

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

WALKING TOGETHER

A Journal for our Journey



Issue 3

Autumn 2023

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THEMES FOR THIS EDITION:

• Welcome

Pope Francis recalls Isaiah inspiring us to 'widen the tent' to welcome in all who seek God's love.

• Participation

Synodality recognises the gifts and ministries of every member of the church and our shared responsibilities to seek discernment together.

There are opportunities to help with the children's Sacramental Preparation:

After School Club, at St. Mary's.

Saturday Club, at St. John's.

We are all encouraged to use our talents for the good of the whole community just like the early disciples.



Welcome to your Parish Synod Journal - Walking Together

The parishes of St Mary's and St. John's have worked together to produce our third issue of this newsletter.

We hope you found previous editions interesting and useful and that this autumn edition will be equally informative. Spoiler Alert: It contains an invitation!

This summer Pope Francis attended the World Youth Day in Portugal to listen to, share and pray with young people from around the globe.

And, this month, The Synod on Synodality has begun in Rome with an unprecedented number of lay people participating. Increasing participation in the life of the church at all levels is a key theme which we explore in this journal.

Your suggestions for topics to cover relating to Synod, suggestions for improvement or offers of help with producing this journal are all very welcome.

Please get in touch at:

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Welcoming - New Scots Speaking Club

Volunteers from our two parishes are active in a local Speaking Club held at St. Mary's Church for refugees from Ukraine who live in the area.

The ability to communicate effectively in English is important for refugees as it enables them to be more independent. Most refugees attend formal classes at various colleges to learn the fundamentals of English and supplement this study with language practice at Speaking Clubs.

The Speaking Club at St. Mary's Hall on Sundays from 2-4pm is organised by the local authority but is highly dependent on volunteers who engage in informal conversations with Ukrainian refugees who attend.

The conversations, as well as the learning taking place, reflect different levels of speaking ability and are wide-ranging, varied and full of great humour.



There is no doubt that these activities have had positive benefits for learners. They are able to relax and practise their new language while experiencing a sense of community, welcome and sharing. They have been able to build new relationships which has improved their overall wellbeing.

For older learners at risk of social isolation, this has been particularly important.

Volunteers have heard Ukrainians speak of the joy of once again living under peaceful skies, about witnessing the destruction of home and village following the collapse of the Kakhovka dam, of visits to Arran due to its resemblance of home in the Carpathian Mountains as well as fascinating insights into the world of beekeeping and receiving gifts of chocolates – a Ukrainian custom!

In common with many of our everyday conversations, many exchanges focus on getting around, getting hold of GPs, healthcare, schooling and young people, traditions and culture. Sometimes, these can lead to occasional organised trips to local places of interest, for example, Portencross Castle.

With humour and creativity on all sides – as well as a little help from translation tools – these brief encounters bring people, communities and faiths together in joy and hope in the face of what can be a hostile world.

Since the Russian invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022, refugees have been arriving in Scotland and many have been accommodated throughout Ayrshire and in our parishes. Despite the trauma which many have experienced and their continuing anxiety for the survival of their home country, Ukrainian refugees have hope and faith in the future.



Moving forward in Synodality

You will remember from our first issue that our parish councils met together to consider the first steps on our synodal journey earlier this year. That meeting imagined what a synodal church of the future would look like in our parishes.

“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.”

It would be a Church

- for all generations,
- which reached out to families, young people and others dis-engaged from our faith community,
- where we shared our resources when appropriate,
- which was welcoming, inclusive, and open to all,
- which was known in the wider community.
- in which more people would participate,
- where a wider range of gifted people were involved in sacramental roles

‘Walking Together’, this, our shared journal, is a direct outcome of that meeting and is the first step as our parish communities respond to the Pope’s call for a Synodal Church.



Does opposition to synodality signify lack of trust in The Holy Spirit?



