

St Joseph's Parish Synodal meeting report – 17th Feb 2022

1. Introduction

The report reflects the views of those who attended the St Joseph's Parish Synodal meeting on Tuesday 17th Feb 2022 to inform the response of the Diocesan submission to the General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops in October 2022, "For a synodal Church: communion, participation and mission".

Parishioners were invited to the event via a number of different routes. Members of the Pastoral Council spoke at, and distributed a leaflet to all attendees at weekend Mass, information was communicated via the St Joseph's Parish website and social media accounts and was added to the Parish Bulletin for 2 weeks prior to the event. Parishioners were guided to the Diocesan website to complete the on-line questionnaire and encouraged to share the leaflet and the questionnaire link with friends, neighbours and family, including with those who no longer attended Mass. Hard copies of the questionnaire were made available in the Church Sacristy for parishioners without internet access or who preferred not to complete questionnaire on-line.

The session was attended by approx. 60 parishioners from a Parish population of approx. 1400. St Bridget's Church in Eaglesham was also represented. Those who attended were older parishioners, with no young people, and few parents of school-aged children. It is possible that responses are therefore not representative of the Parish as a whole. Participants seemed very willing to engage with the process and approached the evening with open minds.

Concerns were noted about the timescales within which the consultation took place, limiting both the ability to engage the wider Parish, particularly those who do not attend Church on a regular basis, and those who no longer attend Church at all. The capacity of Pastoral Council volunteers who co-ordinated the event was another limiting factor.

Therefore, this response is limited by timescales, the capacity of volunteers, and the lack of representation of all age-groups within the Parish.

The phrasing of the questions asked participants to reflect on areas for development or change rather on what works well and this has influenced the tone of the report.

2. Process

On the evening, attendees were divided into ten groups, and each question was discussed in turn. A scribe was allocated to each group and noted individual responses to each question. Facilitators were responsible for one question and moved round each group in turn. They were therefore aware of responses from each group to that specific question.

Following the event, all notes were transcribed, and comments on common themes collated. Facilitators reviewed the collated comments for their question and added any overarching themes for that question that had not been adequately captured. Each section was summarised and the summary circulated to facilitators to ensure this was an accurate reflection of the discussion. Where there was overlap between responses to different questions, these have been included under the most appropriate question and this is indicated in the text. Some quotes from parishioners have been included to provide a flavour of the conversations.

3. Summary

3.1. Recurrent themes

3.1.1. Young people

Threaded throughout the discourse and agreed by almost everyone present was that young people were marginalised and that the Church was not meeting their needs by not listening, not understanding the place of faith in the context of their lives today, or by failing to address their needs in a practical way – recognising that the Church frequently had little relevance in their lives.

The role of schools and the relationship between parents, schools and the Parish community was seen as crucial in bridging the gap between religion, Religious Education and involvement in the Parish. Some concerns were raised about the effectiveness of the current approach.

3.1.2. Not living in the real world

The theme of “not living in the real world” recurred in relation to the Church’s response to young people; the level of involvement of the laity in the Church; the Church’s hierarchical nature; its understanding of the priorities of parishioners; the need for a less judgemental, more forgiving and welcoming Church; and in the wider perceptions of the Catholic Church, including its representation in the media. In particular the Church preoccupation with sexual morality above issues that are more important in the lives of parishioners, but which influences the Church response to these concerns, recurred in a number of questions. There was a sense that the Church needs to tackle those issues where there is conflict between its teachings and social norms.

3.1.3. The role of language

In many responses the role of language and use of “jargon” was noted as a barrier to inclusion and involvement, noting that it may not be fully understood by members of the Church or the wider community. More inclusive language could help overcome a sense of the Church being removed from the real world. In relation to the laity, clear accessible language would remove one barrier to active participation in the life and work of the Church, especially for young people. Clarity of language was also seen as important when working with other faiths.

3.1.4. The need for a Welcoming and non-judgemental Church

The theme of an unwelcoming Church was raised in all questions, specifically acknowledging those who do not meet the accepted definition of a “family”, including single men and women, people who are gay and those who are divorced.

However, the need for a welcoming Church also related to recovery from Covid, bringing a sense of joy and hope back to the Church with greater opportunities for building our community back.

The need for a more welcoming Church was also noted both for “excluded” groups and for existing parishioners who saw no place for themselves in Church out-with attendance at Mass, whether through a lay ministry contribution or via social opportunities.

3.1.5. The need to change

There was wide recognition of the need to change altho’ the solutions varied on how to achieve this. The majority of the conversation about the need for change revolved around structural issues which are not in the gift of individual parishes, however the importance of change within individuals was also noted. The vast majority of responses acknowledged greater involvement of the laity.

Other solutions related to addressing the shortage of priests, by both increasing numbers of priests through other routes and by reviewing the role of the laity. These included increasing access to the priesthood for women and specifically Nuns, for Deacons and allowing priests to marry. Although these suggestions were not universally supported, only one person actively disagreed with the principle of women entering the priesthood. The hierarchical nature of the Church was noted here in the context of a lack of opportunities, existing routes or infrastructure to enable the laity to influence decision-making.

