



# Synodal Conversations

## What has been heard?

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Parish: Waterside (Glendermott) and Strathfoyle

Facilitator(s): Sr Evelyn Fergus, John McCrystal, Robyn Whitehouse.

### Introduction:

We adapted four questions/themes from the Diocesan Synod pack (Core question and questions 1,2 and 6). Our questions were: Q1 What experiences of Church in our parish do you cherish most? What do you think is missing that would improve your experience of parish? Q2 To what issues and groups does our parish need to pay particular attention? Q3 What can we do on a personal and community level to make our parish a more welcoming and inclusive community? Q4 How can we listen better to the different voices in our parish including those on the margins? We used a two- pronged approach using the same questions in a questionnaire (on-line & hard copies) and listening sessions in three of our churches. We rang those who filled in questionnaires and invited them to the listening sessions. We spoke at all Sunday/Vigil Masses one weekend and put up posters. Metrics: - 4 listening sessions – 33 attendees in total in three churches. 18 questionnaire responses. Sessions for JPPII students (10 participants).

### Parish Synthesis: (2½ pages)

The need for Mission and the critical role of the parish community was most evident in the context of concerns expressed about the decline in active participation in our parish and the wider Church. *“The response can only be an extension of the Eucharist, living out the faith”.*

#### **The Mass and liturgy (including music)**

Most participants said that what they cherished most was the Mass. *‘The Eucharist and the importance of the Holy Sacrament is everything to me.’* The choice of Mass times is greatly appreciated, also Adoration and Holy Hours. A desire for Masses that help build community and awareness was also expressed, for example, healing masses, and services that embrace people who may need support with problems such as alcohol, drugs, and mental health /suicide issues. Try to involve others in church ministries – one involved person invites another to read. We need to create an atmosphere of welcome and actively welcome new people to our parish.

#### **Communication**

Communication should be improved across a number of areas. The parish website for example, could provide better information about the activities of the many parish groups and other areas. Better use of notice boards and paper bulletins would be beneficial to those who do not use

technology. The introduction of the Church webcams due to COVID was recognized as a positive. We need to create settings / social events where people can meet and discuss parish life and their own lives and get to know each other and the priests. These events may also promote a sense of belonging and may help encourage people to volunteer for the many parish ministries. We need to link better with groups within the community and reach out to those on the margins. There needs to be a focus on using social media more efficiently. Technology generally, would help in reaching out to various groups such as our parish community, our young people and those who may have fallen away. It may help to spread the Christian message and enable us to avail of resources that may support our faith life.

### **Connectedness & Links**

*“I feel at home in the church, it is an extension of our home, being with the parish community and being part of the community.”* A recurring theme was the sense that there are “3 parishes within the parish”, aligned to each of the churches of the parish. This presents a missionary challenge as to how we can better connect as one parish family. A number of people suggested that our parish should work more closely together with neighboring parishes. A common theme was the need for better, more visible connection between the parish and our schools. This is just one important way of engaging with and investing in the faith of our future generations.

### **Leadership / Participation**

To effect positive change through the mission work within the parish it is critical that there is strong spiritual leadership from our priests. *“If we want to change or if we need to change it won’t happen unless it’s led by our priests.”* Mission can only be delivered together as a parish community. However, it is recognized that within our parish people seem reluctant to put themselves forward to undertake roles that involve leadership and responsibility. *“No one person can do this on their own it will take a collective and organized response.”*

### **Adult faith formation**

Parishioners appreciate retreats, missions, Lenten, Advent, and occasional talks by visiting clergy. There is a hunger for a deepening of faith and its continued input from Confirmation level to adulthood. Small group sharing e.g., Lectio Divina is a formative experience. *“Strong spiritual guidance from the priests is important.”*

### **Empowering young people**

Faith through projects can deepen young faith e.g., PJP2. Responses indicate the importance of young people to the future of parish and faith life. All parishioners have a role in encouraging this. Much commentary focused on young people being “missing” from the Church although recognized as good Christians. Getting young people back to Church could also bring back older parishioners, one encouraging the other. Teaching the faith cannot be left to the schools

due to resource and time limitations. Things have changed. Other themes include a powerful desire for children's liturgy, young people's Mass. Social groups and activities for young people and Church that develops a faith aspect. A recognized disconnect between family, Church and schools exists. Support of ongoing programs for the young is challenged by resource and priest availability. Is this an opportunity for others in the parish to be involved? Often the question was asked if we know why the young feel that the Church has nothing to offer them? What are their issues? What prevents them from getting involved in parish life? A strong desire exists to have young people involved, that they feel important to parish and faith life in it. The whole parish needs, as a duty, to establish that outcome by engagement with the young so that it comes to fruition. We need role models of all ages. There is a need for additional support of young people who have fallen behind during COVID.

### **Building a dynamic community**

The parish is a living community that needs nourishment to keep it alive. The 'Listening process' is good but a need was expressed for different kinds of groups, meeting and sharing. Hospitality after Mass could help build community. *"Our church is a community, and our community is a church."*

### **Evangelisation**

Evangelization is seen as a priority. *"We need to do what Jesus did and actively go out and find those who are on the margin."* The basics of the faith need to be understood and reflected on. Christian living in action needs to be experienced. A sense of the wider community not engaging with the parish should push the parish to be proactive and reach out to spread the Good News. Parishioners visiting homes, door to door to evangelize, particularly with young families, could provide good encouragement to others. Such attempts at this engagement need careful preparation. *"Perhaps start an 'Intercession Group' as a first step, through the power of prayer the Holy Spirit will guide us"*. Alpha and Divine Renovation were proposed.

