



**Tuia i te Rangi  
Tuia i te whenua  
Tuia i te here tangata.**

That it be woven in heaven  
That it be entwined on earth  
That it be interlaced as with  
the threads of all people.

# Synod

## Synthesis



DIOCESE OF  
AUCKLAND



## INTRODUCTION

*“...the purpose of the synthesis is not to present a chronology of the stages of the synodal process that were followed, nor to draw up a report that lists indiscriminately all the points that emerged during the work. as the culmination of a communal spiritual discernment, the synthesis aims to gather and express the fruits of the synodal process in a way that is understandable even to those who did not participate, indicating how the Holy Spirit’s call to the Church has been understood in the local context.”*

Guidelines for synthesis writing Vatican May 2022

The diocesan phase of the Synod for a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, Mission in the Catholic Diocese of Auckland gave an opportunity for the people of the diocese to give voice to their experience, hopes and dreams for the Church. It enabled them to participate in discerning the Spirit calling us forward together.

In this consultative phase submitters who did not participate through the national surveys were not required to disclose their details. This was a deliberate choice responding to initial concerns about the process and a fear that certain voices would be heard more loudly, or responses judged as more or less acceptable if it was known who was responding. Despite this many groups identify themselves. Therefore, although we cannot statistically breakdown the voices, we know that of the over 500 submissions received about 40 % were from individuals. Discerning groups varied in size from 3 to 58. Submissions were received from parishes; both urban and rural, ethnic communities that identified as Pacifica and Asian, lay associations, religious congregations, primary and secondary schools. The age of participants ranged from 11/12-year-olds to 95-years-old.

It is prudent to note that there was no clear voice of the clergy and that although we heard from the young, school communities, Māori, and those that are marginalised from the Church these were not strong voices. It is also notable that many groups appeared homogenous in membership so that often it was listening to people with shared experiences.

### Response to the consultation process

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic the Auckland diocese was under stay-at-home orders at the start of the diocesan process and significant restrictions around gathering were in place until Easter 2022. This frustrated a number of respondents who felt constrained by the use of technological tools such as Zoom believing that gathering digitally significantly reduced the spiritual nature of the process. For others this highlighted the lack of access to technological responses of certain communities.

A range of submissions, especially collected by online survey and submitted by individuals rather than from within communities, expressed a great deal of pent-up cynicism and anger due to experiences from the past or their image of the church. There were strong expressions of hurt, of experiences of lack of acceptance by the church, and even fundamental rejections of the church, specific priests, the hierarchy, and the papacy. Numerous references to priests abusing children and the lack of action by the Church to these crimes were made.

Conversely there is much excitement that the consultation is taking place. It is seen as reviving or completing the emphases of the Second Vatican Council concerning the pilgrim people of God. Many respondents reported both a sense of privilege and relief that there was an opportunity for them to speak of their experience of Church and share dreams of how the Church might go forward.

*I have been waiting for this moment since Vatican II.*

*Thank-you for listening.*

## Experiences of the consultation process

*We shared, expressed, listened, discussed, agreed, and disagreed. We walked together in community, with participation, on a mission.*

*It will be whitewashed by the diocese. What we need to say will not go to NZCBC or Vatican.*

*What a privilege, the Church cares about my thoughts*

When reflecting on the experiences of the consultation process as would be expected a range of reactions emerged.

For some participants participation in the process was a **negative** experience they felt unheard. Due to pandemic restrictions others felt that the process suffered because people were **zoomed out**. It was noted that encouraging participation in the process felt like trying to **'light wet wood'**. Anger was expressed that some parish leaders including clergy were dismissive of the Synod and so failed to provide **access** for people to meaningfully participate. Some contributors felt a strong **resistance** within their communities to the Synod. Feelings were also expressed that the process was **confusing, bureaucratic, and rigid**. Participants were **sceptical** that participation would lead to significant changes in Church.

