

DIOCESAN SYNTHESIS

Catholic Diocese of Christchurch, New Zealand



Diocesan Vision

The Catholic Diocese of Christchurch is seeking to grow a community of disciples of Jesus Christ, striving to grow in holiness, supporting each other in community and on mission proclaiming the good news of Jesus Christ.

Diocesan Priorities



Growing in Holiness



Strengthening our Faith Communities



Proclaiming the Good News to others

Patron Saint

St John the Baptist - pray for us.

Cover Image:

This cross hangs in one of our schools. From the foot of the cross the koru of Aotearoa is followed by the frangipani from Pacific.

On the Crossbar, shells are assembled using Samoan shark tooth design representing our mountains.

From the top of the cross, shines the sun, borrowed from the Filipino national flag.

Three shells from the stalk of the frangipani suggest the Holy Trinity, the shark teeth, the suffering of the cross, and triumphing over all, the sun, giving us Christ the Light of the World.

Introduction

A synodal Church, in announcing the Gospel, journeys together

This document offers a summary synthesis of responses from the Christchurch Diocese to the questions:

How is 'journeying together' happening today in our Church?

What steps does the Spirit invite us to take in order to grow in our 'journeying together'?

Responses to the invitation to journey together in this process came through both group and individual participation. Many people took time to carefully, consider the questions and offer thoughtful responses.

The group gatherings were rich experiences for people. Although the Covid context hindered opportunities to gather, nevertheless, people from parish communities and non-parish communities came together in small groups to pray, listen, share their thoughts, and discern their responses to these questions.

Diverse and often creative responses also came from various survey initiatives including 577 individual submissions and 43 group submissions.

Separate email submissions were received representing a further 47 groups and 18 individuals.

At the close of the diocesan discernment phase the Diocesan Pre-Synodal Meeting was convened to reflect further on the diocesan response. Over sixty people attended from different parishes, cultural communities, schools and ministries.

Those participating in the synodal journey came from both urban and rural locations. They tended to be older and Pakeha, although some young people and people from non-Pakeha ethnicities, also took part, although there were perhaps fewer from these groups than might fully represent Catholics across our diocese. Most participants were either church-going or connected loosely to a Catholic community.

Those who took part in this process responded to the questions with great seriousness, and many had clearly thought deeply about the issues raised. The tone of responses reflected, variously, the joy of journeying together, the experience of pain on the journey, and hope for a synodal church of the future.

The joy of journeying together

The synodal process itself enabled people to deepen their involvement in their parish communities and nurture their faith through prayer, scripture, Eucharist and other forms of liturgy, group sharing and reflection.

People experienced joy in reflecting on their faith journey in these synodal sharing groups. Some saw the journeying together as rekindling the promise and excitement of Vatican II.

Pain on the journey

There were expressions of pain too, as people reflected on their experience of Church:

- **Frustration** at not being able to express their gifts through full participation, at the promise of Vatican II not being realised, at a lack of recognition of the diversity of the People of God, and at clericalism.
- **Grief** at seeing people turning away or being turned away. In Christchurch, there was also grief expressed at the way that parishes have been restructured with, as some see it, the loss of community.
- **Urgency** in terms of the need to respond to the climate emergency, poverty and racism in our society.
- **Horror** at the scope of sexual abuse in the Church reported through the Royal Commission of Inquiry into Abuse in Care.

Some people chose not to engage in the synod process at all, and others were not enthusiastic about it, perhaps doubting that it could achieve genuine renewal.

Dreaming forward for a synodal Church

Respondents saw a number of ways forward: hospitality, formation for all, embracing those hurt by the Church, listening (especially to the young), reaching out to other denominations and other faiths, rediscovering the priesthood of the baptised, and being aware of how God is speaking to us.

In what follows, seven themes that emerged from the responses are summarised. These are: celebration, participation, inclusion, mission, formation, ecumenism and interfaith, and hearing what the Spirit is saying to the Church.