3.1.6. The need for a more proactive Church

Threaded throughout discussions was the need for the Church to be more proactive. This related to how the Church presents itself externally, for example, through media coverage, but also in relation to being a proactive, welcoming Church and finally, in clearly stating the need for greater lay involvement in the Church and identifying the areas where this is most desperately needed.

3.1.7. Learning from other Abrahamic religions

The importance of building relationships out-with the Church was threaded throughout responses.

The potential to learn from other Churches was a recurring theme, with the Church of Scotland cited a number of times as an example of a different approach to the role of the laity and the authority invested in their position. Joint worship was also well supported; however it was observed that the current opportunities for joint activity and joint worship are poorly supported by St Joseph's parishioners.

3.1.8. Lack of a forum for dialogue

The lack of a forum beyond the current Synod for parishioners to engage in issues facing the Church was noted in several questions. This included in relation to the need for change and the form that change should take, how to achieve a more welcoming and inclusive church and the role of the laity.

3.1.9. Finance

Several responses across questions referred to financial matters. However there was no collective agreement, rather a sense that this was an issue to be considered. Some responses related to a perception of the Church now being for a more affluent population, with those living on lower incomes being marginalised. It was not clear whether this related specifically to finance or the concept of "middle" and "working class" more generally. Pressure to donate was seen as a potential barrier, however other respondents noted financial pressures within the Church and the need for Parishioners to be more generous in their donations.

3.1.10. St Joseph's Parish

The majority of responses related to structural issues within the church that local parishes are unable to address. However threaded through these were responses and practical solutions specific to St Joseph's Parish. There was a sense of a need to "get our own house in order" to meet the needs of Parishioners and increase involvement of the laity. Several reasons were cited including the need for a more welcoming approach, the size of the Parish, the lack of information about volunteering opportunities and the need for better communication. A separate Parish report will be produced.

4. Individual question responses

4.1. Companions on the journey

- Who feels left out of the Church?
- How can we include them?

Key messages

- **The Church needs to be more inclusive and less judgemental of those who feel marginalised:**
 - **“The rock of our Church is Love and the universal image of our Church has to change to be welcoming and inclusive to all.”**
- **The majority of participants agreed that many different groups felt or were marginalised and unwelcomed by the Church and were not encouraged to return.**
- **Women were marginalised despite being active in volunteering. Those few women who did not agree were vocal in their opposition.**
- **The Church was viewed as hierarchical**
- **Every participant agreed that young people are marginalised.**

There was some overlap between responses to this question and those to section 3.2, in particular relating to listening better to those who feel excluded. Some responses are therefore included in section 3.2, however common themes remain.

There was broad agreement that the Church needs to be clearer about offering a welcome to and being less judgmental of those who feel marginalized, and should be prepared to walk with and listen to those who are not part of the Church.

Several groups were identified by participants as being marginalized including young people, women, those in the LGBTQ+ community, those who are divorced, partners who are unmarried and their children. Those who were gay and those who were divorced were specifically mentioned by a number of respondents.

One respondent commented that there was little evidence of any plan to address this.

Single people, those who are older, disabled or unable to attend Church, those who experience poverty, who are homeless and those who have been abused by the clergy or religious were also identified as groups who may feel or experience marginalisation. The current focus on on-line communication may exacerbate marginalisation for particular groups including some older people, those with visual or cognitive impairment and those with a learning disability.

The role of women in the Church today was discussed, with their contribution through volunteering in practical roles such as readers or cleaners being acknowledged. The majority of education workforce being women was also noted. Most respondents felt women were well established, and referred specifically to St Joseph's Parish, however despite this, limitations on the roles they can undertake within the Church meant that they remain marginalised or “subservient”. The position of Our Lady and the presence of the women at the tomb was seen by one respondent as evidence that

women were not marginalised. Several respondents attributed the sense of subservience to the hierarchical nature of the Church, and felt this sense is not understood by senior, male clergy. This does not mean women felt unwelcome in Church. Nuns were noted specifically as a group whose voices could have greater impact. The patriarchal nature of the Church was also seen as one reason for the disengagement of young people.

The majority of participants highlighted the need to be inclusive but the conflict between the Church's teaching and social norms was acknowledged. The potential for conflict within the Church was also recognised with one respondent noting that the worldwide Church was more conservative than the Western Church. Several respondents highlighted the judgement of gay people as being an excluding factor. One participant was vocal about the difficulties of reconciling God's word with those who adopt a certain lifestyle.

Solutions to improve the inclusivity of the Church included mixed gender groups praying and speaking together as a way of helping men to understand how women feel about how they are viewed by some parts of the Church; greater involvement of young people in the Liturgy; and having a Sunday every year to acknowledge the suffering of and pray for forgiveness of those who have been abused by the clergy or the religious.