Overall feedback to the process was **gratitude**. People were thankful that they were invited to the consultation and **welcomed** the opportunity to participate. While acknowledging that being open to **conflicting** experiences and opinions brought about personal **vulnerability** many saw the consultation **journey** as **ongoing, interesting, and useful, revealing opportunity for change**. It was perceived as a **challenging** process where **honest and thought-provoking** sharing led to **discovery** of a **collective community** response. Many were **excitedly hopeful** that the synodal process would be ongoing and **transformative**.

## THREADS

Having listened to the call of the Spirit through this process of consultation, the following five key threads were discerned. They all centre around how we are journeying together as Church at this time and how we might go forward as Church. The threads are not distinct but cross and influence one another.

1. We heard a call that the Church be **more welcoming of diversity**. Diversity of age, ethnicity, sexual orientation, marriage status and theological perspective.
2. We heard a desire for **a richer parish life** with parish organisation leading to a vibrant faith community where spiritual growth was nurtured, liturgy was inclusive and participatory, and schools were connected to the life of the Church.
3. We heard **frustrations around the form and function of Church structures** where the gifts and talents of many, particularly women were ignored, and a narrow group were responsible for decisions.
4. We heard questions about the **role and formation of priests** and the shadow of **clericalism**.
5. We heard concerns about how the church **engaged** with and spoke to concerns of the wider community.

Each of these threads has been unpacked below.

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### THE CHURCH NEEDS TO BE MORE WELCOMING

We heard a call that the Church be more welcoming of diversity. This included diversity of age, ethnicity, sexual orientation, marriage status and theological perspective.

Many submissions strongly expressed their desire that the church be more open, and that groups of people who have felt pushed to the margins or excluded be given a place. Exclusion from communion was a particular concern. Some felt strongly that judgementalism prominent in the past was still too evident. Many felt that people who had felt unwelcome had walked away and the church was diminished by their absence. People wish to feel welcome in church. But it was very understandable that those who had been absent for a long time sensed a feeling of exclusion.

One concern heard was that **young people did not feel welcome**, especially those in their teenage years. Many have drifted away, and little is done to attract them back. Vibrant liturgies, strong youth groups and appropriate faith formation would help.

We heard that the gift and challenges of **ethnic diversity** confront us powerfully. Parishes are ethnically mixed. Some ethnicities have separate chaplaincies. Often minority ethnicities feel themselves on the margin of the New Zealand church and find it hard to feel at home in the church. So, the church feels itself divided into separate groups that meet without really engaging with each other, and everyone is the lesser for it.

There were two divergent voices in submissions, one saying *“Catholics (priest and lay) are not welcoming in New Zealand especially to foreigners. They may put a smile on their face and say welcome but when foreigners want to experience some beauty in the liturgy, they will immediately [be] cast out as some sort of conservative leper.”* The other voice said: *“From my observation some of the ethnic groups remain in clusters.”*

Some saw that our parishes are blessed by this diversity but strive to learn how to hear the voices of all the different ethnic groups, and to encourage all to worship and meet together as the people of God.

Many expressed hurt and confusion that **the divorced and remarried were denied communion**. Some shared painful stories of how those whose marriages had ended through domestic violence and the children of such situations were bitter about the church’s response. In some cases, an annulment was simply not possible, and the support of the church was lost where it was most needed.

The absence of the marginalised minorities, particularly **LGBTQI+**, was named by many, this deeply affects families and friends. The voice of the church can be perceived as extremely hostile, and many people felt alienated by this voice. While some were anxious that the church does not abandon its traditional teaching, a commonly heard voice was **“sometimes it feels like the Church is always against people and in being so, the journey that is taken quite literally opposes people. I am speaking of prejudices against sexual orientation gender equality.”**

There were a few voices from the LGBTQI+ community who responded, and we honour those who feel (for example) that: *“After coming out as gay I find it difficult to go to church and I don’t feel I can bring my full self to church.”*

The **disabled** often felt that little attention was given to their needs and thus the church sent an unwelcoming message to them. Indeed, they felt that many features of our buildings could be more welcoming to newcomers. There was a strong plea for a wider availability of the sacraments including Mass in NZSL.