The Catholic Diocese of Christchurch

As a city Ōtautahi Christchurch has experienced significant trauma and change over the past decade or so, through events that have impacted on people's lives in significant ways.

The Canterbury earthquakes in 2010/11 took 185 lives and destroyed many buildings, including churches. Some churches were repaired, others could not be saved and 12 churches were demolished. The Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament, much cherished by Catholics and many others across the city, had to be demolished.

In 2019, fifty-one people lost their lives, while at Friday prayers in the Christchurch mosque shootings.

The Covid-19 pandemic has also had an impact on the city.

Christchurch people have shown considerable resilience and compassion for each other throughout the experience of these events.

The diocese has also undergone significant restructuring during this time. Fifty parishes were consolidated down to twenty-five, and then in 2020 to eighteen.

During this time we have had two bishops (Ordinaries) with a new bishop, Most Reverend Michael Gielen, having been appointed in May 2022.

The reorganisation of parishes was part of a process called *Our Faith - Our Future*, which focused on parish renewal. Other programmes in recent years have encouraged the call of mission and evangelisation, resourcing parishes to embrace new ways of being on mission.

The diocese covers the areas of Canterbury and the West Coast in the South Island as well as the Chatham Islands.

We have a perpetual adoration chapel which has been operating since June 2013.

The Catholic population of the diocese is 62,715 and covers 51,780 square kilometres. The diocese has fourteen per cent of the country's half a million Catholics, with a pre Covid weekly Mass attendance of approximately 11,000. This has been fairly stable up until Covid, with an influx (especially, post-quake) of people from Asia (particularly the Philippines and India) and the Pacific.

We have 35 Catholic schools (28 primary schools and seven colleges), catering for over 8000 students. These are very important to the formation of our young people as Catholic education and Catholic schools (along with parishes) lie at the heart of the mission of the Church making known to all the Good News of salvation through the person of Our Lord Jesus Christ.

“Christchurch people have shown considerable resilience and compassion for each other throughout the experience of these events”

Celebration

This theme primarily addresses the celebration of the Eucharist and its centrality in Catholic life. Other forms of liturgy are part of this conversation but respondents' main focus was the Mass.

What experiences did people share?

People understood and honoured the centrality of the celebration of the Eucharist in Catholic life.

There were mixed views on the current form of the Mass. Some longed to return to traditional rites and styles. These people missed the 'sacredness and awe' of these traditions and lamented that solemnity and reverence were being lost through modernisation.

Many more respondents, however, wished to see ongoing liturgical renewal, in order to better inspire and guide people, including coming generations.

Young people agreed. Both in their group and individual submissions they stressed that they wanted to be empowered in their faith. This meant that the Mass needed to be more relevant to their lives. At present they struggled to find inspiration in homilies, the language of the Mass and its music.

One Catholic high school student observed that the Church needs to 'inspire and guide', and that 'quality music and sermons promote mental and spiritual activity' but too often the experience was of 'perfunctory ritual, deadly sermons, mediocre musicians, which poison the liturgy.' Young people spoke of seeking an 'authentic encounter' in the Mass but of being 'deterred by unsingable hymns and growly faces.'

Many people voiced concern about homilies: they longed for these to be much more informed, engaging, lively and relevant to their lives and their contexts.

Lay participation in the preparation and celebration of liturgy was felt by many, to be insufficient, with opportunities missed.

Some respondents observed that liturgies fail to recognise and express the cultural diversity of Catholics in Aotearoa New Zealand.

What suggestions did people make?

In line with the above, respondents' suggestions proposed quite different trajectories for change.

Some (a minority) wished to see the Mass return to a more traditional expression of faith, arguing that reverence for the Mass would promote active participation. Calls were made for more prayer groups in parishes, especially in devotion to Our Lady and the Rosary.

Many more, however, supported changes that would enable the celebration of the Eucharist to speak clearly to modern times and challenges in the following ways:

Language: the use of exclusive (sexist) language in the liturgy is a cause for pain. The prayers of the liturgy (and even the readings) could be more inclusive (and so embrace all the faithful) without loss of authenticity.

