



The Church in St. John's and St. Mary's

WALKING TOGETHER

A Journal for our Journey

Issue 4

January 2024

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THEMES FOR THIS EDITION:

Strengthening our welcome and encouraging greater participation in our parish life. We share the suggestions and ideas from the Community Synod Meeting in October last year steps being taken to take their ideas forward.

There is still time to respond to the appeal to be active in both parishes. We all have different talents and are encouraged to use them for the good of the whole community.

Both Parish Communities need helpers for the children's Sacramental Preparation: After School Club at St. Mary's and Saturday Club at St. John's.

Charity No: SCO10576:
St. John's Church, Stevenston
and St. Mary's Church, Saltcoats.
Parishes of the R.C. Diocese of Galloway.



Welcome to your Parish Synod Journal - Walking Together

Welcome, again, to your Synod Journal. Our theme is inclusion and participation as a way of being a synodal church.

In this edition, we share a report on the first joint parish meeting held in October last year. The meeting widened participation in the process of discernment which Pope Francis says is our collective responsibility. Through prayer, listening and sharing with each other, that community gathering considered how to strengthen our welcome to everybody and how to increase

participation of more people in our parish life. You can read about one practical suggestion from the meeting being planned for Lent this year.

Thank you, also, for the helpful and generous feedback on improvements to the journal. You will see immediately that we have increased the size of the text to make it easier to read. If you have suggestions for content to support our synodal journey, please get in touch via the email:

walkingtogether2024@gmail.com



Lenten Observance - Increasing Participation

Following suggestions from the joint parish meeting, the Synod Group, of which Canon Martin is a member, has looked at increasing participation in non-sacramental liturgy.

For Stations of the Cross during Lent in St. John's and St. Mary's different parish groups are being invited to lead the reflections on Our Lord's final journey to his Crucifixion. The Synod Group will lead the first stations of Lent and will provide support to other groups participating. Some groups may participate alongside Canon Martin

while others can choose to lead the Stations themselves.

If you would like to participate in one of the groups in either parish, please get in touch. Inexperience is no barrier as you will be well supported!

This is a very real and practical step forward and a manifestation of a synodal church where we all share responsibility for supporting our common life and faith and where we seek new ways to use our gifts in the service of God and each other.



Synod on Synodality



Walking together – increasing participation through community discernment.

The previous edition of Walking Together contained an invitation to join in a community meeting and consider how to take Synodality forward in our parishes.

Based around the Vision for our parishes which had been put together by our two Parish Pastoral Councils, the community meeting aimed to bring more people into the discussions about how to move forward Synodality in our parishes, importantly, the community meeting's main purpose was to discern the next practical steps which we could take which would demonstrate Synodality in action.

The community meeting took place in October and followed a simple format of prayer, reflection and discussion. The group of over twenty looked at three questions:

- to what extent did they agree with the Synodal Vision described by the Parish Pastoral Councils,
- what did they think about this journal?
- and what practical steps would they suggest to develop the synodal vision in our parishes.

The responses to these questions are summarised in the table across the page in the spirit of Synodality. The responses are not 'edited' but reported as they have been shared with us because our guidance from Pope Francis is that, 'all voices' must be heard and none should be suppressed because of disagreement, dogma or personal interests.

The Joint Parish Synod Group is now looking at how some of the actions can be moved forward and brought into effect.

This Community Meeting and the earlier Parish Pastoral Council meetings have both suggested that a useful starting point would be communications. The idea is that we should develop our information sharing and distribution to support parish life and each other, bring people together, increase participation and show our welcome to all.

The Synod group will be holding a meeting with members of the parish who are already involved in these activities to explore how these can be developed further. There will be an update on discussions in the next journal.



SYNOD ON SYNODALITY

COMMUNITY MEETING

28TH October, 2023

THE CHURCH IN ST JOHN'S AND ST MARY'S

BUILDING THE VISION

- Faith is irrelevant to so many.
- Communicate on line – other ways?
- Need to engage 'in-between' groups including Young People.
- Involve school parent councils and parents, Sunday teas.
- Huge gap in 'offer' – what about Taizé, Evening Prayers/socials/community events/SVDP.
- Fundraising for school – make visible to community.
- Use personal approach to involve more people in parish life and ministries with training and support if needed.
- Publicise PPC membership as points of contact/information.
- Vision is good starting point.
- More active and directed action which needs to be 'inclusive'.

