



Diocese of Derry

REFLECTION

on the Document for the
Continental Stage of the Universal
Synod 2021 - 2024



Prepared by the
Diocese of Derry
Synod Working Group

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For a synodal Church
communion | participation | mission

1. EXPERIENCES OF THE CHURCHES

- The need for individual conversion is highlighted as is the need for communal renewal and reform. This will be a Christ-centred experience with a focus on *being* as well as *doing* (contemplation *and* action). We should avoid creating a long to-do list. We are inclined to focus on problems rather than solutions. There is need for vision and spiritual intelligence. We need to acknowledge the good that is going on in the Church accentuating the positive.
- The reality of martyrdom in other parts of the world was striking. We need distinctive voices speaking into the future to create little shoots where God is.
- The image of the tent (Isaiah) is useful and encouraging – it points to the need for radical inclusivity. The phrase that, “*the Church should be a refuge for sinners and not a palace for the perfect*” resonates profoundly.
- The negative impact of clericalism is a recurrent theme but there can exist a form of ‘clericalism’ among the laity who can form exclusive cliques where others do not always feel welcome. There exists a deep and energetic desire for collaborative and relational forms of ministry.
- Laity must assume a position of co-responsibility. Some don’t because of feelings of inadequacy (consider their lives are not in keeping with the moral doctrines of the Church) or lack of confidence but there is also a culture of passivity.
- We need a new way of looking at the past that allows healing so that we can move forward having learnt important lessons. We cannot remain stuck in the past – a form of ‘*arrested development*’ in the Church.
- Women need to participate equally in decision-making and governance roles in the Church and men attracted to more active membership in the Church.
- Spirituality needs to be at the core of the new vision of synodality, avoiding reducing it to functionality and mere technical organisation – no spirit without prayer.
- A renewed love for spirituality will realise liturgies that are diverse, accessible, joy-filled, and unitive.
- A minority wish to go back to a pre-Vatican II Church which is perceived as safe. Some do not feel at ease with the post-Vatican II Church.

2. CHALLENGES TO ADDRESS

- There must always exist a synergy between Love, Truth and Mercy. Too much emphasis on any one of these aspects, to the exclusion of the other, leads to a fundamentalism in approach. The Church, in love, should be open to all people and it must have mercy on the sinner in all of us. This does not equate to a free-for-all. . Jesus still calls us to conversion and the Truth of the Gospel. There remains the command – “*Go away and do not sin anymore*”.
- There is certainly a tension between belonging and exclusion. Sometimes this can be a perception but sometimes it is because of the lived reality of people’s experiences in the Church.
- Tension between unity and diversity – we must learn to celebrate difference rather than seeing it as a threat. A new era of radical inclusivity is needed where we open the doors and give. We need to learn to listen rather than judging.
- There is a tension between clericalism/traditionalism and more progressive voices – perhaps this can be reconciled with a renewed focus on *conversion* of the interior life as the criterion for holiness among all people.
- “*Preferential option for Youth*” – they are the life of the Church in the present and we must be genuine with them so that they have a life-long positive experience in the Church. Young people are the NOW of the Church!
- There is a real tension between the personal moral values/lives that believers live day-to-day and the expectations of the Church vis-à-vis moral doctrine.
- Tension between ‘talking the talk’ and ‘walking the walk’ – the world needs missionaries as well as philosophers – Francis Xavier – “*I want to shout out to those who have more learning than love*”.
- The call for lay involvement in the Episcopal conferences is welcomed.
- We must learn to ‘sit’ with difference/paradox – we do not all have to be the same but acknowledge tensions.
- Naming problems is important, and we should not feel threatened by diversity.
- Is Canon Law in its current form really fit for purpose? We need to take a collaborative approach. There is tension in the range of ministries, but we should focus on complementarity rather than competition.
- Tensions between perceived ‘Class’ inside the Church. We need to recognise the giftedness of everyone so that people feel comfortable.
- Tension between secular state and the Church around values. Marginalisation of the Church and a ‘bloodless persecution’.