Homilies: in-depth formation is needed for both clergy and laity so that homilies are well-informed

by good scholarship in Scripture, theology, and local and global contexts.

Participation: many among the laity have gifts and skills that they can bring to liturgical celebration, if only they are invited and given appropriate formation. Liturgical groups having input into, or even being able to deliver, the homily was urged by some.

Honouring culture: liturgies could better include expressions of the cultures of our parishes through use of language, hymns and waiata, and the images used on feast days. This would involve each parish team working with the different cultures among its own laity.

Music: the parts of the Mass and hymns could be examined for their language, and how easy they are to perform 'with gusto' (as one respondent said) by both singers and musicians.

Participation

This theme addresses the involvement of the laity in the Church, from participation in the liturgy to sharing in decision making and governance roles.

What experiences did people share?

Many responses spoke of the importance of journeying towards a church in which lay people participate at many levels to a much greater degree than is currently the case.

This includes recognition of people's gifts and skills, and the creation of many more opportunities for people to exercise these including in the liturgy, and in decisions made about parish life.

Many felt very strongly about this. Responses referred to 'constant discouragement' of lay thought and initiatives, a lack of listening or reflection by those in authority, no attempts at co-governance, lay ministries being de-valued, 'no semblance of collegial responsibility' on liturgy and material matters, no accountability, no input, no consultation, 'autocratic dictatorship' in diocese and parishes, local commissions disbanded and ignored, elected parish councils abolished.

These feelings are reflected in comments about changes in the Christchurch Diocese. These changes have led to disconnection and a loss of identity, a loss of small communities where there is no longer a sense of *Journeying Together*. People have expressed their disappointment at not being consulted, some saying they were afraid to speak out.

Finally, people felt strongly, and spoke often, about women being denied full participation in sacramental and governance roles. Women voiced their frustration at being 'on the margins' despite the work they do to keep parishes functioning. There was strong feeling from many respondents that women should be involved in decision making at every level, and should be in leadership roles. Some proposed inclusion in the diaconate, but many more supported their ordination as priests.

What suggestions did people make?

This was one of the themes about which people were most passionate. It captures people's desire for the Church to be the people of God *journeying together*, rediscovering the priesthood of all the baptised. People see this happening through:

Continuing the journey of this synodal process by exploring different forms of participation through discussion, reflection and discernment in small community-based groups.

Collaborative leadership arising from affirming the place of laity and especially of women in leadership, ministry and decision-making. This includes working in ways that involve the priest but 'do not depend on him for a final say.'

Enabling participatory liturgy by re-introducing and honouring Eucharistic Services led by laity during the week (and on Sundays) when there is no priest available in a particular parish. Rural submitters spoke of their isolation and the lack of available priests. One submitter asked to remedy

this by having two priests available to every rural parish, but many more supported exploring other ways to celebrate liturgy in the absence of a priest.

Listening and acting on what is heard: a group of young adults spoke of the importance of empowering young people by listening to them and giving them opportunities to participate.

Participation through talents recognised and opportunities realised. People spoke of the pool of talent and skill available in their parishes and had a great desire to see these used in service of the people both in the liturgy (e.g. informing and giving homilies) and in parish life.

Overall, there was a strong call to review the church's approach to authority and to recognise and explore the baptismal priesthood of all the people of God. Support for women priests, married priests, declericalisation and collaborative leadership was frequently voiced.

Inclusion

This theme addresses people's experiences of 'journeying together' where some feel welcomed and encouraged on the journey and others do not.

What experiences did people share?

Many participants spoke of their yearning for a more inclusive Church. Some referred to their own parish communities as inviting to all. Others have experienced exclusion and neglect, sometimes personally and sometimes in relation to friends and loved ones.

Young people: There was great concern that young people are 'ignored and neglected' in many parishes and consequently are leaving the Church. Young people themselves referred to the importance of being listened to, welcomed and empowered. They seek opportunities for connection and service, for journeying in faith and for affirmation. Some young participants observed that the Church can unconsciously put up barriers in the liturgy through seating arrangements and forms of language and music that aren't inclusive.

