Development Group prepared and distributed the synodal prayer to every parish with the request from Bishop Nulty that it be prayed at all Masses. Various parish prayer groups also held the synodal process in their prayer during Lent with many parishes including it in the Prayer of the Faithful each weekend.

What was notable during the synodal process was the honesty of the contributions. People who spoke did so out of a real concern for the church community and from a real desire to see us better follow the promptings of the Lord. It was notable too that faith matters greatly to people and as a result there was, many times, a healthy passion to the contributions.

Some of what people said gave them joy when they thought about their experience of Church:

Attending Mass

- faith is personal, I get joy and nourishment by attending Mass and receiving the Eucharist
- a well-prepared liturgy where the homily gives us something to take with us to help us live the Gospel during the week
- greeting before and after Mass, welcome at the door
- being involved as readers, eucharistic ministers
- the opportunity to attend daily Mass
- Latin Mass has a lot to offer
- the church building being open for anyone to call in to sit with God, the silence and the smell of the church building

Music and choirs

- singing and music and an enthusiastic and approachable celebrant make liturgy a joyful celebration
- music is an important element, gives the ceremony a lift, brings a different atmosphere
- choirs encourage children, brings more families to church, choir was missed during Covid

The use of technology during Covid restrictions

- the church making use of modern technology - the webcam, the impact it has had on the local community, but also the wider community abroad
- the wealth of great liturgy available on-line during Covid
- returning to church after restrictions, appreciate Mass after Covid absence
- the removal of the obligation to attend Sunday Mass, wanting to go as opposed to obligation

Funeral liturgies

- funeral liturgy is very meaningful, funeral liturgies where the priest has engaged with the family and the people come to be present to the bereaved in their time of sadness
- funerals in Ireland are very well done and there is a great sense of people coming together in a prayerful manner

Community aspect of Church

- gathering of the community in the church, the sense of community that the Church gives in happy times and sad times
- the celebration of Mass, be it Sunday liturgy, funerals or weddings is the only time the faith community in our parish gathers to be Church.
- the support of a group with the broad belief in goodness
- friends that are made through attendance at church
- seeing other people's faith brings great joy
- the great goodness shown in parishes, especially in time of tragedy
- sense of community and a sense of belonging, - all ages, everyone is the same in Church
- the importance of the priests in the community - visibility of the priest in the community- priest involving himself in the life of the community outside of the church, attending hurling matches, parish events etc.
- seeing lay people empowered by the Church to use their gifts, co-responsibility – laity and clergy working together
- the welcome given by the parish to new communities, e.g. Indian community
- care of the sick in nursing homes and people who are housebound
- annual parish-based events, e.g. barbeque, involving young people
- new religion programmes teach about other religions; schools now have many people with different religious beliefs, good to have an understanding of their religions
- faith development groups, prayer meetings, daily reminder of the Angelus, adoration in the Friary, *lectio divina* in the Black Abbey, Life in the Spirit seminars, Knock Shrine
- laity involved in Synod
- Church's contribution to people on the margins, e.g. St Vincent de Paul, charitable ministries

Special occasions

- Christmas, Easter special ceremonies bring joy, great symbols in those events
- "event" Masses, e.g. cemetery Masses or outdoor celebration of Mass, support for family occasions
- part of the community decorating and looking after the church building
- Communion service when the priest is not available

Sacraments

- sacraments – a lifelong source of nourishment

- the sacraments, happy events – especially for children, promoting and supporting the faith of the next generation
- sacraments bring joy, even a funeral can bring joy if it's a celebration of life
- family Mass groups allow young people to be involved; children's presence brings joy
- the welcome given to people when they come to church to receive the sacraments
- schools do great work for sacraments and should be commended - First Communion and Confirmation preparation programmes

Lay involvement

- Pastoral Areas, working with neighbouring parishes more inclusive
- active parish pastoral council, establish parish pastoral councils and bring them further
- ministries for lay people, develop them
- I see tonight as the beginning of a process that must become part of our lives, a total reorganisation of the Church at local level, this discussion needs to continue
- lay people involved in the Synod
- seeing lay people being acknowledged for the work they do behind the scenes in church
- various church agencies helping the poor and homeless, parishes helping Ukrainian refugees - gives hope that the human family looks after each other