4.2. Listening

- How well do we listen to people who have different views to our own?
- How can we listen better to women, young people and minority groups?

Key messages

- **Historically the Catholic Church has been poor at listening to people who have different views and needs to be more tolerant.**
- **There is no forum currently for disparate voices to be heard, including those who have left the Church, and young people, and this needs to be addressed.**
- **The relationship between schools and the Parish is important in connecting better with young people.**

There was a clear overlap between this question and section 3.1, with many themes and solutions being common to both. Responses to 3.6 are also relevant in relation to ways of listening better.

In listening to those who have different views, one respondent stated that we first needed to listen to God.

There was overwhelming agreement that we needed to listen with respect to views that are different, to better understand and address the needs of those who have left the Church, of those who are divorced and feel excluded from participation, and other groups such as those who are gay. The importance of Priests acknowledging different views and being encouraged to do so was noted. One respondent commented that "very little of what the Church is preoccupied with is in the Bible"

Many respondents expressed a need to listen better to those within our own Parish as well as wider. It was noted that no platform exists within our Parish for this type of conversation.

Several respondents cited learning from the example of other denominations.

Children and young people were a particular focus of this discussion, with a sense that young people struggled to relate to the current teaching of the Church. Respondents emphasised that the majority did not actively participate in their faith, with some commenting that the Church is not sufficiently encouraging of (as opposed to lecturing to) young people, that it provided no incentive for young people to attend Church and had failed to engage with or listen to their voices. This view was widely supported. A few respondents noted a disconnect between the schools and parishes. There was broad agreement it was particularly important to gather the views of children and young people particularly those who had left the Church. One respondent also noted that children of parents who are unmarried are excluded from participating in some Sacraments by some priests, particularly if those parents are not supportive despite the child attending a Catholic Church.

However the idealism and hopefulness of young people was recognised, along with the work in schools to engage young people through offering daily Mass and the Caritas programme. A gap in relation to opportunities to participate in parish activities was noted. Two respondents commented on the work of the NET teams and whether the impact of that experience resulted in those young people being more or less engaged in their faith as a result.

Schools were seen as a conduit to the parish, with both schools and the Church needing to facilitate this. However both schools and parishes need to address “worldly issues” of relevance that affect young people. Areas such as global and local inequalities and injustice and sexual health were cited.

- “R.E. education in schools needs to be relevant and welcoming”

Solutions offered related to two areas: the first in terms of education, there is a need to reach out to and inspire our young people through RE teaching, the second is to include young people more in Parish activities, in particular involvement during Mass, as well as reintroducing social events such as specifically within St Josephs’ re-establishment of the Youth Club.

Many respondents expressed concern that marginalised groups were not heard and that there was no forum for such conversations to take place. This was seen as a barrier to engaging more widely. However there was no immediate solution to this. One-to-one discussions as opposed to large groups were suggested as a way to help people explore challenges, along with offering a series of “question and answer” sessions. Within St Joseph’s, a connection was made to revitalising the use of the Church Hall as a way to re-engage those who do not feel included, offering the opportunity for conversations related to specific areas of interest.

Those who did not access the internet were identified as another group where greater efforts were required to maintain or re-establish communication.

Some participants noted that single people, both men and women, were less valued and should be more actively engaged to ensure the Church meets their needs.

4.3. Speaking out

- How can we speak the truth more boldly both within the Church and beyond?
- How do we relate to social media?

Key messages

- **Media representation of the Church is almost always negative and there is a need for the Church to be more proactive on messaging around global issues such as climate change, poverty and overseas development.**
- **Opportunities to speak out about issues of concern are limited within the Church.**

Many parishioners felt there was a need for change and that the Church needed to be more proactive and outward looking, taking its message out to people and leading the agenda on issues of concern to society. This included both the relationship between the Church and the media and with how the Church takes its message into communities. Concern was voiced that it had become too comfortable and inwardly focused. Solutions related both to how we respond as individuals and how the Church itself responds internally and through the media.

Some respondents reflected on the historical problems of Catholic oppression in Scotland meaning we were reluctant to share our faith proudly.

Many respondents expressed a desire for the Church to reach out to those who feel marginalised, to respond much more warmly to ensure everyone feels loved and welcome, for all to be blessed, even if not going to Holy Communion.

- “Our solutions are either meaningless or just push people away when they are already struggling”

However this extended to taking Mass and the sacraments beyond the church building, rather than “expecting them to come to us”. Red buses were cited as an example.

- “The Church needs to go to people and not just ‘people go to Church”

This may be linked to the many comments noted about the Church being intolerant and marginalising those who failed to “meet its expectations”, leading to people becoming disenfranchised. Examples cited included those whose marriage had broken down, with women being seen as experiencing greater judgement. Several respondents commented on the Church’s obsession with sexuality/celebrity and “rule breaking”, which were not relevant to parishioner’s experiences.