Women: Many people commented that women, who do a great deal to keep parishes functioning, are nevertheless 'on the margins' in terms of being

included in decision making and holding significant roles within the Church.

Māori and immigrant Catholics: Some felt that much more could be done in liturgies and parish gatherings to celebrate the diversity of cultures in our communities. They commented on members of these communities feeling isolated within parishes.

Divorced and remarried Catholics: People in this situation, and others who know them, reported that this group feels 'shunned and estranged' in their parishes.

LGBTQI2+ Catholics: Some participants, including some young people, expressed feelings of deep personal hurt caused by exclusion relating to their sexual identity.

Some in these different groups report experiencing a Church that 'excludes, judges and regulates,' focusing on 'sin, atonement and redemption' rather than on 'grace and understanding.'

What suggestions did people make?

Dialogue: Many spoke about listening, acceptance and creating opportunities for dialogue between those marginalised and parish 'regulars', and between the laity and those in power in the Church.

Welcome: Much can be done, simply, in terms of welcoming and acknowledgement, especially of the family new to the parish, and the visitor. Parishes can actively work to appreciate differences across many forms: cultural, socioeconomic, age, sexual identity, and marital status. In parish activities, liturgies, outreach and communities, it's vital to listen and respond with hospitality and humility.

Parish members can seek out those who have become estranged from the Church and invite them back into community 'over a cup of tea and a conversation with friends.'

Bicultural relationships: It's essential to recognise and honour our bicultural reality as expressed in

the Treaty, including finding creative ways to use te reo Māori in liturgy.

Multicultural relationships: Parishes are increasingly multicultural so working with people to incorporate aspects of different cultural practices into liturgies and celebrations is an essential part of parish life.

Embracing those hurt: There were many calls to embrace people who are excluded by the Church (divorced and remarried, LGBTQI2+, laicised priests). Serious consideration was urged regarding access to the sacraments for those divorced and remarried. The blessing of same sex couples was encouraged.

Clergy: People also sought 'a much warmer and more welcoming, concerned and interested approach from the clergy, who need to be part of, rather than apart.'

Mission

This theme addresses the way journeying together enacts the nature of the Church 'as the pilgrim and missionary People of God' (Synod Preparatory Document). Some people saw mission as bringing people (back) into the Church, and some as the Church being out in the world as servant and prophet.

What experiences did people share?

Some participants reported feeling heartened to see their parishes move 'from maintenance to mission' by forming small groups to share pastoral work and outreach with the priests. The Alpha programme was seen as an important evangelisation tool.

In terms of its mission in the world, some participants were concerned that 'the Church does not move into and speak in the margins of society enough.' Others were concerned that 'a narrow

focus on devotion leads to ignorance of social challenges.'

The Church was at risk of losing touch with people: '[It] ignores the social and cultural context of the modern city - and is ignored by it.' And of failing to take up Pope Francis's challenge: 'I want a church that is hurting ... on the streets ... with shepherds that smell of the sheep.'

What suggestions did people make?

Speaking out: People saw a great resource for mission in the Tradition and social teaching of the Church and wished to encourage ways in which Catholic Social Teaching, values and morality could be heard in public.

Addressing abuse: Some stressed the need to 'get our own house in order before evangelising,' by addressing the core problems that have led to the prevalence of sexual abuse in the Church. 'We still have structures in place and follow teachings that led to these scandals occurring in the first place.'

Service: There is enthusiasm to reclaim the missionary nature of the Church through performing the works of mercy by reaching out to those in need and on the fringes, those who cannot get to church, the sick, and the dying. Community service was part of this: budget advice, visiting, transport, holiday activities and food banks were all encouraged.

Social justice: People desire a church that is passionate about the common good and social justice. They want to see the Church providing prophetic leadership, taking action in the world especially in relation to the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor. There is real urgency in people's concern that the Church speaks up on the climate emergency, following the lead of Pope Francis in *Laudato Si'*.

