

# Synodal Response from the Transatlantic Super Region May 2022

## Introduction

There were many submissions to the Synodal consultation. The Transatlantic Super Region input came mostly from the synopses of meetings which were held face to face or online involving a team or a whole region. In addition, there was also a response from a single Team member and a response from a whole Team with their vision for the future using the guidance provided by the Vatican documentation and reflection having attended the Zoom discussions. One Regional response was from a region that comprised twelve team responses. Others were the result of several meetings with groups which were then summarised.

12 sets of responses were provided in writing by the following:

Great Britain Province (three Regions) (undertaken in 4 parts in Zoom meetings with multiple breakout rooms), plus responses from 6 GB Teams and One Individual

Ireland Region, including a synthesis of 5 Teams responses

Malawi pre-Region

South Africa Sector

Trinidad and Tobago Region

Most responses are from the perspective of Teams members in the Catholic Church, some responses consider the Synodality and Collegiality of the Teams Movement as seen by the respondent.

Method of Summarising

Responses were provided over a period from November 2021 to May 2022.

All responses were read carefully at least twice, notes made and discussed by the SR couple and the notes were arranged to provide the basis of the synthesis, summarising the points raised.

It is acknowledged that it was not possible to include everything that was shared but we trusted in the guidance of the Holy Spirit to help us in our task and guide our deliberations.

## 1. Journeying Companions:

### ***How can we be more welcoming as a Christian Community?***

“The church cannot be the Universal church of Jesus Christ without openly declaring itself to be the church of the fallen, the marginalised and the sinner and living up to that declaration through its welcome for all.” [Ireland region]

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There were many responses to the question of being more welcoming. Most reported the need for demonstrating “joy” and for being “welcoming” communities who show Gods love rather than being bound by rules.

Many expressed a need to support all: regardless of economic, physical, emotional situation, race, skin colour, gender or sex. The role of women was also an area which it was felt needs to be addressed in our communities and dioceses. It was suggested on many occasions that women do not feel valued in the Church but actually provide the backbone of effort and support in our faith communities.

There were many suggestions about how to achieve this welcoming approach:

- Be open to new faces; don't ignore old faces
- Have a welcoming team at every event to be a point of contact and to exude warmth
- Develop personal encounters with others in our community; those living in poverty, refugees, those with mental and emotional health needs, those in irregular marriages, those who are divorced, separated, or just struggling in life
- Meet people where they are and walk with them
- Break the ice and then develop relationship to avoid losing people to nothing
- Avoid 'rules-are-rules' attitude ... our community is not just 'black-and-white' there are a lot of grey areas
- Make 'welcoming' a more important part of our Sunday gathering around Mass
- Walk alongside those who have despaired because of the recent scandals in the Church
- “We need to ask ourselves if we are consigning to “the margins” those couples who are in different family structures, e.g. in stable relationships but not formally married, or those Catholics who are divorced and remarried, or those who are in unstable or difficult relationships – these are all our companions. Are we sure that they are welcomed and are being accompanied on the journey? Can we do better?” [GB Province]
- Each one of us is broken in some way – are we sometimes being too judgemental about our fellow travellers?
- “We must not be isolated in our own Team, Fr Caffarel said that “Teams should look outward” [Ireland]

## 2. Listening:

### *To whom do we listen?*

Listening is at the heart of the Synodal process. It was felt that in the Church the practice of listening and really hearing what is being said by the faithful is not

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strong. There is little experience in effective listening, and we all, priests and laity need to learn how to develop this skill. There is a feeling that the laity are not being listened to; there is a real hope and expectation that with Pope Francis and the Synodal process, this will change. There is a perception that at present “listening” happens through a “filter”. One response suggested that Canon law is such a filter.

Some comments suggested that we need to establish organisational structures to enable listening. This will not happen unless there is a real focus on this. This needs to happen at parish, diocesan and other levels in the church so that the views of the laity as well as the clergy are heard and, importantly, inform decision making.

With some exceptions, the voice of women does not feature strongly in the Church. A mark of Synodality would be to see this change. The hierarchy excludes women and there are few women in high positions and positions of influence in the Church, although more have been appointed in recent times. Yet paradoxically, within the history of the church, and to the present day, most of the work has been done by women. Parishes and groups within the Catholic community are often hugely supported by female volunteers. Historically, female religious congregations have contributed enormously to the running of hospitals, schools and parishes.