Earlier this month, **Fr James Martin, SJ**, a renowned Catholic pastor, theologian and author prepared a discussion which appeared in the publication *America – The Jesuit Review*. In the article he addressed the question of why there seems to be opposition to Pope Francis’ call to be a synodal church. He provides some clear thoughts on why there is opposition to what is a fairly simple and faithful call from Pope Francis to grow as a synodal church and he invites us to reflect on how we respond to Francis’ call to participate. This is an abridged version of his article.

“Pope Francis has been the subject of what seems like unrelenting criticism for several years. At times, it is difficult to keep up with the sheer volume of critiques and attacks on the Holy Father. Some well-meaning critics try to be respectful of Pope Francis; other critics seem to have jettisoned even a modicum of respect for the successor to St. Peter.

In the run-up to the Synod on Synodality’s first month-long gathering in Rome, one former archbishop wrote in a new book attacking the synod, saying that the process will foster “confusion and error and division.”

Perhaps one reason that there is so much public criticism is that, with a few exceptions, Francis is allowing these conversations to take place rather than clamping down on the discussions.

Synod is a form of ecclesial gathering that has existed since the time of the early church, but which fell into disuse; it was revived by St. Paul VI shortly after the Second Vatican Council as a way of gathering together a variety of voices from across the church. Later, the model was promoted by St. John Paul II, who convened many synods during his pontificate.

Welcome and Participation: Your invitation for Saturday 28th October, 12-2pm

Pope Francis recalls Isaiah when he invites us to 'widen our tent', that is, to be welcoming, to be actively drawing in the extended family of God and to do this in a way in which 'all voices are heard'.

He calls us to listen to one another and to the Holy Spirit as it most assuredly guides us forward. He also asks us 'to listen to the world and the challenges and changes it sets before us.'



Since the early 'synodal encounters' in our parishes, the small cautious steps so far on our synodal journey have been taken by a few volunteers working prayerfully and under the leadership of the parish councils.

However many volunteers come forward to take active roles in moving synod forward, Pope Francis reminds us that we all: ***“Walk together. Question together. Take responsibility together for community discernment, which for us is prayer, as the first Apostles did: This is Synodality.”***

Francis has emphasized the synod and “Synodality” as a way of listening to voices from around the church, especially those who may not have been heard from before. One of Francis’ innovations has been to give women and other laypeople the right to vote as full members of the synod.

So, the synod, as conceived and established by Francis is a step toward fulfilling the promise of Vatican II. “The synod,” Pope Francis said on Oct. 9, 2021, the day before its official opening, “offers us the opportunity to become a *listening church*, to break out of our routine and pause from our pastoral concerns in order to stop and listen.”

If we trust in the Holy Spirit, why would we be fearful of Francis’ vision of the synod as a gathering where all voices are heard?”

James Martin, SJ

So, now, ***this is your invitation*** to help discern and shape the next faithful steps forward as synodal parishes in Saltcoats and Stevenston.

On Saturday 28th October, 12pm to 2pm an open meeting will be held in St Mary’s Church Hall and everyone is and will be welcome.

The purpose of the meeting will be to prayerfully through discussion, listening and sharing consider what the next possible steps might be for our parishes to become more welcoming, more inclusive and with greater participation in every area of parish life.

The meeting will consider three questions:

1. The Parish Councils’ description of a synodal church
2. The Walking Together Journal
3. How do we ‘widen the tent’ and welcome our wider family in?

This meeting is *not* about asking for volunteers to ‘do stuff’: it *is* about working out what ‘stuff’ can or should be done. (We can look for volunteers, later!)

Please come and share your thoughts and prayers.



Receiving Communion from the Chalice

Communion under both kinds was common throughout the church but fell out of practice in the western church during the Middle Ages. Following the Second Vatican Council in the 1960s it re-established but, again, it was stopped during Covid.

Now, again, Communion from the chalice will be offered from the first Sunday of Advent in both parishes. This follows agreement of our Pastoral Councils and is a matter of personal choice without obligation.

