

## **Towards the Second Session of the Synodal Assembly (October 2024)**

### **Synthesis of the Contributions from the Church in Scotland**

To the request of the General Secretariat of the Synod, *Towards October 2024*, the Catholic Church in Scotland offers the following response. As outlined in the Secretariat's request, the contributions of the eight dioceses in Scotland are here collected in answer to the guiding question – How can we be a synodal Church in mission? Reflections are organised to correspond with the chapters of the Synthesis Report, *A Synodal Church in Mission*.

### **PART 1 - THE FACE OF THE SYNODAL CHURCH**

#### **1. Synodality: Experience and Understanding**

The overwhelming welcome that many have given to this vision of a Synodal Church is a sign of the presence and action of the Holy Spirit in the process. There is much to build on but already the foundations are being laid. Understanding synodality as a spiritual process, which is rooted in prayer, listening and discernment, and guided by the Holy Spirit, enables us to foster a spirit of co-responsibility in the mission and governance of the Church.

Nonetheless, there is still hesitation on the part of some about this method of communal discernment. It is hoped that a greater appreciation of the equal dignity of all the baptised and the value of all their voices being heard, along with an increased understanding and exercise of the practice of synodality will help to overcome hesitations and will encourage more and more people to engage with the process. Many of those who have taken part in synodal gatherings have found that praying together has brought us closer as an authentically Christian community. Listening, sharing concerns, doubts and joys in a safe, non-judgemental environment has proved rewarding and meaningful.

The Conversation in the Spirit method may be used in any Church, family, or community context where discernment is required, decisions are to be made or grievances resolved. We must call on the Holy Spirit to be present as we listen and accompany each other on our journey of Faith.

#### **4. People in Poverty, Protagonists of the Church's Journey**

The Church must support the poorest and most vulnerable, however, the Church can only tackle immediate needs, not the causes. Politicians need to act, and to encourage them to do so, dialogue is necessary. The Church's social doctrine is a valuable resource that has the potential to make a real difference in our world if it were to be consistently put into practice. Every member of the Church should be more aware of the social teachings of the Church so that we are equipped to denounce injustice and speak with elected officials about peoples' real concerns. There are many occasions when the marginalised seem to remain marginalised by the structures and activities of the church, whereas we should be facilitating their voice to be heard, both in the Church and in society.

#### **5. A Church "out of every tribe, tongue, people and nation"**

To achieve this vision, we need to abandon our own reticence and learn to be open with other people about our faith and what it means to us. We must go out to the schools, involve families, engage young people, have social events, deliberately involve people, and learn to appreciate how others perceive things. Prayer is necessary. We recognise that we have already lost generations through our inactivity. We must seek to renew in ourselves and in others a living and active faith.

## 6. The Eastern Churches and Latin Church Traditions

To be more clearly a Church of Churches in communion, effective in service and dialogue, we should seek to understand the different traditions within the one Catholic Church. Eastern Rite Catholics have come to Scotland from India, Ukraine, and other countries. There are also a number of adherents to the Tridentine Mass who feel their desire for Mass in another rite is not being listened to. They have no wish to create another Church.

## 7. On the Road Towards Christian Unity

Positive relationships exist between the local Catholic Churches and other Christian denominations in Scotland. There are ecumenical services, Christian groups, social activities and, at times, shared use of premises. Sadness has been expressed by people from other Christian denominations who cannot receive the Eucharist when attending Mass. We must continue to build bridges with these brothers and sisters in Christ.

## PART 2- ALL DISCIPLES, ALL MISSIONARIES

### 8. Church is Mission

As the Synthesis Report notes, *“The sacraments of Christian initiation confer on all the disciples of Jesus the responsibility for the mission of the Church... They have received different charisms and vocations and exercise different roles and functions, but all are called and nourished by the Holy Spirit to form one body in Christ...”* (Ch 8, Convergences: b). There is little doubt that there are huge resources of people and expertise in our parishes that are not being used. *“In their immense variety, the charisms of the laity represent distinct gifts to the Church from the Holy Spirit that must be called forth, recognized, and fully appreciated”* (Ch 8, Convergences: f). We must consider: To what extent are we already doing this? How could we do it more effectively at parish, diocesan, and national level?