“To be Synodal the Church will need to learn how to listen – to develop the skills and the organisational approaches, to understand the lives and experiences and concerns of the faithful and to be open to responding to the messages that they hear”. [Malawi]

Some suggested that creating Parish Councils and/or Evangelisation Strategy Teams are ways of involving people and of opening dialogue within parishes and strengthening mission.

Some responses referred to the importance of involving all family members young and old... with special emphasis on our young people as they are our future Church (and future priests and religious). There should be a plan to engage and support young people beyond Confirmation.

Several said that we need to listen to our conscience and respond to the promptings of the Holy Spirit. As a Benedictine monk leading a Teams retreat once said “work, pray, agitate”.

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“Pope Francis said “...the Eucharist is not the reward of saints, but the bread of sinners.” The church needs to welcome all.” Listening is crucial to welcome.

### 3. Speaking Out:

#### *How can we be more honest in our dealings with one another?*

Many responses suggested the need for there to be an atmosphere of being “listened to” before people feel comfortable about “speaking out”

Some responses suggested the need for a positive and constructive way of speaking and for acceptance of differing opinions. The tone of speaking out and of listening needs to take account of the fear of confrontation and rejection that some have experienced in the past.

Many mentioned the need to recognise charisms and gifts of individuals and to allow people to play to their strengths and God given talents. It was noted that often people feel frustrated that priests are unwilling to accept offers of help from people with expertise – “the laity are no longer amateurs – the priests no longer endlessly energetic and able to be responsible for everything.”

Church and Laity need to act with transparent integrity for the common good.

A group shared that in a multicultural society like South Africa, it is difficult at times to speak out freely and frankly. To promote open communication, people have to first acknowledge each other’s culture, background and sometimes racial prejudices. Acceptance of each other’s past and current situation will help people to communicate better. As a result, speaking out will also require much honesty, courage and trust.

Suggestions for how to speak out:

- Listen with understanding and empathy.
- Speak out even if the issue is contentious.
- Combine thoughtfully chosen words with sensitive actions.
- Distinguish between the sinner and the sin -avoid righteous piety.

Speak with love for the other

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One response raised the promotion of Christian values in the workplace as an issue to speak out about. “Most people spend large amounts of their time in the workplace, whether virtual or in person, yet the workplace is rarely considered in terms of Christian principles. Issues of concern include treatment of low-paid workers, harassment of staff, inter-personal relations and behaviour, ethical conduct of individuals and organisations, and much more. There is a perception that young people are not being adequately prepared for their working lives. How do we give them the formation needed to cope with the complexities of modern working situations, as well as encouraging ethical behaviour in the workplace? In general, the priesthood, as a whole, does not usually have a lot of experience in any workplace outside the Church, although some deacons do. It was suggested that within parishes and within Teams we think about what formation is needed to prepare young people for their working lives and what support we need to enable us to function as good Christian employers and employees.”

A thought that was shared.

“The church is like compost, rotting and smelly, but it is transformed into nutritious life-giving earth by regular turning and letting the air in. The centre opens up to the periphery.” We need to mix things up in order for progress to happen.

### **4. Celebrating:**

#### ***How might we celebrate better the Liturgy in our Parish?***

It was clear from comments that journeying together in our prayer and liturgy is seen as crucial.

“A reoccurring theme of reflections was that of the need for flexibility and variety in liturgy, allowing local churches and communities to use that which expresses their faith and needs at particular times and places”

Many felt that to promote the active participation of all the Faithful the liturgy also needs to be accessible to all and inclusive of all. Priests and parishes need to look at the needs of all their parishioners –providing a variety of Masses, a quiet Mass, a sung Mass, folk Mass, school Mass, healing Mass and so on.

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Some suggestions were:

- Involve all ages in participation in the liturgy- e.g. young readers, family take up the offertory
- Encourage a folk-choir and congregation singing as this helps fuller participation in prayer
- Being a Catholic is not just about 'being on your knees'-it is being able to celebrate joyfully
- Celebrate each state in life i.e. mix school attendees with jobless group, Toddler group and the elderly and so on

Some felt that the Catholic Church doesn't experience the wealth of prayer that other denominations do, because the focus is on the Mass. It would be good to provide opportunity for different forms of prayer, praying aloud or in silence, communal prayer, praise and worship, adoration. Messy church, prayer groups for specific purposes, Mothers prayers and so on.