Many respondents expressed concern or frustration about the media portrayal of the Church, particularly the negative portrayal over the last decade, which was sometimes seen as inaccurate, and with faith being seen as a minority issue. The Church was seen as failing to lead the agenda here.

Many respondents felt the Church’s response to global issues such as poverty and injustice was positive, although this was not well represented in the media.

- “We look as if we are detached from the real world”

Pope Francis was seen as inspirational however it was acknowledged that not every Catholic felt this.

The Church's response to the abuse scandal emphasized its internal focus and failure to meet the concerns of society. This connected with the portrayal of the Church by the media, with a number of respondents suggesting the Church needed to become more involved politically with world affairs. Some felt being more outward-looking might help to address Church unity.

A few respondents identified the problem of hypocrisy, such as the way the Church dealt with the child abuse scandal, or LGBTQ+, meaning it had less credibility externally. One respondent raised concerns about the hypocrisy of the Church preaching peace but celebrating Armistice Day.

The importance of internal discussions within the Church was raised in this and a number of other sections. These conversations would fulfill a number of functions, including opportunities to explore faith-based issues, to create greater social opportunities and to look for solutions to the challenges we face.

The hierarchy within the Catholic Church was seen as a barrier to speaking the truth internally, with its historically deferential relationship with the laity making it difficult to speak out. Several respondents mentioned experiences of attempting to speak with the parish priest about issues of concern (sometimes trivial) where they did not feel listened to or where the response was not appropriate. It is important to note examples cited may be historical rather parishioners' current experience. The hierarchical structure was seen as a barrier to addressing issues such as the child abuse scandal.

Several respondents spoke of the need for Catholics to be trained in apologetics so we are better equipped to counter criticism, or proactively argue the appeal of our faith and its focus on justice, love, and concern about poverty, rather than people's sexuality or whether they are divorced. However this was seen as not just about speaking out about "the big issues" but about common decency.

Catholic Voices was cited as an example of preparing people to speak out about complex issues that many in the Church could learn from.

Social media was seen as a force that cancelled out any positive influence of the Church. Our young people were seen as a way to engage more effectively with social media.

4.4. Celebration

- How well do communal prayer and liturgical celebrations inspire and guide our sense of community?
- How active is our participation?

Key messages

- **The impact of Covid has reduced the level of involvement and joy from participating in the Liturgy which now needs to be addressed.**
- **The Church needs to be actively welcoming to those returning to Mass and use a number of approaches to meet the needs of different parishioners**

Responses in this section that related to supporting adult formation as opposed to participation in the Liturgy have been included in section 3.9 under discernment. Responses relating to lay ministry beyond liturgical involvement have been included in section 3.8 under participation.

The participation at weekly Mass hearing the word of God and receiving Holy Communion is the corner stone of our communal participation and weekly Mass is the key opportunity to influence and change perceptions.

There was a sense that the impact of C-19 had undermined participation in the Liturgy, that now more time was needed for both the Liturgy and given for personal prayer after Mass. The importance of music was also noted, in particular for its ability to lift the spirit.

A number of respondents highlighted the opportunity for the Church to be more proactive in seeking congregational participation during Mass. Several respondents made practical suggestions to improve the sense of community during Liturgical celebrations. These included provision of eulogies at funeral Masses; more inspiring music (although this did not apply to all Masses), broadening the range and age of participants of readers and in the Offertory. Other opportunities to involve the congregation more broadly in Mass included decoration of the Church.

The importance of lay ministers including musicians and readers understanding their role was raised, with Liturgical formation classes a potential solution after the prolonged break because of Covid.

The need to be more welcoming and create a sense of community at the start of and during Mass was another very frequent response to this question, again with many respondents noting practical solutions such as having a welcoming group at the Church doors, parishioners introducing themselves to their neighbour in Church, and acknowledging them at the sign of peace.

A number of suggestions were made in relation to improving engagement with children and young people, including participation in the Liturgy and personal invitations to Mass. Restarting the children's Liturgy was seen as a priority.

Communal prayer was noted by some as inspiring and could promote greater participation and celebration if more opportunities were offered.

There was also recognition that some people chose particular places for worship because the style within that Church meets their particular need. This includes the opportunity for a traditional Latin Mass. The importance of including the Creed in Latin on special Liturgical occasions within all Churches was mentioned. Some respondents emphasised it was important to ensure this need was met.

Some suggestions to promote greater engagement in Mass related specifically to St Joseph's Parish. These included having the hymns projected on the wall for every Mass which was seen as more inclusive, and improving the sound system. Concerns about the quality of sound was a recurrent theme under a number of different questions.

4.5. Sharing responsibility for our common mission

- What stops us giving our gifts and talents to the Church?
- How well do we enable everyone to participate?

Key messages

- **Acknowledgement of the pressing need for a greater involvement of the laity**
- **Barriers to participation included practical barriers, communication, lack of a welcoming environment and uncertainty about how to become more involved**
- **There is a need for a more socially active, welcoming Church.**

Many responses here overlapped with those to section 3.8. Some responses have been amalgamated and those specific to lay ministry have been recorded in that section. Many responses in this section reflected parishioners personal experience within both St Joseph's and other parishes, but are more widely applicable.