3. (a) PRIORITIES AND CALLS TO ACTION - Your local diocese/community.

- Embedding and integrating synodal working in all areas of the Church to include schools, families, hospitals, businesses – making it part of how we are and not a bolt-on
- A renewed focus on Adult Faith Formation – including developing prayer, leadership roles, mission, listening skills and community.
- What can post-conflict Derry do to help others in conflict situations? Focus on conflict resolution and outreach to the world. We must not be apathetic – “Peace is not simply the absence of war”. We must continue to actively seek peace at home.
- What can we learn in the Derry Diocese from Liberation Theology – the idea of the Base Communities with a focus on Praxis. Small communities of believers coming together to reflect on Scripture and pray and break bread (have a meal).
- Do we have a Church for the middle-class in Derry? We need to reach out to all people. Perhaps a renewed emphasis on Ecumenism. A conversion of hearts and minds that challenges us out of our comfort zones.
- Building a shared vision for our diocese – reconfiguring the Church in our diocese. A radical rethink of what it means to be Church and what Eucharist actually means.
- Radical rethink of priesthood with a rediscovery of the *priesthood of the laity*. As baptised daughters and sons of God, we *all* participate in the royal priesthood of Jesus Christ.
- Being Eucharistic and being Church does not always entail attending Mass inside a Church building – we need a focus on Liturgy and Mission.
- Forming Laity to take on roles/responsibilities such as visiting the sick and dying.
- We need to manage expectation vis-à-vis what the priest can do. The call to ministerial priesthood is a special call, however, this does not mean that clergy have ‘cornered the market’ in certain aspects and that their role is a privileged one which allows the laity to abdicate their responsibility.
- We need to bear witness to reconciliation in practice. If we live with the tension, a resolution will emerge.
- Training laity to become spiritual directors with a focus on accompaniment, dialogue and moving forward.
- Every community should become a school of prayer, promoting a ‘spirituality of communion’ (Cf *Novo Millennio Ineunte*).
- Co-responsibility is a call to action – we are all responsible for the growth of the faith.
 - Further ongoing focus and strategy for accompanying young people
 - How do we create ‘in-between’ spaces that allow conversations about faith
 - Refresh *Laudato Si* strategy and embed it practically into how we live and work in parishes

- Reflect on the role of Parish Pastoral Councils and how they can truly work in a synodal Church
- Specific focus on mission – link what we are spending time on and what the outputs/delivery of mission are in the Derry Diocese.

3. (b) PRIORITIES AND CALLS TO ACTION - The Catholic Church in Ireland.

- A call for co-responsible leadership but there is passivity among some laity.
- There needs to be a focus on adult faith formation so that the laity feel equipped and confident to participate and assume important roles with the Church.
- There needs to be full inclusion of all people at all levels in the Church.
- Lay involvement in the Episcopal Conference – it should be representative of the Church in Ireland.
- National Initiative – 1600 anniversary since the arrival of St. Patrick in Ireland – Can we have a 10-year plan which will take us to 2032?
- Has ‘Share the Good News’ been implemented?

3. (c) PRIORITIES AND CALLS TO ACTION - The Universal Church.

- A renewal of the call for a world-wide mission or evangelisation.
- There needs to be a change in some structures of the Church especially at the highest level – Curia. However, tweaking Church structures is no substitute for the inner conversion that must take place in all men and women’s hearts and minds.
- What will synodal liturgies look like? We must think outside the box. We are too focused/obsessed with Mass and Church buildings.
- A new focus on practical holiness’ and interior conversion as well as Mass attendance which will have an impact on society.
- Holiness is to be the new criterion for the health of the Church – not only Mass attendance nor the number of seminarians in a particular diocese.
- We are co-responsible for each other’s holiness/sanctity/saintliness – focus on the Universal call to holiness.
- What real difference/impact does prayer have on peoples’ lives.