The history of these changes on this one single issue illustrates how the church has been and remains in a constant state of movement and adaptation to factors which affect the lives of its members and wider humanity.

So, this latest change is less about any sense of going back to the old ways but more about asking humbly, how does the church work and respond now, today, in these circumstances?

This is Synodality already happening. It provides reassurance of the constancy and guidance of the Holy Spirit to steer us through change as we pray, listen and work to broaden our discernment, becoming an increasingly synodal church.





Sisters share our Synodal Journey

Sisters come and go but their mission remains constant and is remarkably consistent with our synodal journey.

We have become used to seeing the sisters at Mass and around the parishes of the Three Towns and although we may have some idea of the other work they undertake so we invited the sisters to tell us more about their order and their mission.

Sr Marie Monique, who joined us at the same time as Sr Ursula, has recently left us and moved to continue her work in Lancashire. The parishes expressed their appreciation and prayers for Sr Marie Monique's time with us at a farewell event in June. Many parishioners have reflected on her quiet, always prayerful presence and her ready warm smile of greeting. Sr Marie Monique remains in our prayers.

Sr. Ursula, who has been with us five years and Sr. Anna, newly arrived to replace Sr. Marie Monique told us that The Order of The Sisters of St. Paul of Chartres was established in 1696 initially educating young girls. Coincidentally, that is the same year as the Education Act was passed by the Scottish Parliament settling a school in every parish in Scotland, so quite a lot has happened since then!

The Sisters told us that the order now works in 40 countries over 5 continents around the world as well as in Saltcoats, Stevenston and Ardrossan.

Sr. Anna has previously worked in Seoul, Ankara and London whilst Sr. Ursula worked in The Lake District before coming to Scotland.



Sister Anna



Sister Marie Monique



Sister Ursula

Both sisters describe their activities in our two parishes as focused on visiting the housebound, older people and care homes providing company, comfort and communion. Sr. Ursula highlights their prayer life and entrusting the care of those they meet into God's care; and Sr. Anna also praised the way that members of the parish worked to support the activities of the community and Canon Martin.

And the link with synod? In an interview with Mother Myriam Kitcharoen, Superior General of the order interviewed in 2008, she said that they are *inspired by the teaching of Isaiah to enlarge our tent and extend our missions, and to let ourselves be guided and taught by the Holy Spirit, in a new Pentecost*".

So, it seems that the notion of welcome and participation as evidence of a synodal church is not as new as some might think. It is already embedded in the work of the sisters now working and sharing with us on our own synodal journey.



Pause for Prayer

As we walk together, we continually reflect on the place of prayer in our lives. Parishioners have shared how and why they pray as they build their relationship with God, who is always beside us and ready to listen to our worries, fears and petitions well as our praise and thanksgiving. We hope that by sharing we can help each other grow.

Reflect

Why is Jesus so adamant about us not judging? And why does he connect it to being judged ourselves? If we spend time and energy judging others, it will become a habit and will one day turn on itself, judging us and souring every joy and achievement with criticism and self-recrimination. Nothing we have or do will ever be good enough. And doesn't that sound a bit like hell? And if we judge others, isn't that being unwelcoming and preventing others from participating fully in the life of our parish and wider community?

Prayer

Dear Lord.

You came into the world not to judge it, but to save it. Grant me the humility to "judge not" and let me know the peace of not being judge, even by myself and to truly welcome others in your name. I offer you this day, and ask that you quiet my inner voice and that you open my eyes to the wonder and gift of all creation.

Act

Today, if you find yourself beginning to criticise or judge yourself or someone else, take a deep breath and raise your finger to your lips. Hush that critical voice with that simple gesture. Ask God to let you see that person or yourself through the lens of love. You will find God's love is contagious and there is no turning back.

***Holy Mary, pray for me now and always.
Amen.***

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St. John's Church, Stevenston and St. Mary's Church, Saltcoats. Parishes of the R.C. Diocese of Galloway.