

Synod Synthesis Dunedin Diocese

How are we, the people of the Dunedin Diocese of Aotearoa New Zealand, journeying together as people of God, and where is the Spirit leading us on this journey?

Introduction: (Disappointment, Hurt, Love, Joy)

As we reflect on the responses from the people of the Diocese, we consider the background from which these responses came.

In 1962 Pope John XXII convened the Second Vatican Council and invited us to open the windows and let in the light.

Now sixty years later, Pope Francis is inviting us to continue being a Vatican II church as we journey together with the Holy Spirit leading us and there is strong support for this vision of Church.

Some examples of how we are a Vatican II church were expressed in comments received such as:

- People keen for the Church to be life-giving and have an active presence in the world.
- Maintain Ecumenical and Interfaith initiatives that are currently active in many parts of the Diocese.
- Express a desire to collaborate on projects with all people of goodwill.
- Be an outward-looking servant Church.

However, we also need to acknowledge that many people have been hurt by church leadership, structure, hierarchy, and its actions and inactions at both a local and global level. Some of the expressions of disappointment and hurt that came out in synodal discernment and reflection groups, that they feel have given a negative perception of the Catholic Church were:

- Not being listened to.
- Not having the opportunity to fully live out their baptismal calling.
- Feeling marginalised and excluded because of how the Church functions.
- Prohibitive, withholding and excluding instead of supporting and including.

- Sexual abuse by Priests and other leaders.
- Handling of complaints.
- Hypocritical with inconsistencies between gospel values the Church professes and some of the doctrine and rules the Church teaches.

There were also many who expressed a great appreciation at the opportunity to reflect on how we journey together, and spoke positively of the place the Church has in their lives.

Comments such as:

- A continued desire to grow in relationship with God, community, and all of God's creation.
- A desire for the Church to travel much more lightly, strip back to the Gospel essentials.
- The importance of prayer, social justice, outreach, community and mission.
- The goodness of the quiet ministry of people, involving simple encounters with one another- loving presence.
- People also commented on how the synodal process itself, is as important as the outcome, as it is in listening to one another that the Holy Spirit is present. This was tangible and in the love and joy that was experienced.

Key Themes:

The main themes from the submissions received can be listed in five different categories.

1) Inclusion:

- Many people spoke of the importance of the Church being a place where everyone is welcome, and where people are not judged. A place where their dignity is upheld.
- Many mentioned with sadness the Church's formal stance on LGBTQI+ and challenged the Church to be more open to difference.
- There is a real desire to move away from withholding sacraments based on sexual orientation or marital status.

- Support and bless relationships where people commit to love one another irrespective of their gender, or marital status.
- Note is made of the multicultural nature of our local Church and the challenge to listen to the perspective of people of other cultures and to integrate this into our liturgies.
- A desire to support bi-culturalism and more understanding about our responsibilities under Te Tiriti o Waitangi.
- A real desire for the inclusion of divorced/remarried in Eucharist.
- Our Catholic Schools were mentioned many times as wonderful places of inclusion and belonging.

2) Leadership:

- Many challenged the leadership structure of the Church. It is seen as being authoritarian and needs to be a better listener and include all the baptised in decision-making and leadership.
- Many decried the lack of opportunity for women in the Church, in leadership and liturgy.
- This lack of equality for women within the church is seen as a huge stumbling block for the Church in the modern world.
- Developing a culture of co-responsibility between clergy, religious and laity. Offering leadership training to the laity is vital – collaborative ministry.
- It is important to help grow the confidence of the laity, assist with discernment and provide a forum for dialogue.
- A wider understanding of vocations – inclusion of baptismal “ vocation “ is important.

3) Liturgy:

- While some spoke of their great love for the Mass, a common concern was that the Mass/liturgy simply does not resonate with so many in the wider Church family.
- Many are not connected and don't feel connected.
- The desire to use the gifts of the faithful in the pews in our liturgies was expressed.
- Many spoke of their sadness that there were so few young people and children at our Sunday Eucharist, yet our Catholic schools are full.

- There was a desire to connect our parish and school communities and support young parents in their formation as well as the children.
- A small number spoke of their love for the Latin Mass and their feeling that they were marginalised.
- Many others however spoke of wanting to see the Mass have a more modern appeal.
- Many spoke of the power of prayer and meeting together in community outside of Mass as very valuable.

4) Outreach:

- The church's social outreach is greatly valued and appreciated, especially our Catholic social teaching.
- Many believe the Church should be more engaged in the wider community, the environment, care for our common home, and care for the poor, and being pro-life in a wide understanding of that term.
- A continued commitment to support the Common Good is vital for justice, peace, love, equality, and equity in our world.
- Increase our focus on societal structural issues such as poverty, inequality, modern day slavery, human trafficking and inequity.
- People are keen for the Church to be life-giving and have an active presence in the world.
- Ecumenical and Interfaith initiatives are active in many parts of the Diocese, and these are very welcome as a sense of working together to bring about God's Kingdom.
- More of a focus on Laudato Si' and being a leader in the urgent need for environmental justice.

5) Community:

- People expressed how being part of small prayer groups was crucial in their faith development.
- They expressed how it was important for them to be known and belong to a more intimate group outside of Mass.
- Local context is important. While we are part of a global church, being able to act nationally or locally is important. **(subsidiarity)**

Conclusion:

Now that we have reflected on all the responses received, we look forward to continue working in this synodal way, meeting with the people, listening and praying with each other, to continue together on this journey in communion, participation and mission as individuals, parish communities, and a diocese.

Some of the fruits of this process are:-

- The prayerful process of the synod was profound in how it encouraged respectful listening.
- A real desire for change, more collaborative ministry, a more inclusive Church.
- That even through the hurt and disappointments, there is still a strong desire to be part of the Church, to have a sense of belonging and for everyone to feel that they belong.

Some of the attitudes and aspirations for our journey:-

- Being an outward-looking servant Church, witnessing to God's mercy, compassion and love.
- Being a listening Church. Keeping our eyes, ears and hearts open to what the Spirit is saying.
- Being bold, courageous and trusting in the Spirit
- Being ever present to what is life giving
- Being a vulnerable, humble Church of the People of God who know of God's constant unconditional love.

Experiencing God's loving presence and mercy in our lives, knowing that we are loved by God in all our frailty is the starting point of our "belonging", and it is also our invitation to others to "belong".

Last year we visited six different areas of the Diocese. This was an initiative of the Bishop and the Diocesan Pastoral Council, who wanted to know how rural parish communities, especially those with no resident Parish Priest, could be assisted.

This has proved a very worthwhile experience. We went to these areas to listen to what they had to say, and were well received with open and honest discussions. A wonderful example of what happens when the Holy Spirit is invited in and is present with us.

This year we are returning to these areas with continued support and formation as promised.

Now that we have completed our synodal process of listening, discerning and providing feedback, that will be sent on through National and Oceania channels to Rome, it should not and cannot end there.

Pope Francis has given us all this challenge and opportunity to continue this process in our own hearts, in our parish communities and in our diocese.

The people of the Dunedin Diocese are keen to proactively continue to use this listening, reflecting and discerning process in any issues and decision making.

Our challenge and opportunity now is to ensure this happens.