Te Tiriti: There were also calls for the Church to 'step up' in relation to biculturalism and Te Tiriti because injustice and the effects of assimilation are still being felt in society.

Prison chaplains: A submission from a group of prison chaplains commented that 'the Church can and should be a prophetic voice within the Justice system.' This group sees an opportunity for this in Hokai Rangī, the strategy of the Department of Corrections/Ara Poutama Aotearoa. They see this strategy as 'prophetic and entirely consistent with Christian values.' The six pou of Hokai Rangī are: (i) humanising and healing, (ii) whānau, (iii) incorporating a Te Ao Māori worldview, (iv) whakapapa, (v) foundations for participation, (vi) partnership and leadership. The chaplains comment that the strategy 'would be enhanced if the Church were to publicly endorse and support [it].'

Our Tradition: There is a powerful Tradition that invites us to mission: one group wrote of 'the teachings of successive popes, going back more than a century, who have condemned unfettered capitalism, environmental degradation, war, the arms race, economic exploitation, racism and gender inequality.' This group calls on the Church to 'teach the non-violence and radical nature of Jesus and highlight the presence of grace everywhere' and to 'place social justice at the heart of the nature of God as Vatican II did.'

Formation

This theme addresses the desire for renewal in the Church to be based on a firm foundation, for both clergy and laity, of faith informed by a sound understanding of Scripture, Tradition, Catholic Social Teaching and spiritual awareness.

What experiences did people share?

This synodality process has been an experience of formation for many. People valued the ways in which the discussion in small groups 'enlarges one's faith and sense of community.'

It is clear that many people long for nourishment in their faith. One group wrote of people 'meeting the Risen Christ in their daily lives and seeking to find in a hopefully nourishing community a source of grace, support and transforming love. They recognise how essential belonging to a collective ecclesial community is for the development and sustenance of their faith.'

As people seek more inclusion and participation in the life of the Church, they also seek the formation that will enable this transformation to occur. This means enabling clergy and laity to develop in-depth understandings of Scripture, Tradition and Catholic

Social Teaching, as well as access to modern theological insights.

Submissions referring to a Church characterised by 'boring' homilies that 'need to explore broader theologies,' outdated understandings of human dignity and rights, a dualism posed between science and religion and a lack of understanding of diverse cultures, all point to the need for on-going formation.

Some respondents sympathised with priests asked to minister in settings very different from their culture of origin and previous church experiences, but found these experiences alienating and urged better training and formation for clergy in this situation.

What suggestions did people make?

Community: many would like to continue these small group discussions. Some mentioned that this is especially important in Christchurch in the context of the amalgamation of parishes - small groups can help to foster community. There are many Scriptural and theological resources that can nurture such groups.

Scripture: assisting clergy and liturgical groups within parishes towards better biblical understandings to inform homilies and liturgies would greatly nourish congregations.

Leadership training that includes spiritual guidance and theological understandings of leadership, together with community empowering skills would assist clergy, parish employees and administrators in their service.

Modern contexts need leadership relevant to the present needs of the wider community. This includes understandings of, and respect for, diverse cultures, human dignity and rights. Formation/

education is especially important regarding the place of Tangata Whenua and Te Reo Māori in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Science and religion should not be presented in opposition to each other. Many submitters commented on this. Some encouraged more adult catechesis in scripture, theology and liturgy 'in the light of our 14-billion-year-old universe - the story of God's mercy and the goodness of creation.' The Church needs ongoing engagement in scientific and technological education, leading people to greater understanding of the natural world. 'This is the work of the Spirit of God...in a world that is in disarray.'

Formation in ecological morality is urgent: the Church needs to teach, preach and act on the work of Pope Francis by highlighting and enacting the principles of *Laudato Si'* and care for our common home. Again, there are many resources available for this.

Ecumenism and Interfaith

This theme addresses a desire by some respondents for the Church to be more open, collaborative and welcoming in relation to both interdenominational and interfaith understandings and relationships.

What experiences did people share?