The welcome extended to the **isolated** calls for particular thought. For such people, stepping into the church may be difficult, but our welcome can extend to our social media front door.

A welcome will be viewed as false or shallow if it does not give an opportunity to belong. Thus, the call to be welcoming will be needs to reflect our openness to those on the margins.

Some felt that the church had a reputation of pandering to the rich, and that it failed to use its resources to **welcome and support the poor**. The poor were often the marginalised, the new migrants, the ethnic minorities. Some parishes to the needy, but it was harder to welcome them into parish life. As one group said:

*“Don’t mix money and status with faith. The poor according to your judgement is always the coloured people. Stop racism in the church. It is hidden and those well-paid Catholics thinks they have more faith than the low income and status Catholics”.*

**“... we need far more dynamic youth work for our rangitahi, our young people need to see their faith as a place to learn and grow, and the leaders in our church must connect with people who are in touch with our young to make this happen.”**

## DESIRE FOR A RICHER PARISH LIFE

We heard from many a desire for a richer parish life, with parish organisation focused on building a vibrant faith community where spiritual growth was nurtured, liturgy was inclusive and participatory, and schools were connected to the life of the Church.

There was an overall concern that some parishes no longer **nourished a caring and supportive community**, at a time when many people were seeking this. As someone commented: *"[We need] a parish that is prayerful and prays regularly in the service of its surrounding community ... if the parish is to be in service to the community, then the parish must ask themselves: what is the Holy Spirit trying to achieve in the community?"*

There was a significant concern that parish life engages children and young people. More attention is needed as to how to enable them to feel interested and involved in the mass. Some wanted to place baptism back into the mass, rather than as a private celebration.

Many felt that the church did little to **nurture and grow a strong personal spirituality**.

*"There is certainly a divide within the church, as someone who has not long returned to the church, I have found it quite difficult to grow spiritually because of it."*

It was felt that parishes missed out when they did not put energy into nurturing a life of faith and prayer. As one person commented, *"We all struggle one way or another on our journey and need to find ways outside of Mass and other formal liturgies to discern what the Holy Spirit is asking of us so that we can grow in our faith and contribute to the realm of God."*

Some of these concerns focused on **the desire that liturgy would truly reflect the changing New Zealand community**, including use of Te Reo, and inclusive language. The language of liturgy drew a broad range of comments. In particular the flat language of the current version was noted, and its lack of connection with our country:

*"Please! The liturgy needs a big shake-up. While people do a lot of sit-stand-kneel and respond during the service, they can in reality be totally disconnected. ... Can our services especially the Mass be made more vibrant?"*

*"In Aotearoa we need to acknowledge our tangata whenua and include Te Reo Māori in every single mass every day. I see it very rarely being used and it is token in its use now."*

Non-Inclusive language in the mass also drew a lot of comments.

Inevitably **music** produced some strong reactions. Many hoped that *"more lively music in hymns to be encouraged to keep the youth engaged."* And there was a desire that liturgical music reflect the diverse ethnicities and cultures of the contemporary parish. It was felt that good liturgy gave contemporary ways for people to tap into our rich tradition.

Other voices felt strongly that contemporary practices had deprived them of other historic forms of worship. There were great extremes in these comments, from those who wanted the restoration of the Latin mass, to others who wanted lively contemporary music.

Some observed a growing gap between the Catholic schools and the church. Schools were seen as a welcome aspect of welcoming community, but one that was no longer linked to parishes. The schools were sometimes a significant attractive factor, but the parish failed to benefit. One person commented: *"I have felt welcomed by the Church, but it did take a while for me to ... feel included and part of the parish. I have definitely felt welcomed by my local Catholic school community."* In many cases, the school was virtually the primary introduction to the faith, but lacking any strong links between the two, many students and their families are not integrated into the parish.