Many participants identified practical barriers to greater participation. These included contemporary pressures of time and competing priorities, other commitments and "laziness". The size of the Parish was noted by several as making it difficult to come together, to get to know other parishioners or to know when a new parishioner joins.

Poor communication was identified as a barrier, including lack of information about opportunities for involvement, particularly beyond Liturgical activity; the time commitment required; the purpose of groups; the skills or talents required; uncertainty about how to become more involved; or who to approach to volunteer, to put forward suggestions or to raise areas of concern.

Some barriers related to people's individual perception, that they had no skills or talents to offer, that they lacked confidence or that others were better placed to help.

Finally, there were barriers based on previous experience or perceptions. Several respondents stated that the Church was bad at building communities; that volunteering needed to be made more inviting; that all roles were already filled or that the Church was not receptive to new ideas. The theme of being unwelcoming recurred in relation to greater involvement in existing activities. Some respondents noted that some groups felt "cliquey", and if long-established, made it difficult for someone new to fully integrate.

Overall was a sense that the Church needs to be more proactive in making people feel welcome. Some noted this can only be achieved by talking to those who are not already involved to understand the barriers they experience and what we need to do to overcome these. This includes those who are disabled, young people, families, and those who are lonely.

- "Losing contact within the communities who have specific needs stops us giving our gifts."

Many parishioners spoke about the Church as a second home, with one respondent referring to it as "an oasis, welcoming with open arms".

A connection was made with Liturgical involvement and the need to inspire a sense of community and create a more welcoming environment to Mass as a joyful celebration, with Parishioners leaving enthused and inspired.

- “A dose of jollification is needed”

Specifically in relation to St Joseph’s, a number of respondents commented that we are not a welcoming parish, although acknowledged that the size of the Parish contributed to this.

- “We don’t always say hello to people we don’t know.”
- “Sometimes we can feel like “outsiders” “groups seen as “cliquey”

Some respondents acknowledged the need for parishioners to accept individual responsibility for making a greater contribution, that people were just not willing to give up their time and that it was “easy to hide in Church”.

- “Talk to your fellow parishioners – talk to anyone!”

Many respondents spoke about the Church Hall as a key way to improve the sense of welcoming and of community, including as noted previously, opening the Hall up for parishioners to mingle after Mass. Suggestions also included more frequent social events, such as ceilidhs and morning tea and coffee and use by community groups such as the play group. The Hall also offers a place to run groups about faith, offering the opportunity to strengthen adult formation and discernment. For those who are marginalised, such groups could provide a forum to discuss specific areas of concern, establish social connections and reintegrate into the Church community. Access to the piano in the Hall was highlighted as a way to help people feel welcome.

- “Create opportunities within Parish to meet and talk”

A “Fresher’s” week for participants was suggested. Previous events in the Hall bringing the different groups together to raise awareness and encourage volunteering were cited altho’ it was noted these were not always well attended and those who did volunteer did not always follow up on this commitment.

The need for better communication was highlighted. Request for help should be explicitly made to all parishioners. Volunteering opportunities for participation need to be better promoted, should emphasise that these opportunities are open to all and include relevant contact details. Improvements to the website were suggested, it should be “written as if for strangers”. The “Welcome Pack” was noted as “very detailed and all contacts evident”.

Clearer verbal communication, in particular in relation to announcements at the end of Mass, was also noted. The poor quality of the sound system was highlighted by many respondents, including the need for additional speakers at the back of the Church.

Some parishioners raised concerns about the need to raise additional money to sustain the Church. The example of tithing set by some evangelical Churches was cited. Another respondent noted this could discourage those on low incomes from attending.

4.6. Dialogue between the Church and society

- How do diverse people in our community come together for dialogue?
- What issues do we need to pay more attention to?

Key messages

- **There were few if any opportunities to come together for dialogue**
- **Issues identified were those where tensions exist between teaching of the Church and those of society and these need to be tackled.**
- **Dialogue needs to take place through a number of routes including education, communities and society.**

Much of this conversation focused on issues the Church needed to address and is relevant to section 3.10.

Several participants were unsure what was meant by the word 'diverse' and assumed it was being used to distinguish between income variation, age, race or ethnicity rather than for example sexual orientation or gender.

There was a sense that St Joseph's Parish is (or appears to be) 'well-healed' and many participants shared a worry that the church was no longer attractive to more traditional working-class people and that Catholicism was now a middle class religion.

Respondents identified different groups where connections need to be strengthened or where dialogue was required: between parishioners and the Church, between the Church and schools; between schools and the community; between families, the Church and society. Some parishioners questioned if the Church genuinely wanted dialogue.

Understanding of the definition of "Church" was raised, with it noted that it is often used as synonymous with the Clergy, rather than it being clergy and laity together.

