

Exploring new directions for the Catholic Church in Scotland: emerging themes

In their exploration of possible new directions for the church in Scotland, participants were invited to reflect on Bishop Leahy's presentation on a synodal model of church: what insights and observations stood out for them, what were they learning from his presentation? In the afternoon they reflected on the experience of parishes in rural Galloway, Glasgow and Edinburgh: what did they hear that would work in their parish?

From the 'gallery' of headlines in response to these questions, the following themes emerged.

New ways of being church

Synods should be **better known** as a way of being church. Pope Francis has highlighted their importance. They are a 'big picture change' with implications for 'parishes, decision making and ministry'. A synod is a 'process of growth and change', 'not a one off'. It is a time to begin again, to be open to the Holy Spirit and to change. The synod process is rooted in prayer and discernment. It is 'not just for people who come to church'. It meets people 'where they are'. Synod is 'journeying together with the secular world, other faiths, other Christians'. We need to find ways to include everyone, especially women, those who are marginalised, older people, young people, divorced and remarried. The 'camino' is for everyone.

The synod in Limerick was a 'refreshing **transformation** of "the church,"' a 'move away from self-preservation'. There is a huge pool of gifts in church which are not harnessed or affirmed – especially the gifts of women. A lot of good people are ministering outwith the church. The church is being 'left behind'.

The synod generated a strong sense of **co-responsibility – 'us not I'**. It was characterised by 'dialogue and inclusivity'. It tapped into and released energy through 'active listening and discernment'. It was marked by 'real, deep listening skills, mutuality and co-responsibility'. Language, especially inclusive language, was 'really important'. The image of the polyhedron was seen by many groups as a helpful way of understanding the diversity and inclusivity – and 'messiness' – of the church. There is a place for everyone with their charisms.

The synod's **structures** were important. Many conversations highlighted the stress on communication, consultation and accountability as well as the investment in planning, administration and IT. 'Widespread consultation resulted in widespread involvement'. Accountability was described as 'essential' – lay people are 'disenchanted' by consultations that fail to demonstrate accountability.

The synod empowered people at **local level**. The tone and style of the synod was 'empowering' and 'gave people permission' to take small steps'. Synod implies 'agreeing local priorities'. It 'created space for innovation to emerge locally along with a planned process for sharing ideas and learning'. It recognised the diversity of communities; 'many approaches are needed to meet local needs'. There is a 'yearning for parish life that helps us move forward together'.

In response to presentations from Galloway, Glasgow and Edinburgh, groups reflected that 'Local circumstances dictate response to change'. 'Identify needs and then do something'. We need to 'learn from others, share successes and failures with other parishes, and connect with the reality of communities'. 'Pool resources and people; have courage'. 'Gather together and take risks'. Offer training to 'give everyone confidence'.

One group suggested that a 'welcoming community is attractive to young people' as is 'the use of IT'. 'We should be more accepting of people with chosen lifestyles'.

We have a lot to learn from other denominations: 'ecumenism is important'. We need to 'work with other churches and agencies and learn from them'. 'Social action and outreach are important'. There were positive comments on the creation of the TLC café in Galloway.

Divine Renovation was described as 'a powerful book that needs to be adapted locally'. It provides a 'toolkit which can respond to local needs'. It 'could work in a parish looking for a structure for change'. It implies a gradual process, with 'small steps'. The workbook means we 'don't have to reinvent wheels'. Several groups suggested getting together and considering Divine Renovation in their parishes.

New forms of leadership

Issues of leadership emerged from conversations throughout the day. Several groups commented positively on the role of the bishop in calling the synod and 'releasing the energy of all God's people'.

One group spoke of 'tensions between the church's traditional leadership and the need to trust and involve lay people'. We need 'new forms of leadership and a change in our style of hierarchical leadership'. 'Hierarchical leadership must change'. 'Clergy need to be open to dialogue'. They have 'kept decision making to themselves'. In 'mission' countries there is plenty of lay leadership.

One group pointed out that the Galloway group had 'vital support from an open minded bishop and parish priest'. 'Reluctant priests' would be 'obstacles to change'. The introduction of Divine Renovation 'needs a willing parish priest'.

A new role for lay people

There was a great deal of discussion on the role of lay people, the importance of baptism, and new forms of collaboration between ordained and lay. 'Bishops and clergy need to be open to change; lay people need to accept responsibility; there has to be acceptance of lay leaders'. We need to 'help lay people recognise their talents and encourage their use'. 'The old model [of church] is no longer working; we need to invest energy in the people of God'. Lay education is 'vital and we need to ask for it'. 'We need a change of mentality from laity and clergy'. 'We need to 'challenge clericalism in all its forms'. 'The 'clerical mindset is no longer sustainable or acceptable'. 'Is the lack of priests a crisis or an opportunity'?

There was discussion of new forms of ministry. 'We need to rethink ministry in the church'. 'We need clergy formation in collaborative ministry and letting go'. 'We need episcopal formation in nurturing and training clergy'. We need 'empowerment of laity and collaboration with clergy'. One group asked: 'What's happening in seminaries'?

We are 'all missionary disciples, all learning'. 'Lay folk must be involved not because of the "crisis" in the shortage of priests, but because of their baptism'. 'We are all commissioned by baptism'. 'There is a need for mutual support and guidance between laity and clergy, and more responsibility given to parish pastoral councils'. Lay ministries have within them 'spiritual resources'. Mission is a 'major feature' of Divine Renovation. It is a way of 'empowering lay people' and giving them confidence.

Challenges to lay involvement were identified as 'work, family and attitudes within the church'.

The importance of prayer

The importance of prayer and discernment was highlighted throughout the day: we need 'prayer, reflection, listening'. 'Don't forget the power of prayer'. 'Prayer is the foundation'. Change is 'spiritually led'. 'Keep church doors open'. 'We need help with developing relationship with Christ'. 'Faith sharing and formation are important'.

Divine Renovation provides a 'positive affirmation of prayer life'. Encounter with Jesus is essential – 'spirit is the energy underlying all'. 'The Alpha programme opens up people's faith journey and offers a personal encounter with Jesus'.

The importance of different forms of prayer was highlighted. We need to 'connect with young people'. 'What are their prayer and meditation preferences'?

The challenge of change

Threaded throughout the conversations was the challenge of change. 'How do we foster co-responsibility and 'break old habits'? 'It takes courage to start a conversation about change'. How do we 'create a climate for change'?

One group pointed out that change was 'not always clergy-led'; everyone needs to be open to change. 'Everything can be challenged'. The church should have 'tables, not pews, to facilitate sharing'. 'Let new thoughts and ideas in – especially from young people'. One group stressed the 'importance of communication 'whatever you do'. One group thought we should 'focus on one aspect at a time and build on that'.