### **Outreach & Social Justice**

Responses indicate a strong identification of mission and practical service of Christ through good works of outreach, charity, and social justice. Relevance is emphasized due to current economic challenges being faced, the high levels of poverty and social disadvantage, clearly present within our parish. *"Poverty is a huge issue and is very prevalent on our doorsteps. How do we respond, how do we reach out?"* A consensus exists that the wider parish community, including regular Mass-goers, would become involved in this type of ministry. It is an opportunity to connect with those of less active faith, as a stepping-stone back to Christ. Parish outreach could include food bank collection/distribution. Missionary projects also generate great enthusiasm, interest, and participation. Could under-utilized Church land,

property be used for the provision of community facilities? Groups such as young mothers, unemployed, older people, could meet for mutual support? These could be hubs that would potentially draw many people into parish life and extend the faith community. Do we welcome all e.g., the LGBT+ community, those with issues such as drugs, alcohol, and mental health?

### **A welcoming parish?**

The Listening Sessions challenged participants as to whether this is a welcoming parish. We are not sure, or best placed to judge. There are no formal processes to identify those who are new to the parish or to welcome and support them as they begin to settle with us in our parish community. This could become a tangible piece of work that could easily be part of our mission. Our young people said the things that stop Mass attendance include not knowing anyone, intimidating (feel you need to dress up), other commitments.

### **What does Pope Francis need to hear?**

Our JPII groups looked at this and highlighted the following - women need to be put in more leadership positions within the Church, should consider priests being able to marry, female priests, sectarianism, Mass attendance is lower and youth involvement.

### **Conclusions**

This process has raised expectations of change and greater welcome in our Church. We recognize that we have heard many of these things before, tried to take actions and not had sustained support. How do we do this differently now?

To have active participation in the life of the parish we need proactively to get to know each other using a range of methods e.g., adult faith formation, build small groups of people who pray together, know each other, and can support each other in time – mirror the early Church. Involve people in small things with no burden of responsibility and build from there.

We have lots of dedicated parish groups – need to highlight what they do and how to join them.

We need a plan to support catechesis, involvement and support of young people and families.

This needs to be done in parish as well as in schools and should include addressing the gap between confirmation and adult life (learn from our Syro Malabar parishioners).

Initially we need to identify a number of deliverables, realistic things learning from the process.

The points raised will provide focus for the Parish Pastoral Council.

Focus on our welcome for all through conversations and develop welcome packs. This is linked to how we communicate. Leadership – develop skills within the parish.

Linking up the enthusiasm especially of young people for the earth, making the themes of

Laudato Si more visible and real in our parish – using church land for allotments- involves

young people, helps with mental ill health, builds community but can think of lots of problems!

## **Appendices**

### **Glendermott and Strathfoyle**

#### **John Paul II Sessions (led by Robyn Whitehouse) - 10 participants.**

##### **What are some things that stop people engaging with the church?**

- Not a strong religious upbringing
- Not many other activities to participate in
- Social/work life may make it difficult to attend mass regularly
- Children may be disruptive so people may choose not to attend
- Inconvenient timing
- Intimidating environment (feel like you have to get dressed up)
- Don't know anyone
- It is repetitive
- If there's not choir/folkgroup
- You can do it online
- Mass can be a bit boring
- COVID
- Judgement
- Laziness other commitments
- Time consuming
- Lack of faith

##### **What issues do you think Pope Francis needs to hear about?**

- Women need to be put in more leadership positions within the church
- Should consider priests being able to marry
- Female priests
- Sectarianism
- Mass attendance is lower
- Youth involvement

##### **What are some positives about belonging to a parish or Catholic community?**

###### **Parish**

- Allows people to meet new friends
- Provides support
- Creates a sense of family
- Sense of belonging
- Practicing faith with people close to you
- Sense of solidarity in the community
- meditative
- Such an emphasis
- Folk group
- Lots of choirs
- Meet new people
- Opportunity to go to Mass

- Identity
- Involvement
- GAA

### **Catholic**

- Celebrating sacraments brings everyone together
- Strengthens faith

Some more quotations.....

'my great grandparents prayed in this church.'

"Faith starts in the home. Our homes are the little churches."

"Leadership brings responsibility – this may be a reason why people don't come forward to become involved. There needs to be a better sense of shared responsibility as a group".

'Prayer is good but we need to see the benefits in action.'

"There are good examples of community outreach, e.g. foodbanks and overseas missionary initiatives such as the Water Project, these generate great interest, enthusiasm and participation

"Groups like this need to meet more often, to water the plants".

"Our priests are over-worked and over-run. We cannot be too reliant on our priests, we need to develop roles for the laity".

"Can we make better connections with other local parishes, e.g. the Long Tower? It would nice to see parishes mixing more".

"The priests need to connect with the parishioners and the parish, they need to be inspirational and good motivators."

"We all have a role to play in running our parish and developing a faith community". 'We need to have structures in parishes that are maintained as priests change and allow parishioners to develop skills.'