The issue of women's place in the Church was raised, with the Church seen as having responded inadequately to domestic violence, which was potentially attributable to the Church being chauvinistic as noted in 3.1.

The disengagement of children and young people from the Church was identified as a priority. As noted in section 3.2, the balance between home, school and the parish was seen as critical, with suggestions around greater involvement of the community and parents to ensure what children learn in school is seen as relevant in the home and Church setting. One example was in preparation for the sacraments rather than it being "professionalised".

Catholic Voices provide an example of people trained to speak about issues that lead to people leaving the Church. Their learning could be shared more widely to help support dialogue with those who feel disenfranchised.

The importance of a friendly, open, welcoming and inclusive Church was a prevailing theme, with many respondents speaking about the need to be more socially inclusive and embracing of those who did not fit with traditional expectations. Same sex couples and others in LGBTQ+ communities were identified here. This was seen by some parishioners as a way to "fight back" against the negative portrayal of the Church.

It was noted by a few respondents that both the Church itself as an organisation and individuals within the Church need to build the capacity for inclusion.

The need for the Church to be physically open with a welcoming presence at all times was also noted, with comparisons being drawn with the mosque in Central Glasgow whose doors were open throughout through-out lockdown.

One participant noted the situation of partners who are not married and in particular their children who experienced exclusion because of their parents' decisions and the impact this has on both those individuals and their wider families.

One respondent also observed that before bringing those who are marginalized back to the Church, we need to meet ourselves socially.

Several respondents spoke about the lack of a forum for dialogue.

Several parishioners supported a reactivation of Justice and Peace groups in all parishes as a way of beginning conversations.

Lack of outreach was noted by several, with a need to be more proactive both within St Joseph's and the wider community.

Bringing the experience of those who have left the Church to share their stories, whether or not they have subsequently returned, was suggested as a way to increase dialogue. This could be done through a Synod Reflection time in each parish at a weekly/ monthly Mass listening after communion on the experiences of those who feel least accepted by the Church. This could include divorcees, refugees, and young people in an attempt to broaden understanding and encourage dialogue.

4.7. Ecumenism

- [How do we relate to other Christian communities?](#)
- [How can we go forward together?](#)

Key messages

- **The Church is showing good leadership in building bridges with other Christian faiths.**
- **In principle, developing stronger ties between Churches was seen as a positive move but in practice this is not well-supported by parishioners.**
- **We can learn from the experiences of other Churches**

Several respondents noted the importance of working to achieve unity with other Christians, with this seen by some as the future of the Church.

A number of barriers were noted including Catholics having a sense of "superiority" or elitism, which at times made us "culturally insensitive", associated with a risk of appearing disrespectful. This was seen as potentially undermining our ability to learn from other Christian communities. The need to acknowledge that God may have revealed himself differently to other faiths was identified by a number of respondents. Several respondents cited areas where they felt other Christian faiths were stronger and where the Catholic Church could learn from them. The need to leave behind the "tribal" Catholic attitudes in the West of Scotland was also noted.

Several respondents flagged up the need to be more respectful and develop a deeper understanding of other faiths. Clarity of language was identified, with questions about whether anyone out-with a small group within the Catholic Church would understand words like “synodal” or “discernment”.

Suggestions to improve communication and understanding included different forms of joint worship such as praying together as children and adults, joint scripture classes, joint services, joint choirs, singing hymns that everyone knows, and using special liturgical celebrations to come together.

Specifically relating to St Joseph’s, previous events such as outdoors stations of the cross and the exchange of ministers and pastors were noted but with a sense this could be strengthened. The example of the King’s Club, run during school holidays by a local evangelical Church, was cited as a positive example of bringing children together. It was noted however that very few parishioners attend current opportunities for joint worship, such as the joint services offered by Clarkston Churches Together.

A number of those present also spoke of the need to reach out to Jewish neighbours and others in Abrahamic tradition.

While parishioners were keen to strengthen commonalities and concentrate on the areas that unify the different Christian faiths such as Baptism or abortion, the importance of acknowledging the differences was also noted. The barrier of only Catholics being able to take the Eucharist at Mass was identified, although it was noted some faiths were happy to take communion in other Churches and some of other faiths did take communion within the Catholic Church.

Stronger joint local action in both our geographical communities, including outreach programmes, and supporting communities of interest were identified by many respondents. Existing interfaith community work such as Justice and Peace and the eco-congregation programme were noted as opportunities where action could be strengthened locally. Social clubs and activities were also seen as a way of engaging and meeting other Churches. Sharing resources was raised as a way to achieve economic savings as well as improving communication, with the potential to share an administrator with other local parishes offered as an example.

Under several headings respondents noted the opportunity to learn from other denominations, whether this related to dealing with the media, communicating clear messages or the balance between the Clergy and laity, with some other denominations enabling greater leadership by lay people within the Church.