Submitters referred to groups in some Catholic parishes meeting regularly with their Anglican neighbours. Joint services with other denominations are also mentioned. People commented on feeling enriched and blessed by these connections and shared experiences.

Some people expressed concern at what they saw as a loss of ecumenical spirit within the Church. They recall the willingness towards ecumenism

that Vatican II encouraged but have not seen this flourish except as an expectation 'that one day there will be one denomination - Catholic. That is not ecumenism.'

There are not many experiences of ecumenism shared in the submissions, perhaps because these are relatively rare. More attention is given to suggestions for what might be done to develop a more ecumenical spirit within the Church.

What suggestions did people make?

Ecumenism is broadly interpreted in people's suggestions as an openness to those who are not Catholic, including Christians of other denominations, people of other faiths and people who profess no religion.

This openness takes various forms. Some would like to see more frequent joint services with members of other denominations and other faiths (Islam and Hinduism are mentioned).

In relation to Christian ecumenism, some would like to see the Church welcoming people of other Christian denominations to the celebration of the

Eucharist. Some who spoke about this would like not only to welcome others but also to allow all to share in receiving the Eucharist 'in the spirit of Jesus words, "Take and eat of it, all of you."'

People argued that the Catholic Church shares with other denominations the common ground on which Christianity stands and that there is more agreement than disagreement among Catholics and people of other Christian faiths. This, they hoped, should lead to respect for the heritage and traditions of other churches.

"Many said that they have not previously had opportunities to be listened to. The group process of listening and silence was cherished. People found in the experience ways to listen, build trust, learn and 'dream forward.'"

Hear what the Spirit is saying to the Church

The closing theme in this summary synthesis acknowledges the way in which people who took part in this synodal journey embraced the process and expressed in their submissions a passionate love for the Church and an urgent plea for renewal.

What experiences did people share?

The Synodal process was welcomed widely in written responses and in group gatherings. Many said that they have not previously had opportunities to be listened to. The group process of listening and silence was cherished. People found in the experience ways to listen, build trust, learn

and 'dream forward.' Some expressed as 'essential that people are involved in decision making in our Diocese.'

Pope Francis's vision, words and efforts to renew the Church through this process were welcomed.

What suggestions did people make?

More than one submission referred to this synodal process as a 'Kairos moment' for the Church. 'The time has come,' 'Now is the favourable time,' 'Open the windows.'

People called for courage and faith to discern and act on what the Spirit is saying to the Church at this time. Some of the areas where this is needed were identified as:

Sexual abuse: people urged honesty, humility and openness 'for the light of truth and humility to shine into the dark places of our Church.' They stressed the importance of welcoming those who come with concerns and complaints.

Vocations: the lack of priestly vocations is a clear trend. What can we discern about what the Spirit is saying to the Church through this?

Marginalised voices: it's important to be aware of how God is speaking us through voices we sometimes ignore.

Science: the dualism that sometimes appears in homilies between science and religion is unnecessary and damaging. The Church should make a credible connection between science and faith, recognising that we can embrace both while celebrating the goodness of God's creation.

Second Vatican Council: This was a strong theme in submissions. While a small number lamented the changes to the liturgy that the Council introduced,

most people urged a fresh study of the wide-ranging teachings of Vatican II and a renewed willingness to implement them.

People expressed grief for the lost opportunities of Vatican II to build a 'sustainable and meaningful future' enlivened by 'the Holy Spirit, sacred scriptures, and dynamic tradition.'

They saw the Council as a transformation event from which 'a new vision of Church' emerged, 'filled with challenges and alive with expectation.'

One group urged that 'the People of God concept, which was so refreshing during Vatican II, must be really adopted now.' Another that 'the Church is the people of God: [let's] rediscover the priesthood of the baptised and let's live into that promise.'

Courage: Many people involved in this synodal process showed a great willingness and enthusiasm for change and renewal. They urged a continuation and expansion of the spaces opened up by this process:

'Make room for on-going conversations, for listening.'

'Don't be afraid of what might happen.'

'It's not easy but the Holy Spirit is challenging us all to respond.'