NEXT STEPS

- Personal invitations to all aspects of parish life.
- Everyone can be an ambassador for our churches.
- Small steps, casual chats (not hard sell)
- Communicating to the wider community
- Share success (Speaking Group/Soup & Chat)
- Youth groups and participation.
- Focus on disengaged.
- Be actively welcoming – take the first step.
- Improve information, access and participation in all ministries and parish activities so that all talents find a home.
- House groups.
- Revamp Soup & Chat and develop similar activities to engage and respond to wider needs in the community including Foodbank.
- Be proud in and of our faith and own this in our families and communities.

FEEDBACK ON THE JOURNAL

- Visually attractive, full of varied information, highlights community links and stimulates interest/discussion.
- Emphasises Synod process.
- Distribution – can this be widened/online/distributed in community locations?
- Cost effective – can we measure/judge this? Do we need to?
- Too much text – small text.

SUMMARY

PRIORITY FOR ACTION - SUGGESTIONS

- Social events with good publicity and personalisation.
- More greeters to actively engage before and after mass in particular.
- Publicise the open access to all ministries including reading and music and how to get involved,
- Publicise PPS members as contacts on activities and opportunities in parish life.



Understanding fear of Synod

Some people fear that Synod will bring major changes to church teaching. But church history shows that the church's teaching has developed on a variety of topics, including slavery, women's roles, ecumenical relations, the liturgy, limbo, capital punishment and so on. As Pope Francis said, "doctrine also progresses, expands and consolidates with time and becomes firmer, but is always progressing." Throughout church history, we have been invited to trust in the Holy Spirit during times of uncertainty—with Pentecost as the defining example. So, uncertainty, trust and change are not new.

The Under-secretary of the Rome Synod said that "The Spirit can speak through critics to tell us something... but the enemy can also use fears, resistance and critique as a means of diverting us from the right path to take in response to the Spirit's calls." To condemn the synod outright is akin to saying that *we do not trust* that the Spirit is alive in the hearts of our fellow Catholics, or that it is alive in the church and or that it may even have something new to teach us.

As for me, I trust in the Holy Spirit. **James Martin, SJ.**
(Abridged)



Caritas Award in St. Matthew's Academy

As the Caritas students from St. Matthew's Academy approach their final few weeks of their learning on the value of love as witnessed to in the life of Jesus, we thought it would be a good idea to catch up with them and ask them what impact the Award has had on them, both on a personal and collective level. Many felt it has been beneficial to them in so many ways. It has been good for their self-confidence, some stating that it's made them feel 'very selfless'. They believe they have been 'given an opportunity to make a difference in people's lives' which has also had a positive impact on their own. It has motivated them to get more involved in our communities and they have enjoyed seeing the impact they've made, particularly when they have been involved with charities such as The Wayside Club in Glasgow. Volunteering at the Christmas Lunch for the Wayside Club in St. John's church hall was a highlight of their year for many of them, an experience which was surprisingly enjoyable and made them think. They believe opportunities such as this would help 'prevent selfishness and stop hate', also giving everyone involved a 'sense of hope'.



However, the greatest positive impact on their own lives over the past six months is the sense of community they have experienced. Comments such as having loved:

- 'joining a new community and helping people',
- 'learning new things about the community',
- loving the 'sense of community felt through the school and parish',
- 'giving back to the community together'.

were numerous and underlines the importance of welcoming and encouraging our young people to be part of the wider Christian community. For some this sense of community has helped 'rebuild their faith' while for others, they 'look forward to becoming more familiar with regular members of the church and becoming a recognisable face'.

This sense of community is essential as we journey together through the process of recognising that we are a synodal church and it's so wonderful hearing from our young people that this is what they're experiencing. We are hoping that there will be an opportunity during this coming Lent to enhance even further our Caritas students' experience of liturgy within our community and taking a further step in our synodal journey together.



Pause for Prayer

We often view the new year as a fresh start and make resolutions to improve our lives. This is not unfamiliar territory. The following is attributed to Sir Francis Drake in 1577! It could apply now – perhaps this prayer will inspire us in 2024.

Disturb us, Lord, when
we are too well pleased with ourselves,
when our dreams have come true
because we have dreamed too little,
when we arrived safely
because we sailed too close to the shore.

Disturb us, Lord, when
With the abundance of things we possess
we have lost our thirst
for the waters of life;
having fallen in love with life.
We have ceased to dream of eternity
and in our efforts to build a new earth,
we have allowed our vision
of the new Heaven to dim.

Disturb us, Lord, to dare more boldly,
To venture on wider seas
where storms will show your mastery;
where losing sight of land,
we shall find the stars.

We ask you to push back the horizons of our hopes;
and to push into the future in strength, courage,
hope and love.