A thought from the Catechism CCC219 "The liturgy as the sacred action par excellence is the summit toward which the activity of the Church is directed, and it is likewise the font from which all her power flows. Through the liturgy Christ continues the work of our redemption in, with and through his Church."

### **5. Co-Responsible in the Mission:**

#### ***How well do we (clergy, laity) work together in mission of the Church?***

It was suggested that there needs to be clarity in what the "mission of the Church", diocese or parish is. In any organisation if people are to work together, they need to understand the mission.

Some felt that teaching and demonstrating love and involvement is "What Christians do" i.e. the mission.

As baptised Disciples of Christ we are all called to share Christ's message of hope. "Being witness to the love of God, is our essential mission as Church."

Formation was a key word in responses to this section – formation of both priests and laity. All of us should be actively involved in ongoing formation to enable us to be confident in our role as missionary disciples. There was an emphasis on training

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and formation, e.g. for leadership coaching for clergy and for laity so that the needs of those in our churches and on the peripheries can be addressed by confident well equipped missionary disciples.

Bishops and priests should encourage their flock to “co-respond” – to take an active part in their parish and diocese. There were comments that not all priests work in a Synodal way, making this difficult.

Many felt that priests could share their load more if they knew and trusted their parishioners more. It was felt that if they get to know their “flock”, better trust will build- they should “smell their sheep”. In some dioceses priests are moved frequently making this building up of relationships, local knowledge, and expertise difficult.

Lay engagement, if encouraged, leads to a feeling of shared responsibility in local communities which leads to cohesion and well-being.

We must be aware that formal structures for adult and youth formation are essential if faith is to be a source of life for future generations. This is our responsibility.

A comment was made that Teams of our Lady can contribute to the discussion in wider society about marriage and family life. Teams can do this through working with other organisations that support marriage and family life and foster strong social and family development and relationships. This happens in some countries in the Teams Transatlantic Region where Teams in GB, Ireland and Trinidad work in union with organisations for the good of all families e.g. GB Association of Catholic Marriage Organisations and Marriage and Family Life Departments and Trinidad AFLC (Archdiocese Family Life Commission).

Some commented that all parish service should be for 3 years. It was suggested One year to learn, one to excel and one to pass on the knowledge and skills to a successor. Examples of this could include service in parish teams (catechists, Eucharistic ministers, readers, cleaners etc.). In this way expertise is shared and roles are not for a select few. All should be encouraged to consider service in lay ministries, e.g. as readers, servers, ushers, welcomes, stewards, cantors, cleaners etc.);

“We are all responsible for creating an ever-flowing circle of love and compassion” for others.”

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### **6. Dialogue in Church and Society:**

#### ***How can we (diocese, parish, group) be more outward facing?***

Dialogue is more than words: it's what we do and how we show who we are. It is a two-way process – not “one way down” communication as some have reported feeling.

Dialogue involves listening and responding. We are all children of God and if dialogue is to be effective then principles of honesty and sincerity and respect for others are paramount.

Sacramental programmes provide a good opportunity for dialogue with those on the peripheries; many parents do not themselves understand the faith they are wishing to pass on and this is an opportunity for dialogue and growth.

“Parishes need to have a vision, not just on paper but, in reality.”

In the responses there were many suggestions on how to foster dialogue in Church and society:

- Get involved in meaningful ecumenism i.e. be open to experiences from other communities;
- “We must listen before we speak or act.”
- We must be aware of barriers to communication
- Keep it simple
- Recognise changes in society (divorce, LGBT, abortion) and develop helpful pastoral responses for those who are affected
- Support those in poverty, grief or stressful situations in our local environment by -volunteering in food banks, joining support groups, like Citizens Advice Bureau, and listening to their stories with empathy
- Support refugees from war torn countries – formally through Caritas initiatives and informally in our local places of work and worship
- Be seen locally through our witness

### **7. With the other Christian Denominations:**

***In what ways might we improve our dialogue and relation with other Christians?***

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Dialogue with other Christians reveals the presence of the Spirit, working in common among all the faithful for the common good.