Priests

- having a good priest that people trust and support, the local parish priest
- role and presence of the priest at times of bereavement, priests are very comforting at times of bereavement
- priests with good short, sermons
- when the priest involves himself in the community outside of the church
- dedication of the priest to vocation, priest empowers people and promotes Church

Young people

- the wonderful Youth 2000 movement
- young people have faith despite their absence from church
- young people involved in ministries and helping in church gives joy
- feeling that children are safe due to good safeguarding procedures

Guidelines to live by

- the guidelines to live by given to us by the Church's core values
- tradition is something to be proud of
- the cycle of the year in the Church – it has a rhythm that fits with the cycle of life, routine of milestones in the year

Pope Francis

- Pope Francis is a great leader, has brought joy to the Church, interested in environmental issues, open to change, reaches out to everyone, a brave man
- Pope Francis has brought joy back into the world through his papacy

Some of what people said disappoints them when they think about their experience of Church:

Mass and sacraments

- small number attending church, a lot of children at church but no teenagers
- live-streamed Masses reducing physical attendance, miss Sunday Mass in parish church
- failure to use technology
- inability to receive under both species, no opportunities to renew faith - missions, novenas etc., lack of altar servers,
- lack of reverence, respect, solemnity and silence in the church
- full church for First Communions, Confirmations, disappointing when children don't turn up in church afterwards
- parents not attending church, not bringing children, nothing to entice young people to come to church after these sacraments
- parish is vital; unfair that the priest is going to a number of parishes, priest having to rush off the altar to reach another parish is not showing reverence to the Eucharist, just rushing around fulfilling a job
- people not getting married in church, miss Confession
- number of Masses – quality v quantity

Involvement of lay people in Church

- the structures that would evoke meaningful dialogue at parish level are absent, no mechanism exists at parish level which would enable parishioners to shape the lives of their parish in a meaningful way
- no involvement of laity in the running of the parish, no shared responsibility with priest in decision-making affecting parish life
- no mechanism in place to ensure that policies adopted at diocesan level are implemented by the parish
- I am very saddened by the few opportunities lay men and women are being afforded to partake more fully in the life of the Church
- I am saddened by the fact that some parishes have Pastoral Councils in name only
- still a disconnect between priest and community, lay people appear to be a threat to some of the clergy

- a lack of meaningful consultation with parishioners, laity's voice not sought until now, previous listening sessions have not led to change, consultation that didn't lead to action
- pre-Vatican Two attitude alive and well – keep things as they always have been, it's sixty years since Vatican Two and the Spirit is still being blocked
- Pastoral Areas not being embraced
- Pope Francis bringing in changes but a lot of opposition to change is a disappointment –
- the trappings, the pomp and ceremony around Church disappoint

Priests

- lack of appreciation for priests
- declining vocations and number of priests, no appetite for the help of foreign priests, lack of future thinking re shortage of priests, heavy workload for priests going forward
- our limited and confined understanding of the priesthood
- we have spent years praying for “vocations” without realising that everyone present has a vocation -this has always frustrated me
- sermons not relevant to today's ethical challenges,
- clericalism, attitude of some clergy
- silenced priests

Young people

- the Church has very little relevance for young people, youth is indifferent to Church, lack of young people in church saddens
- young people only attend church for baptisms, weddings and special occasions
- lack of youth ministry
- disappointment when young people don't get encouraged
- young people not exposed to catechism

Knowledge of faith

- lack of understanding of faith, lack of education in the basics of the faith, lack of understanding of the Mass
- people don't know the Commandments, ten Commandments very important – guidelines given out of love to help us
- sad because people haven't really known that God loves them
- Church in Ireland today is a poor reflection of what Church should be, as a Church we have no sense of purpose, there is no desire for mission, no reaching out to the lost or those who have walked away
- environmental issues are not tapped into in a faith setting

