



St Mary's

St John's

Saltcoats

Stevenston

Walking together, side-by-side

Synod Update

July 2022

Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle in them the fire of your love. Send forth your Spirit and they shall be created. And you will renew the face of the earth.

Welcome to your first update on the development of a Synodal Church in our parishes following the Synod encounters which took place in early 2022.

What is the Synod?

This synod is about a new way of being church. So, it's not about producing reports for bishops or a top-down imposition of a blue-print for every parish. In fact, it's quite the opposite.

It started in October 2021 when Pope Francis issued an invitation to the whole church to begin a process of discernment in every parish. The bishops will meet with the Pope in Rome in 2023 to discuss the work in progress. But the real work of discernment, prayer and action has already begun in parishes like ours.

So, when we talk about Synodality and Synod in this context, we are really talking about ourselves as individuals, as parishes, as community, as witnesses and ambassadors for Christ.

What does it mean to be a Synodal church?

That's very much for each parish community to discern and develop, prayerfully, openly and collaboratively together, seeking consensus always.

Pope Francis' purpose in calling the Synod is to renew local churches and have them embark on a synodal process to increase participation, to add to the community of faith and to work together to bring the Good News to its local community.

So, we are invited to accept responsibility for *building a community* which doesn't just attend Mass but which works together. A community of people welcoming to everyone, who work for social justice, who feed the hungry, clothe the naked, care for each other and all in need and who join together joyfully each week for communion.

That all sounds warm, friendly and hopeful but ...

The Preparatory Documents, which give guidance to the Synodal process, talk about *Sensus Fidelium*, the Consensus of the Faithful. This, they say, is an authentic guarantor of the faith expressed by the Church. So, this new synodal way of doing things would be by consensus and not edict.

Here are two reassuring quotes from the documents which address the *'but'* question.

“The whole Church is called to deal with the weight of a culture imbued with clericalism that she inherits from her history, and with those forms of exercising authority on which the different types of abuse are grafted ...”

"We recall that the purpose of the Synod, and therefore of this consultation, is not to produce documents, but “to plant dreams, draw forth prophecies and visions, allow hope to flourish, inspire trust, bind up wounds, weave together relationships, awaken a dawn of hope, learn from one another and create a bright resourcefulness that will enlighten minds, warm hearts, give strength to our hands ...”

Can anyone get involved?

YES! Pope Francis says that God expects the whole Church to embark on this path of Synodality. A major principle adopted by the Second Vatican Council is embodied in its teaching that the church is the whole People of God - the whole community of the baptised. And that community is marked by a rich diversity of gender, class, education, social status, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity and culture.

The Synod on Synodality aims to ensure more “diversity” within the internal life of the Church and to ensure that the views of the “marginalised” are properly represented within the synodal dialogue.

Although, at the moment, there is a small group of people in both parishes helping to move Synodality forward it does not belong to us, it belongs to ***all of us***.

So, it is intended that many more people will become involved to help shape our new way of being a truly Synodal Church community.

Parish Developments

At a recent joint meeting of the Parish Pastoral Councils of St Mary's and St John's, we looked at ways that we could forward the Synodal process.

We began with a review of all of the feedback which came from the synod encounters held in both parishes. Our task was to try and understand how that feedback might lead our growth into a Synodal Church in each of our parishes.

The first part of our meeting focused on understanding 'where we are now'. We began to put together a list of all the things which we already do well in our parishes.

We then looked to the future and asked ourselves the question: What could a truly synodal Church look like?

What we do well in our parishes.

- We do well at Ministries for Mass – Welcomers, Readers, Eucharistic Ministers and our Music Ministry.
- Church cleaning was mentioned as well as the people who serve the teas after Mass.
- During Covid we came together very well to help with the things that were necessary like live streaming, sanitation and cleaning. Covid also restricted many of our regular activities.
- We felt that we are particularly welcoming at funerals.
- We are very good at a time of crisis – look at the response to the Ukraine collection.
- We are generous toward SCIAF and Mary's Meals.
- The SVDP do sterling work helping the poor and in Stevenston the Crisis Bags initiative with the High Kirk was highlighted.
- We feel that we look after the elderly who are in Nursing Homes, bringing them Communion regularly.
- We provide support for couples bringing their children for Baptism.
- The Annual Fete in St. John's was mentioned as a great means of bringing the community together.
- Our halls provide facilities for the community.
- Our RCIA groups help people who want to join our church.

We know that the list is incomplete. We hope that it will grow as we have better understanding of the many good works undertaken in our parishes in the name of our faith. Knowing where we are now, helps us to discern the future.

In response to Pope Francis' invitation to "dream dreams", we imagined a Church made up of men and women of deep personal faith committed to the values of the Gospel, a Church committed to working for justice, reaching out to those in need and loving those whom the world rejects, we spent some time in prayerful reflection and discussion.

What we imagined a church of the future would look like.

- Be a church for all generations.
- We would pool our resources.
- Inclusive, open to all. It would be a church in which more people would participate.
- It would support the community both practically and spiritually.
- Provide more and different spiritual experiences based on the Gospel.
- Be known in the community, it would reach out to families. It would not just be a Sunday Mass provider.
- It would communicate much better. Everyone would be kept informed. It would use social media and new technology better.
- It would involve a wider range of gifted people in sacramental roles.

We made a good start. The Parish Pastoral Councils agreed to meet again after summer when we will begin to develop individual and shared plans for our parishes.

The feedback from the Synod encounters will remain the focus of our work to faithfully discern our way forward towards being a truly Synodal Church.

We will produce another update following that meeting.

If you would like to make any comments or suggestions, ***please feel free to contact one of us or leave a message*** with Lorna in St Mary's parish office.

Thank you.

Margaret Millar, Mary Theresa Russell, Kevin Rowswell, Peter Timmons, Danny Murray.