Look for ways to bring different traditions together

Leave Catholic superiority behind and be prepared to welcome others in

Christians need to work together – they are now in the minority in some countries

Be represented and active in our local Christians Together group

Use ecumenical resources like “The Marriage Course” which provide enrichment for marriages

Join in Marriage week activities- each church taking responsibility for this each year in turn

Join in Songs of Praise events

Improve our participation in interfaith events (e.g. Good Friday Walk of Witness, World Day of Prayer, Christian Aid week, Messy church, Pentecost activities- Thy Kingdom come, Refugee support, Inter-church families,

Be more open to participation where possible ... (e.g. ecumenical house groups);

Recognise there are difficult areas (e.g. Communion) where sharing could be divisive;

Ecumenical Lenten discussion groups “The parish priest and the Church of Ireland minister gave Lenten talks in a hotel and successfully brought together two traditions.”

### **8. Authority and Participation:**

***How can we make the Church more participatory and increase co-responsibility?***

It was shared that Authority implies responsibility to facilitate growth and development.

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There was much discussion about Parish Pastoral councils. Some have effective groups and others are virtually unknown. To foster Synodality they need to be visible, transparent, and work effectively and communicate properly with their parish. Another suggestion was that the Parish Council / Evangelisation Strategy Team should if possible be democratically elected and listened to by the priest and parishioners

“The parish pastoral council can be thought of as an inner and outer circle of influence.-the inner circle concerns littler tasks and the outer circle is about areas of concern and how they may be approached.” [Ireland]

Share the message that participation in the life of the community is expected

Ensure inclusion and remove barriers

As said in a previous section it was felt that roles should be time limited to support better listening and ensure energy levels are maintained

People are wary of commitment as volunteers ... being drawn into wider responsibilities; but parishes need to “recruit” a pool of volunteers so that there is a culture of delegation

Recognise that lay volunteers have work and family to factor into other responsibilities;

Develop roles of pastoral responsibility for women;

Recognise value of all (men and women) equally in pastoral ministry ...

Give transparent shared consideration to possibilities for married and women-priests;

### **9. Discerning and Deciding:**

***What new processes of decision-making and decision-taking are needed? How transparent and accountable are the decisions made?***

Processes of discernment and decision taking must be rooted in a spirit of prayer.

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The Church will need to demonstrate that it is using a Synodal approach in all areas from parishes all the way up to the Vatican in future.

It will be necessary for Synodality to be embedded in future decision making.

Some ways suggested for discerning and deciding are:

- Encourage involvement in parish tasks and find ways of planning for success through consultation and listening
- Provide welcoming structures to support pastoral services
- Be open to new or different ways of working
- Listen to ideas from younger generations
- Encourage those who are reticent to get involved, to use their charisms for the benefit of all
- We can ask “What would Jesus do?”

### **10. Forming Ourselves in Synodality:**

***How do we form people to make them more capable of ‘journeying together’?***

Within the Church there is a real need for formation at every level to help to develop skills in listening, communication, discernment, and transparency, all of which are needed for Synodality.

Training is needed at every level to help people take part in this process. There was a view that specific training was needed for anyone undertaking a role of responsibility at ALL levels within the church, both lay and clergy, and in particular that clergy need training in all leadership skills. Training of priests should include skills/awareness in management, finance, psychology, counselling, among others.

Parishes should be encouraged to learn from each other with examples of where things are working well, and good practice identified and shared. This could include reciprocal visits. This type of learning could be facilitated by Deaneries or Dioceses but in addition parishes will need a level of “middle management” to embed learning and bring about change.

Suggestions made included:

- Less focus on programmes – walk with people from where they are
- Foster a sense of community

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- Attract and listen to younger people using their language and technology
- Provide formation(training) that is practical, relevant and socially bonding;
- Focus on relationship and not on rules and regulations

### **In Summary**

As summed up in a Team response...

Our dream is inspired by the Beatitudes of Jesus

Blessed is the Church that:

- Welcomes the poor and the meek and feeds the hungry
- Teaches care for the planet our common home
- Comforts those who are bereaved
- Is merciful to those who have strayed from the path
- Campaigns for those who are oppressed and without hope
- Seeks to be a peacemaker in times of conflict
- Is an inspiration for all the people of God to go out and preach the gospel to all people

**Transatlantic Super Region summary of Synodal responses  
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