Church teaching

- a failure to tackle the need for change, failure at all levels to deal with today's challenges
- the Church should defend the position of our faith on issues such as abortion, gay marriage and euthanasia
- Church should not be afraid to criticise politicians
- Church should talk about sin and hell, about the sacrament of Confession
- Confession – general absolution?
- Church should get stricter on parents who want their children to receive First Communion but don't practise themselves
- some priests are ready to forget about the Word of God, preferring to present themselves as nice, open people, modernism and going with the spirit of the age doesn't work -come back to the basics of acknowledging our sinfulness, repenting and embarking on the narrow road that leads to salvation
- the post-modern Vatican Two Church is quickly descending into a Church that no longer stands for anything

Mandatory celibacy for priests

- is it right to expect the priesthood to be confined to men and that they not be allowed to marry?
- disappointing that priests cannot marry, priests should be allowed to marry
- married men as priests, allow priests to marry
- let go of celibacy – why can't we have married priests? look at men who left the priesthood
- end mandatory celibacy for priests, let go of compulsory celibacy for priests
- celibate-only priesthood - disappointing

Role of women

- total frustration at the explicit gender discrimination – women and men are equal and should be treated as such
- position of women in the Church, women not equal in the Church, women not welcomed as are men, women are downtrodden in the Church
- lack of involvement of women, lack of female participation at all levels, lack of female decision makers
- patriarchy – male focussed Church
- hurt done to women and babies and lack of responsibility for same
- comments re family decisions from Rome cause alienation from Church
- women priests not considered, male-only priesthood

- disappointed by opposition to women priests
- a bigger effort needed to promote the ordination of women and include women in roles of responsibility and equal standing

Clerical abuse

- Church was too slow to apologise for clerical abuse of children
- child sexual abuse, and how the Church managed it, has caused massive damage; their response hasn't helped those who are angry, lack of honesty on behalf of the Church for abuse victims
- sex abuse – image of Church more important than children; bishops ignored it and people lost trust in Church
- because of the various Church-related scandals people don't want to be associated with Church and it's having a knock-on effect
- we can't get away from the cover-ups in Ireland

Gender issues

- gay people – gender issues, people may not feel welcome if in minority groups
- as a mother of a gay child I feel he is excluded now from our Church

Communication

- the invitation to be part of this Synod was not properly prepared for or publicised, no awareness of this Synod
- negativity towards Church in the media
- poor communication at parish level, at diocesan and national level
- Covid – lack of contact with parish
- in spite of having webcams in parishes it is still difficult to communicate, especially with young people, Church is not reaching out to many in the community, those who get left behind – it's hard to get back into church – divorced people feel excluded
- sports fixtures conflicting with Mass times

Schools

- level of religion in some secondary schools disappointing, second level schools – no spiritual formation
- primary school religious curriculum leaves a lot to be desired
- suggestion to take religion out of schools is a major disappointment

Response from Primary Schools Online

What I like best about my parish or faith community?

- Going to mass ,meeting friends and family, the choir. The kindness of people, everyone helps one another. The church is clean, quiet, welcoming and holy. The priest is nice and the flowers are gorgeous. I learn about Jesus and God

Involvement in parish/becoming more involved

- I go to mass every Sunday. Singing at mass
- I made my communion and confirmation
- I am not very involved but I try to go to mass when I can
- I Play a lot of sports in the parish
- We help with tidy towns. I help my mother with the flowers
- I should go to mass more, be a helper a reader or a server. I could go to mass more on Holy days and pray more for the people who have died in my family
- I could be more involved by using the webcam from home, pray more with my family
- I should pray more and try more to be like Jesus every day

How could the parish be better?

- Involve children more in the mass .Have a child friendly mass, special readings for the children to read, bring up the gifts. Make the church a little more comfy and child friendly. Have a children's choir
- More involvement/accommodation for people with special educational needs and intellectual disabilities
- More women jobs. Make ladies able to be priests. Female priest
- Light candles for free.
- The church could be warmer, it is very cold. We need more heating

Does everyone feel welcome in your parish?