## FRUSTRATIONS AROUND CHURCH STRUCTURES

We heard of the frustrations of many at the form and function of Church structures, where the gifts and talents of many, particularly women, were ignored, and a narrow group were responsible for decisions.

Many used the word “hierarchical” about the church, and for this reason felt alienated from the structures. Some looked for a parish structure and a diocesan structure where **responsibility was shared by all**, even where their roles differed. In the parish, concern focused on the parish council. “[We] lack structural mechanisms in the church to enable us to discuss and respond to change and new ideas... for example, parish councils need to be elected by the parishioners so that they are genuinely representative, not merely appointed by the priest.”

Another comment was that: “The people of God need to be heard and understood. Therefore, it is desirable to have a participative leadership in our church that encourages consultation, listening, and praying together as a community for fruits that will meet the needs of the people.”

Participants looked for more roles for laity in church bodies. As one said succinctly: “To be a synodal church we need more lay participation in decision making.” Another commented: “The Spirit is calling us to be a church in which leadership and governance are shared, but with lay people having equal voices – a truly co-responsible church at parish, diocesan and global levels.”

This would necessitate looking carefully at how decisions were made, and to be aware of cultural differences. We would need to accommodate different styles of dialogue, discernment and decision making to fully implement this.

Many were very aware the only way the church could achieve its mission was a sense of the ministry of the laity. They endorsed the vision of **all the baptised collaborating in mission**. They were well aware that laity could have loud voices in the parish, but they wanted to work together with others and with a sense of purpose. One frustrated voice commented: “I am willing but don’t know to do it on my own. I want to be a part of a group. It’s hard to find ways to serve the community, which one wouldn’t think would be so hard.”

Some expressed a desire to be involved in such ministries as anointing the sick, baptism, and speaking about their faith. Awareness of the shortage of priests often led to changed views about what laity could do.

**“We believe that parish priests are the key to the promotion of lay ministries and more participation of lay people. ... The other side of that is finding enough lay people prepared to be involved actively on an ongoing basis... the message of responsibility we all have for carrying out the mission of the church has to be put before us regularly in homilies.”**

They were also aware of their own **lack of formation for mission**. They were frustrated that they had not been trained and empowered.

Many wanted a more bi-cultural church where “...significant education be given ... to recognise and practise a bi-cultural way of operating within our faith communities; and developing and valuing these practices and opening up to also become a vital and active multicultural Catholic community.”

The role and status of women inevitably concerned many contributors, and we were struck by the many group submissions on this theme. Participants were very aware of how social expectations had changed and the church seemed out of line in many ways. Many were aware of newly open opportunities to serve as acolytes and lectors, but **they wanted women to be eligible to be appointed as deacons**, and some called for the priesthood to be open to women.

There was a collective feeling from the submissions that the institutional church has failed to reckon on the level of alienation of women that has taken place. As one group wrote, “The institution has a long way to go and a lot of change to make before it could ever be seen by women outside the church as anything other than a malign influence on the wellbeing of women and children in general.”

Another hoped “...that the Church ... show courage to address the ‘consigning of women and other marginalised groups’ to full participation in the true and full decision-making and the leadership of all levels of this community of faith.”

## FORMATION OF PRIESTS AND CLERICAL DOMINATION

We heard many concerns about the role that priests expected to play, and the dark shadow of clericalism. The call for better and ongoing formation of priests was loud.

Participants were well aware that priests were under great pressure, given the shortage of vocations and the busyness of parish life. Sometimes expectations seemed to reflect cultural differences, since some priests reflected the hierarchical structures of their home society, and some older priests found it difficult to adjust to new norms. Some noted that **“We need the clergy to lead – proclaim our faith boldly, without reserve. Without strong leadership and faith of the clergy, the faithful will not be effective/inspired.”**

Personal experiences were reflected in commentary of the role of the priests. Some priests inspire their congregations, work with them on the mission of Christ and respect the gifts and contributions of parishioners. Other priests seem to view the parish as existing to serve their needs. As some commented *“The priests need to remember we don’t serve him, but he serves the community equally with no sense of entitlement ...”*

The priest seemed to control the ethos in many parishes. As one said, *“Yes, I have felt welcomed many times in the past ... but all it took was one horrible priest to change all that.”*

A great desire was expressed for priests to be constant in encouraging and supporting lay initiatives, as well as lay participation in ministry. Nothing is more crushing than priests who leave no room for lay involvement.