Significantly, before considering the various members of the Church, the Synthesis points to the crucial role of the family in the Church and in her mission: *“The family is the pillar of every Christian community. Parents and grandparents and all those who live and share their faith in the family are the first missionaries. The family, as a community of life and love, is a privileged place of education in faith and Christian practice, one that needs special accompaniment within communities”* (Ch 8, Convergences: c). In a world where the family is under attack in many ways, it follows that the Church will struggle in her mission to the world. This convergence concurs with what has been repeated in parishes and dioceses across Scotland: supporting and strengthening families in living their faith must be a priority. Family life brings many joys but also challenges and sadness, for example, when one spouse does not believe in God, children no longer practise the faith, or grandchildren are not baptised. Parents need the support of other adults to understand and fulfil their mission of evangelising their own children. However, many young families in the modern world struggle to achieve this, living as they do far from grandparents and other close relatives. Our parish communities must be ready to provide this support. Our parishes must be welcoming communities where parents benefit from the support, wisdom and encouragement of other members of the community, and children are cherished and nurtured by a community that desires to see them thrive.

At the same time, we must be committed to supporting the poorest and most vulnerable in our communities. All people must be treated with respect and dignity. Parish and Catholic school support of various charitable and international aid groups should be continued and

encouraged. But we must also reach out to those in our own parish and school communities who have become disenchanted, to those seeking faith, to the lonely, the hopeless, those who have distanced themselves from the Church for one reason or another. We must recognise those who feel marginalised in the Church by their situation in life: the elderly, ill, refugees, divorced, homosexuals. We must look upon them as Christ would, not in judgement but in mercy.

It is the responsibility of all the baptised to listen and accompany each other. To welcome the stranger and to walk together. There is obviously much more to the Church's mission than this aspect of welcoming people when they come for Mass. However, we must recognise that people will never seek what the Church has to offer if they do not first feel welcome in their local parish community. We need to be an outward looking church; we need to recognise that God moves among us in everyday life. God is not found only when we come INTO church buildings, but he sends us OUT and goes with us into the world, goes with us to encounter the people who are, and who are called to be, the Church. Renewed focus on evangelization is helping us to form communities of action and engagement. All Christians have a mission of reflecting the love of God in their individual circumstances. Pope Francis has been most influential in promoting a joyful missionary spirit.

In parish reports, a common theme was the need to recognise what is already present in parish life but to organise it in a new, synodal way, recognising the gifts and charisms among the laity, especially women. Special emphasis was placed on the opportunities there are with our Catholic schools. Outreach to the disaffiliated and those on the margins remains high on the agenda, a clear manifestation of the desire to be an outward looking and inclusive Church, embracing people where they are rather than only once they come to church. In this regard, there are a few questions we might consider in our parishes, dioceses, and episcopal conference: Are we doing enough to equip our lay people to be confident witnesses to Christ in today's world? If not, what more could be done?

The Synthesis proposes an expansion of existing lay ministries (such as the ministries of lector and acolyte) as well as the creation of new ones (such as a ministry assigned to married couples to support marriage and family life, and a ministry of "listening and accompanying"). In the context of our parishes, dioceses and episcopal conference, would this be an effective way of calling forth and recognizing the charisms of the laity?

Within our parish communities, there is also a need to promote varied and uplifting opportunities for prayer that do not require the presence of a priest, e.g. Eucharistic Adoration, recitation of the Rosary, Stations of the Cross, Lectio Divina. We need to come together and pray as a community beyond the celebration of Mass. Other forms of liturgical prayer, the Divine Office for example, as well as practices of popular piety, in which the distinctiveness of local cultures is reflected, are elements of great importance in fostering the involvement of all the faithful. They introduce the faithful to the Christian mystery and bring those less familiar with the Church closer to an encounter with the Lord. Among the many forms of popular piety, Marian devotion stands out because of its ability to sustain and nourish the faith of many.