4.8. Authority and participation

- How do we promote lay ministries and the responsibility of lay people?
- How do we nurture our parish community?

Key messages

- **Greater involvement of the laity is crucial to the Church's survival**
- **This requires a change in expectations and of mindset by both the Clergy and the laity to address a historically passive laity**
- **The church needs to be clearer about the need for support and its expectation for the role of the laity.**
- **Lay roles should be distinguished to ensure lay ministry is understood to include Liturgical, pastoral and practical functions.**

Responses to this section relating to nurturing our parish community have been amalgamated with section 3.5, sharing responsibility for our common mission.

There was very strong support for greater involvement of the laity in the Church by the majority of those attending. There was recognition that the lack of new vocations to the priesthood requires increased lay participation and that it should no longer be the priest's responsibility to do everything. This was seen as a challenge, requiring a significant mind-shift by both clergy and lay people as historically the laity were passive recipients of religious life.

- "If people do not come forward we risk losing priests. No priest, no Mass, no Eucharist"

Some parishioners described the need for greater leadership within the laity, with the current role described as "passive". Comparison were drawn with other Christian Churches where lay people have greater influence. The Church of Scotland was cited as an example to learn from.

The Church hierarchy was identified as a barrier to greater lay leadership and involvement as its hierarchical structures were not seen as conducive with a more participative Church and greater leadership resting with the laity. Currently even small changes can be prevented by the parish priest.

There was acknowledgement that the role of the Priest is as our spiritual leader and should be "the leader of his flock", however responsibility should focus on the sacraments rather than on the role of parish manager. The very broad range of skills of parishioners was seen as an advantage in providing a pool of capable people. It was felt the laity could do some jobs better and skills could be utilized more effectively, but that some additional support may be required.

- "We need to learn to allocate and delegate better"
- "We need roles for laity that have defined timescales and training for those who volunteer."

Some present advocated for a pragmatic approach to supporting the parish priest. A Census of parishioners was suggested to identify "working talent" and have a register of "helping hands" i.e. parishioners willing to volunteer with a note of skills and abilities.

The phrase "lay ministry" itself was identified as unhelpful by some parishioners for two reasons. Firstly, it is associated with a perception of passivity and secondly there was the potential for it to be associated specifically with Liturgical ministry rather than other lay contributions within the Church

building, broader community or schools. These different roles should be distinguished to ensure lay ministry was understood to include pastoral and practical functions.

Several participants noted the Church seemed uncertain about the role of lay ministers out-with the Liturgy, and needed to be clearer about roles, expectations and opportunities. This was seen as a route to wider involvement of those from a range of backgrounds, ages and life experience outside the Church. This diversity may then itself contribute to a more welcoming and less judgmental Church. However it was also acknowledged that there are more lay people involved in the Church now than have been in the past.

The need for greater lay involvement was seen as critical to St Joseph's as the size of the Parish means it is not possible for one priest to manage on his own.

Nurturing our parish community was also seen as essential to bring forward more priests by building a family Church.

Inclusion was also raised as an issue in relation to nurturing the parish community, to ensure all feel welcome including gay people and those who are divorced.

A number of different approaches were suggested to promote lay ministry, with recognition that no one approach would be sufficient. This included Churches being clearer about what they needed from their parishioners, and more proactive in asking for support. Some parishioners felt personal invitations to help might be more meaningful, particularly for men, however concern was also expressed that a direct invitation to individuals may be perceived as a small groups controlling decisions rather than an open invitation to all.

The Pastoral Council was cited as an example where the process by which a parishioners became members was unclear. Opening up Pastoral Council meetings to any parishioner to attend, ensuring the opportunity to join the Pastoral Council was open to all rather than by invitation, and holding an AGM with elections to posts were suggested. Information should be available on membership of the Pastoral Council, how to contact members, dates and times of meetings advised in advance, and minutes being available both on-line and in hard copy. One respondent noted their appreciation for the hard work of the Pastoral council.

The Link magazine and its distribution was supported by a number of respondents as a way to reach out beyond those who regularly attend Church.

The lack of a local forum for people to share news or offer opinions was noted.

4.9. Discerning and deciding

- How do we practice discernment?
- How can we grow in communal spirit discernment?

Key messages

- **The concept of discernment may not be fully understood**
- **Support for discernment for children requires the collective efforts of families, school and Church**
- **Many communal activities within the Church offer opportunities for discernment.**

Much of the initial discussion focused on whether there was a common understanding of the meaning of discernment, particularly by younger people. However the need for an ongoing conversation to support adults in their discernment thought reconciliation and examination of conscience was also noted.

Commonly, the practice of discernment was viewed as listening to the Holy spirit through prayer, in particular regular prayer, and is an ongoing journey throughout the life course.

For children, both the school setting and the family were seen as important, but the Church also had a role in supporting parents from the earliest stage of life. Several respondents felt schools may have greater opportunity to support children' spiritual discernment, in particular bringing people with life experience into schools to share that lived experience of challenging situations such as drugs, alcohol or abortion.