There were many comments on the quality of **homilies**. Some were very appreciative, but others were very disparaging. Some strongly opposed the ban on lay giving homilies.

The general opinion among participants was that many of these issues stemmed back to the processes of **priestly formation**. One comment called for *“Radical reform of priestly training. This should contain a much greater proportion of pastoral work in a parish. Psychology should have a more prominent place in the curriculum.”*

Many believed that the vocation of priesthood should be open to married men, and that celibacy should be an option rather than the requirement. Some wanted the priesthood open to women. One group proposed that:

*“Suitably qualified and experience lay people including women should be members of pre-seminary assessment boards and take a critical role in relation to the selection, acceptance and formation of seminarians and participate in the evaluation team deciding suitability for ordination.”*

Voices wanted training in cultural sensitivity. The pastoral and organisational needs of the parish called for better preparation, and formation needed more hands-on training. *“What training are priests given in how to do all of this; arrive, take stock, work with what is good and change what needs to change?”*

It is perceived that recently; the local church has done little to train lay people in theology and to enable them to contribute to the life of the parish and to contribute to society. So, there was a clear voice: *“... that significantly increased emphasis be placed upon accessible, high-quality education in faith, which draws upon contemporary theology and scripture study, being made available to communities.”* Further *“[We need] adult education that is ongoing; discerning individual talents and inviting people to participate – which is more successful than general appeals for volunteers.”*

Some hoped that the result would assist in breaking down the clericalism and help recognise the ministry of all the baptised.

## COMMUNICATION AND OPENNESS TO THE WORLD

We heard concerns about how the church engaged with and spoke to concerns of the wider community.

Many participants were very aware of *the tarnished reputation of the church as a direct result of the scandals of abuse*. This has been an extremely painful experience for many Catholics. They felt the urgent need for the church to regain its lost image as an agency of care and support for the community. **“That abuse within the Catholic Church was dealt with better – it often makes me embarrassed to be associated with the church. ... By denying, downplaying & covering it up is hypocritical & hurts more people than the initial occurrence.”**

And as another said: *“It is not an easy prospect to share our faith with secular people. There is prevailing mistrust and suspicion of the church. ... the scandals of abuse in the church and how poorly they were handled are all factors.”* There were many comments along the same lines.

Unfortunately, the only public voice of the church in the eyes of many was its views on euthanasia, birth control, abortion, and aspects of human sexuality. Some called for some of these stances to be reconsidered. At one extreme someone called for *“Universally accept people’s choices regarding their bodies (abortion, euthanasia) and their sexual orientation.”*

Others were pleased that the church had not been swayed by secular opinion and felt that this was exactly how the church should be challenging secular attitudes *“We are at a crossroads with society. It is so easy to be drawn in with either the hype or the pressure and to give in to the immoral new ideologies in relation to gender, choice, sexuality, etc. As a church we have stood the test of time and it is extremely critical that we do not succumb to pressure.”*

Several submitters simply wanted a more balanced emphasis, with the church speaking out on both pro-life and such issues as climate change and biculturalism. *“The Catholic church should reposition itself so that it becomes the number one ‘go to’ organisation when the media ... have any questions on social justice... At present we are usurped in this regard by many other Christian and non-Christian entities.”*

On social and ethical issues, many felt the church would have more credibility if appropriate laity addressed the issues and were able to contribute to discussions at the episcopal level. They also felt that the internal language of the church needed to change, from dictates to encouragement. We heard clearly that *“there were no clear pathways of communication between the laity and the parish and diocese. For most ordinary laity there was no transparency in decision making.”*

It was also noted that there was little links between local parishes.