## **9. Women in the Life and Mission of the Church**

The personal dignity of every individual must be upheld. Unfortunately, this has not always been the experience of women. *"Women cry out for justice in societies still marked by sexual violence, economic inequality and the tendency to treat them as objects. Women are scarred by trafficking, forced migration and war"* (Ch 9, Convergences: c). These injustices not only harm women, but they also have a disastrous effect on the entire human race. In situations

and societies where women are not able to flourish *as women*, a spiral of woundedness, darkness, and violence ensues. Local churches must be encouraged to extend their work of listening, accompaniment and care to the most marginalised women in their social contexts. In Scotland as elsewhere, women make up the majority of people involved in the Church. Their unique role in the Church needs to be recognised, and they need to be included, supported and valued within the Church.

The Synthesis proposes that the role of women in the Church be expanded, especially with regard to decision-making (although it does not open up the possibility of female priests). To what extent has this already happened in our dioceses? To what extent do we still have work to do?

One of the benefits of this synodal process is that women have been listened to, they have shared their thoughts, and improvements are beginning to be made. It is imperative that women participate in decision-making processes and assume roles of responsibility in pastoral care and ministry. However, the question of women's ordination is met with mixed views. Concern exists that many women feel active only in minimal roles. Women's abilities, experiences, and expertise should be taken into consideration when involving them in pastoral care and ministry and decision-making processes.

### **10. Consecrated Life and Lay Associations and Movements: a Charismatic Sign**

Families and parish communities need assistance to be what they are called to be. Religious communities have something valuable to offer here. The members of these institutes have taken a vow of chastity, not as a denial of their masculinity or femininity, but precisely to place the gift of their sexuality in the hands of God. To allow him to make them spiritual fathers and spiritual mothers in the Church. But they also live as brothers or sisters with the other members of their religious community. They live as a family in the Lord. The human formation and training in synodality, which should happen in every Christian family, is integral to the formation and daily life of consecrated men and women. Religious institutes provide this formation to ensure that all their members can live together as a family. At this juncture in history, in order to form parents who are expected to fulfil such a vital role in the Church, the wisdom and experience of consecrated women and men should be sought in parish communities, schools and universities, marriage preparation programmes, seminary formation, youth ministry, and the like.

### **11. Deacons and Priests in a Synodal Church**

As baptised persons, we are all members of God's family and have an obligation to do what we can for the good of all. In this dynamic of reaching out and seeking the good of all, we cannot neglect our priests. We value our priests and recognise the many burdens they carry on our behalf. We do not want to undermine their ministry; indeed, we want to help them. The care and support of our priests is a vital concern of the whole Catholic community. Although they are in a position of trust and authority over us, they are human and, like all of us, have needs that require our understanding and compassion. They need regular opportunities for rest, recreation, and spiritual renewal. To prevent them from becoming isolated in their life and ministry, they need trusted individuals among the clergy, religious, and laity who provide appropriate fraternal and pastoral support. Our synodal discussions already have encouraged "respectful listening" between clergy and laity even if, at times, tensions remain. These conversations must continue so that priests and people may be true collaborators, supporting one another in the Church's mission.

## PART 3 – WEAVING BONDS, BUILDING COMMUNITIES

### 14. A Synodal Approach to Formation

There is a general recognition that this new way of living and working as a synodal Church demands a profound culture change: a spiritual, intellectual, and ecclesial conversion. In this regard, it was noted that formation in synodality is necessary and, wherever possible, we suggest that it should be done with clergy and laity together. In consultation responses, formation has always been identified as fundamentally important in encouraging the partnership between clergy and laity in the new evangelisation. We propose that priority should be given to providing programmes designed and intended for the joint formation of the entire People of God (laity, consecrated and ordained ministers). There appears to be a gap between how synodality is perceived by the clergy and by the laity. Clergy and religious are more familiar with synodal structures within the Church, whereas this has been a new experience, and happily a positive one, for the majority of lay members of the Church. Formation that aims at synodal collaboration between all members of the Church would enable the ancient practice of synodality to bear new fruit. Dioceses should endeavour to encourage these projects within the local churches and there should be coordination at a national level.