- Yes, everyone feels welcome because it is a caring parish, our chaplain is very good and understanding. Yes, because everyone joins hurling. Yes, some families are inviting Ukrainian families into their homes. Everyone who is Catholic is welcome

Additional comments

- We are happy you are asking our opinion as it is important to us
- We would like for girls to be allowed to become priests
- Me and my family don't go to church
- I like my parish and I'm glad to be in the parish I am in

Conclusions

As we draw together this synthesis of this first part of the synodal journey in Ossory we do so conscious of the effort undertaken to gather as many, and as varied voices, as possible. The

main synodal group made a concerted effort to achieve this through careful planning. It is notable that we spoke to people from many/nearly all sectors of the Diocese including, but certainly not limited to, the urban and rural, those in work and those not, those who are married and those who are single, those with college education and those with none; those who practice faith regularly and those who do not; the young and not so young, those who are heterosexual and those who are LGBTQI, we note, too, that national conversations allowed engagement with certain groups such as, but again not limited to, those in our third level colleges, those who are survivors and victims of abuse - we welcome that they were also invited to be part of our local synodal journey through their comments in our recent external audit of safeguarding practices in our Diocese.

The synodal group do, however, lament that some voices could be better heard or represented, again included here but not limited to, young families/parents were noticeably light in engaging with the process, as were those in our second level schools, the travelling community, the LGBTQI communities, those who struggle with belief and other groups. The synodal group did invite responses from the children in our primary schools and, through the schools, their families but we stand now, at this point in the journey, with a sense that more can be, and needs to be, done in these spaces. We note, then with sadness, that some voices are still largely missing from this synthesis - not from want of our trying to reach out but simply we recognise, at this point in our synodal journey, that more needs to be done to encourage people to take part in future phases of our synodal journey.

It is notable that our Church community contains, in a very real way, those who are at opposite poles - those who feel we are not Catholic enough, in the sense of holding to traditional teachings, live alongside those who feel we would be more Catholic in embracing more modern approaches. These many disparate opinions/groups must all co-exist in our Church; as neither can have complete satisfaction without the dissatisfaction of the other. We experienced real evidence of these positions - as Pope Francis terms them *contrapositions*.

It is notable too, at this stage of our synodal journey, that some of what is contained in this first phase of this synthesis is actionable locally or even nationally - such as, merely by way of an example, better liturgies, reduced number of Mass, better quality preaching, greater involvement of women in local decision making roles, whereas others are more suitable to reflection/action by the Episcopal Conference or wider universal Church community. A continued implementation of the Diocesan Pastoral Plan will help begin to realise some of what is desired in these pages. This, in Ossory, must now be the work of the Council of Priests, the Pastoral Areas of our Parishes, the Diocesan Pastoral Council and each of us as members of our Church. We earnestly pray that it can happen as we continue this synodal journey.

Appendix

Some of the items used to increase awareness around our Synodal Journey in Ossory.



Synod 2021 2023
For a synodal Church
communion | participation | mission

POPE FRANCIS WANTS TO HEAR YOU AND SO DO WE! ALL OUR VOICES MAKE THE PARISH

Further information: www.ossory.ie www.synod.ie

The Synodal Journey in Ossory

What is the Synodal Journey?
Put simply, it's our listening to each other. All our voices make the parish. If we listen carefully to each other we believe we will hear what the Holy Spirit wants us to hear at this time.

What questions will start the conversations?
The basic questions for these conversations are: when you think about Church, in your experience, what brings joy? when you think about Church, in your experience, what brings sadness or disappointment? From these more will emerge...

Where will these conversations take place?
Throughout all of our Diocese (venues will be publicised) online through our website, and in as many groups and places as is possible - because every voice counts.

Our Journey Together...

Creating Awareness About Synodality FEB 1st - MAR 2nd	Listening Lent: Ensuring Every Voice is Heard MAR 2nd - APR 17th	Celebrating and Sharing Our Responses APR 17th - JUN 5th
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"listening in lent"



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Above resources and children's animated video by Bishop Nulty