Frequent comments noted that dialogue with other Christian denominations was rare. Many urged a recognition of the spirituality and community possible with other churches, which need not compromise Catholic traditions. Special mention was made with denominations with some parallels with the Catholic Church. *“In the 21<sup>st</sup> century it is not in the interest of the churches to work in isolation.”*

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### CONCLUSION

Having listened to the people of the Diocese of Auckland there are two concluding sets of matters to be further discerned and addressed.

1. The first matters are directed to the Universal Church. Across the threads of this synthesis strong voices brought forward several matters that the Spirit is calling the whole Church to further discern.
2. Secondly there are matters brought to light across this consultation process which call the local Church to action.

#### Calls to the universal Church | To discern how we -

1. Provide a scaffolding for formation of clerics that:
  - makes pastoral responsibilities the centre of formation
  - has suitable lay people part of pre-seminary assessment boards and evaluation teams deciding suitability for ordination
  - reflects local need
  - includes formation in collaborative ministry
  - is ongoing beyond ordination which includes spiritual formation
  - when required is particular to new situation e.g., moving to an intra-cultural experience
2. Explore the roles, responsibilities of clergy and who might take on these responsibilities that respect and honour sacramental orders in a manner that the ordained serve the people of God. This would include looking at
  - the possibility of optional celibacy for priests
  - the possibility of the ordination of women
    - to the priesthood or at least diaconate
  - sharing some of the responsibilities for ministry with those not in orders
    - homilies by formed and appropriate people
    - offering Sacrament of the Sick
3. Welcome with compassion divorced and remarried Catholics to the Eucharistic table

4. Reform liturgical language so that it is welcoming, inclusive, less misogynistic, and hierarchical, and more consonant with contemporary theology.
5. Move to a synodal Church structure where governance is not restricted to clerics, and advisory bodies maintain standards of accountability through open procedures and transparent public reporting.
  - A wider selection of the People of God be involved in the process of the appointment of Bishops.
  - Acknowledgment of the gifts and talents of women in a more equitable presence in Church structures including decision making bodies.
6. Ensure robust systems of safeguarding, admit to the systems that enabled the scandals of the past to happen and sincerely seek forgiveness for failures that enabled abuse to flourish in the Church.

*Through our participation we have made history in the movement of this Synod. We come from diverse cultures, countries, and ethnicities. We have made Auckland our home.*

### **Calls to the local Church | To hear the call from the people of God to**

1. Be more actively welcoming to the disabled, isolated, deaf, LGBT, those of different ethnic communities...
  - o being less judgemental and be more welcoming;
  - o Include all in the invitation to serve, recognise the untapped talent of those present;
  - o “Learn to actively listen.” particularly to those different from self;
  - o Establish synodal parish structures where the variety of groups within a parish are able to express concerns and expectations;
  - o Acknowledge the bias of own culture and nostalgia for the way it used to be;
  - o Expand the confident use of Te Reo in liturgy, including Mass.
    - Significant education be given to the whole Catholic community in Aotearoa so that they can recognise and practice a bi-cultural way of operating in order to build a vital and active intra-cultural Church
  - o Expand youth friendly practices and explore new ways of engagement so that they feel part of the faith community.
2. A faith community of action - not just a group that gathers on Sunday.
  - o Build a sense that Mass is more than getting something it is nourishment to act together as a community of missionary discipleship
  - o Work on making our spaces open other than during Mass for sharing hopes, fears, and outreach to the wider community.
  - o Relieve the needs of the poor in practical ways
  - o Evangelical action
3. Provide accessible, high-quality education in faith that is not reserved to those who are financially secure, thus ensuring that the church has a pool of people for pastoral leadership
4. Strengthen the communion and links between parishes and schools.

***“I’m not going to be leading the change; you are.”***

*+ Bishop Steve Lowe address to the Diocesan Pre-Synod Meeting May 2020*