Related to this, it has been suggested that priestly formation should not be isolated in a seminary but rooted in the community of the faithful. Interestingly, *Convergence d of Ch 11 Deacons and Priests in a Synodal Church*, states: *“In order to exercise ordained ministry in a context of co-responsibility, it is necessary to be aware of one’s own capacities and limitations... In this regard, the contribution of families of origin, and the Christian community, within which a young man’s vocation is fostered, as well as that of other families that accompany his growth, cannot be underestimated.”* Regardless of who is entrusted with training seminarians, each priest’s earliest formation was directed primarily within the home by parents and grandparents, and within the parish community by catechists, teachers, and clergy. What formation can the Church offer to lay people, so that in these relationships, they may be true co-workers in forming the next generation of priests, religious, and married persons?

In their roles as catechists, parents, godparents, and sponsors, lay members of the faithful prepare and present candidates for the Sacraments of Initiation. Catechesis programmes in our parishes are often led by lay members of the faithful. Sacramental Preparation classes for children and RCIA programmes are essential in forming individuals in the faith. Less developed in some dioceses are courses for parents requesting Baptism for infants and young children, and courses for couples seeking to be married in the Catholic Church. It is requested that each diocese or the Bishops’ Conference consider these areas of catechesis: what is currently being done to address them, and what could be established to provide proper formation more effectively. These and other programmes of formation, should include input from local clergy, catechists, married persons and parents and could be made available through diocesan websites and social media for ease of access.

We encourage dioceses to work together at regional level to create a culture of ongoing formation, using all available resources, including the development of digital options. Continual formation of both clergy and laity in how we worship, nurture community, and evangelise – in short, how we become ever-more a missionary and synodal church – is called for. This may include formation in recognising and utilizing the charisms of all the faithful, as well as on-going formation for lay catechists. Parishioners, too, benefit from faith formation, both lay and clergy led. Formation programmes help us to grow closer to God, prepare us for

roles and ministries within the Church, nourish us as individuals, help us evangelise and build community by living in faith together.

There is a call for better knowledge of the teachings of Vatican II, post-conciliar teaching, and the Church's social doctrine. Local churches are invited not only to make Catholic social teaching better known but to foster its reception through practices that put its inspiration into action. The more recently developed concept of integral ecology should be studied from its biblical and theological foundations. It should be recognised as an important aspect of Church teaching, liturgy, and practice, seen in light of the stewardship that God entrusted to human beings at Creation.

### **15. Ecclesial Discernment and Open Questions**

There was consensus on the necessity of becoming a Church that is better at listening. We are hoping that the emphasis on prayer and listening, as practiced in Conversations in the Spirit, will help shape the way people come to discussion, consensus, and finding a way forward together that is more integrative and focussed on doing God's will. Relevant authorities should implement synodality at regional, national, and continental levels in accordance with the insights that have emerged in regard to Church groupings.

### **16. Towards a Listening and Accompanying Church**

Listening to people with empathy and without interruption has enabled us to understand one another; it has brought forth fresh ideas and has enabled us to discern the way forward. Such efforts will make our parish communities more welcoming and inclusive. Creating such a community cannot be left to the clergy alone; it is only achievable if every member of the community takes on the responsibility of offering a word or gesture of welcome to a newcomer, making a point to get to know people's names, extending a helping hand, or taking a moment to engage in conversation. And this leads back to the importance of the family. It is within the family that we first learn the dynamic of synodality. It is in the family that we first learn to listen, and it is in the family where we learn to speak and first encounter persons who sincerely desire to hear us. If our parishes and Catholic schools are helping to form parents and young people in the art of listening, they, in turn, will be instrumental collaborators in the Church's mission by forming their own children and families in this art.