Many barriers were identified, some of which were felt to have a greater impact on young people, including access to information on the internet and social media which encouraged opinions in responds to sound bites without reasoned discussion or debate. The lack of appropriate role models was cited, with young people needing to develop self-reliance.

The absence of dialogue or debate was also mentioned in relation to adult discernment, with the "black and white" approach of the Church seen as a potential barrier, in particular the emphasis on specific aspects of morality which could skew thinking towards issues that may be less important to individuals and to society. Issues such as our poor custodianship of the planet, materialism, wastefulness and disrespect for human life were identified as requiring greater consideration.

The importance of "intention" in wrongdoing was highlighted, with confession being seen as a positive act offering an "avenue to come home". Using the wrong language could be a barrier here.

Some participants felt there was a need for greater teaching and evangelization to support ongoing development of adult faith. Many participants offered suggestions for developing the spiritual life of parishioners, and providing better support for adult formation and discernment. These included greater opportunity for personal and communal prayer and scripture study though prayer groups, running of an Alpha course, Catechesis groups for adults as well as RCIA courses, parish missions, and providing childcare to enable parents of young children to participate in faith-based activities. Adult formation could address cultural and social debates and support discernment. The on-line Alpha course last year and Jesuit Lenten retreats were cited as examples of using technology to extend reach and be more inclusive, as were the series of lectures about faith given by Bishop John before lockdown.

There was a connection with responses relating to speaking the truth more boldly with the opportunity for the development of adult faith being linked to exploring challenging areas of faith with those who feel marginalized and unwelcome.

More inclusive language in the Liturgy was also suggested as a way to increase participation.

The impact of Covid was discussed, in particular that for some it had increased their sense of participation and volunteering within the Church. However others experienced social isolation and loneliness and this should be an impetus to support them to return to Church.

4.10. Receptive to change and development

- What do we need to help us be more capable of walking together, listening to one another, participating in mission and engaging in dialogue.

Key messages

- **There is broad acceptance that change in some form is necessary**
- **Beyond the current synod, no structures currently exist to support the laity to shape change within the world, national or local Church**
- **Many of the current practices within the Church are barriers to those who are excluded.**

As noted in 3.8, there is an acknowledgement that with the current shortage of priests, change in some form is necessary.

A number of Liturgical changes were cited to sustain the Church. These would address the scarcity of priests, improve involvement of the laity and contribute to improving the situation for those who feel marginalised.

- “We should be seen as a welcoming Church for everyone – we need to modernise”

Responses relating to involvement of the laity, in particular issues of clarity of role, barriers created by the existing hierarchy and lay leadership are included in section 3.8.

Many responses to other section, including 3.1, 3.2, 3.3, and 3.6 are also relevant to this section.

Several respondents highlighted opportunities to bring more people into the Priesthood.

The ordination of deacons and nuns, for nuns to join the Diaconate, the ordination of women more generally or for women to join the Diaconate, and consideration of married priests were supported by many of those present. One respondent explicitly stated they did not want women priests. One respondent stated the Liturgy should remain as it is according to Church teaching.

The experience of the Anglican Church was raised with some clergy leaving to join the Catholic Church after modernization.

Encouraging older men who were widowers to join the priesthood was also highlighted, however the requirement to spend 4 years studying at this stage of life was seen as unreasonable by one respondent. Involvement of older men with life experience was seen as bringing potential benefits as after 7 years in Rome, some priests do not seem prepared for the realities of life in particularly our poorer parishes.

- “too many priests do not live in the real world”

Other changes that might encourage more people back to Church included a more relaxed approach to Mass attendance rather than a requirement to attend every Sunday. One respondent highlighted that too much pomp was a barrier.

The theme of welcoming also recurred here, with respondents asking for a more welcoming and nurturing intergenerational Church.

Changes to the language used was also identified, both for it to be more inclusive and for the Liturgy to be clear and accessible.

- “what does synod even mean to most people especially people who already feel like outsiders – divorced, gay, children etc”

Being receptive to change also meant being more open to different views and inclusive of marginalised groups, including gay people, addressing how to bring those who feel marginalized back into the family of the Church.

However there were some who did not agree with this and felt that the Church had abandoned the poorest because it no longer talks about marriage or family.

The requirement for annulment prior to remarriage was raised as a barrier for those Catholics whose remarriage remains unrecognized and who are excluded from communion.

Several participants reflected on the Synod itself and expressed concerns in its effectiveness, particularly in light of the experience of the previous Synod. The risk of raising expectations of change that were not fulfilled, further undermining confidence in the Church and its ability to respond to 21st century issues, was raised.

The importance of seeing both the Parish and Diocesan report was noted.

A Synodal network of contacts at Parish, Diocesan, national and international levels should be established to share best ideas and resources. The Synodal promotion and activity should continue uninterrupted beyond the listening stage. Ideally this Synodal network should involve a partnership of both clerical and lay participation.