This is an area in which the contribution of women is essential. Women bring a particular wisdom which the Church greatly needs. They have a natural receptivity to others; this is the "feminine genius" of which Pope St John Paul II often spoke. Women receive other persons as a gift. They have the capacity, both physically and spiritually, to nourish and support other persons in their human development, to enable them to understand their human dignity, and to flourish as persons. Women are not "a problem"; they are essential to the solution of the world's problems. Even God himself did not save the world except through the free cooperation of a woman. We propose that women in our local churches are given opportunities to participate in decision-making processes and assume roles of responsibility in pastoral care and ministry where appropriate. We must seek to carry forward our understanding and practice of Women in the Life and Mission of the Church.

We recognise that many local parishes already engage in services which include listening and journeying with those in need both in their own communities and across the globe. If we propose to become a listening and accompanying Church, especially for those who feel excluded, then listening is an art we need to learn. We must hear the silent voices. Everyone has a need to belong. We also feel that the people of God who do not belong to any specific marginalised group, have a right to be heard by their bishops on matters of significance.

*‘Those performing the service of listening and accompaniment, in its various forms, need adequate formation, taking into account the experiences of those they come into contact with. They also need to feel supported by the community. For their part, communities should become fully aware of the meaning of this service exercised on their behalf and to receive the fruits of this listening. We propose establishment of a ministry of listening and accompaniment in order to give greater prominence to this service. It should be grounded in baptism and adapted to different contexts. The way this ministry is conferred should promote the involvement of the community’* (Ch 16, Proposals: p). As proposed by the Synodal Assembly, we recommend the establishment of a ministry of listening and accompaniment with proper formation. This will help to improve the way the Church discerns and responds to difficult questions.

*‘We do not start this work from scratch. Numerous institutions and structures carry out the valuable task of listening... and the many other contexts of accompaniment linked to consecrated life or lay associations. Connecting their work in a more integral way with the local Church community enables this work to be seen as part of the life of the whole community, not a delegated task.’* (Ch 16, Proposals: o). ‘Much "listening" and working with marginalised people is already being done by many formal Church organisations, but often the people of God in the parishes are unaware that this is happening. We feel that a much greater emphasis should be placed on communicating to the people in the pews what is being done in their name.

## **17. Mission in the Digital Environment**

We need to better understand and utilize the benefits of digital technology in our dioceses and parishes. Digital forums, streamed liturgical services, online prayer, youth ministry and faith formation can enable the Church to carry out her mission even when distance and other factors make it difficult to meet in person. We experience ourselves as a local church but for many, not as a diocesan community; social discourse must take place despite our geography. Websites and online newsletters can be valuable aids in the mission of each parish and diocese. Nevertheless, digital outreach should support but not replace personal outreach.

The Church also needs to provide opportunities for recognising, forming, and accompanying digital missionaries; facilitating networking amongst them and connecting them with their local Church.

## **18. Structures for Participation**

How do we go forward with fewer priests? Co-responsibility in the mission and governance of the Church is essential. We need to involve the laity more wisely so as to enable them to take responsibility. We need to move from maintenance to mission. Co-responsibility is evident in Fabric and Finance Committees and Parish Pastoral Councils that meet to organise local church activities. Outreach groups promote mission. Those in liturgical ministries and the upkeep of premises proclaim God’s presence and serve him.

Structures that encourage more participation are needed. Parish and Diocesan Pastoral Councils are needed. *“Based on the understanding of the People of God as the active subject of the mission of evangelisation, we suggest legislating for the obligatory nature of Pastoral Councils in Christian communities and local churches. It would also be desirable to strengthen the bodies of participation, with a proper presence of the laity, recognising the role they can play in discerning decisions by virtue of their baptism”* (Ch 18, Proposals, h). Decisions made by these councils should follow discussion and be carried through.

“I dream of a ‘missionary option’, that is, a missionary impulse capable of transforming everything, so that the Church’s customs, ways of doing things, times and schedules, language and structures can be suitably channelled for the evangelization of today’s world rather than for her self-preservation” (Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 27).