



Submitted Synthesis from Deanery Meeting

Deanery: St Giles
(Edinburgh City)



Archdiocese
Of St Andrews
& Edinburgh

Edinburgh Deanery Synthesis

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Background

This synthesis is collated from the discussions held at the Edinburgh Deanery event on the evening of January 26th, 2022.

The attendees, representing around 16 parishes within the Edinburgh area, were asked to sit in groups with people from different parishes.

In total, there were 15 groups, ranging in size from approximately 3 to 8 people.

There were two written submissions for the groups to work on that evening. They are as follows:

Journeying together as a Church implies a vital relationship with God, individually and communally. How can we foster and deepen each person's relationship with God through Christ? What are we doing well that needs to be maintained? What needs improving?

And,

Journeying together as a Church implies loving concern for those who no longer walk with us, or who 'lag behind'. How can we reach out to the 'lapsed', the disillusioned, the wounded, the angry, the apathetic? How can we help them feel they still have a home, and a mission, within the Catholic Church?

Key Points

After having reviewed the submissions several times, certain overarching commonalities became apparent.

- There was a desire for our parishes to be rich in prayer life and to provide a warm, inviting welcome to everyone and a listening ear and compassionate attitude to those who seek truth and justice.
- The love and concern participants had for others was plainly obvious and most seemed greatly troubled that our brothers and sisters in Christ, especially youth and young adults, were leaving or have left the Church.
- The relationship youth and young adults have with Jesus, or the lack thereof, and the quality of Catholic instruction, or catechesis, they have received was questioned.

Before continuing, a few explanations need to be made regarding some of the terms used. When 'youth' is used, this can mean any stage from children in upper primary school to older teens. What also might be a cause for confusion is the use of 'Church' itself, which can mean the Church overall in the world, our Archdiocese, or our individual parishes. Hopefully, the distinctions are clear in the detail that follows.

Detail

The first submission, broken down into the three questions posed:

How can we foster and deepen each person's relationship with God through Christ?

There is a great desire to have a Church that strives to 'love thy neighbour' and provides a sincere

invitation and welcome to all, especially to those who feel anxious or alienated i.e., divorced and remarried, LGBTQ+. Many suggested that we, individually and as a Church, must 'meet people where they are at', remember to 'find Christ in others', and treat all with equality: we must be able to listen carefully with reverence and gentleness so that conversations, even difficult ones, can be respectful and fruitful.

The transcendent beauty of the liturgy and the variety of ways of praying inspires awe, engages the hearts of those who participate, and draws in those who may or may not be seeking God. Attendance at Mass and personal prayer are vital to our loving relationship with Jesus, which is paramount, not only to ourselves but also to those we encounter.

Worship and prayer for every day, and not just on Sundays, is key for deepening our faith. Provision of retreats, talks and courses also allows for growth. Public celebrations and expressions of our rich Catholic faith, such as feast day celebrations and Eucharistic processions, would be another way for others in the wider community to encounter Christ through us.

Having in-depth catechesis, especially homing in on the Church's social justice teaching, and faith formation in children and youth was also seen to be crucial to the passing down of the Catholic faith. Parents should continually seek to deepen their relationship with Jesus and to be models o

f faith to their children: we cannot love who we do not know and the same goes with our children. This emphasis on catechesis, faith formation, and getting to know Christ personally, especially for but not limited to the younger generation, would help to encourage truth-seeking, discussions regarding the inner life, and prayer. Having parishes more involved with schools, with more laity-led endeavours, may be a way of deepening our relationship with God through Jesus Christ.

What are we doing well that needs to be maintained? COVID has made attending Mass challenging and participating in parish activities very difficult; however, many found online resources very useful and engaging during this time. Parish online Mass, prayer groups, talks, Bible studies, etc., have all been very welcome and utilized. Additionally, the availability of Catholic apps such as Hallow, Word on Fire, etc., have also been of great benefit. Even though COVID restrictions are easing, there is certainly a place for online groups to continue.

Ministering to those in need and sharing the Gospel via SPRED (Special Religious Development), SSVP (Society of Saint Vincent de Paul), and the many other groups, has been very good and should continue with renewed vigour following COVID. The Young Adult's group at the Cathedral is also a much welcome organization. Ecumenism should also continue and be promoted.

The introduction of the online Diploma in Catechetics course in the Archdiocese, for example, has been an encouraging step to enhance the knowledge of the Catholic faith among the laity. Reverent and prayerful liturgy was particularly commended, along with the importance of good preaching, and the availability of Children's Liturgy during Mass for children.

What needs improving? The Church should be more welcoming and helpful, and much less censorious, especially to those who may feel marginalized. However, it is also important for Church hierarchy to be more willing to speak the truth on controversial topics to avoid confusion and mixed messages regarding Church teaching.

Many are concerned that young people are leaving the Church and that the Catholic faith is not being passed on effectively. Many felt that faith formation and rigorous catechesis, especially for but not limited to our young people, needs improved or better promulgated.

The wider uptake of the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd should be considered for use in parishes for children ages 3-12 and that additional catechism classes be offered where possible.

Parish life should be integrated more with primary and secondary schools, and connections between schools and parishes strengthened and fostered. More activities, groups, and opportunities for children and youth to help those who are sick, poverty-stricken, or vulnerable could be developed. More chances for children to attend Mass may be created during the school week, and the use of music as a way of prayer may help to engage them.

A more friendly atmosphere should be cultivated in parishes, including having welcomers at the door before Mass if not already in place. A suggestion of 'Name-Tag Sunday' would encourage getting to know one another again. Parish coffee mornings, other face-to-face activities, and social events should be restarted, where there is ability.

Creative ways should be employed to reach out and invite dialogue with those who perhaps no longer practice, who misunderstand, or have misgivings regarding the Church or its teachings. Setting up and carrying out informal social events to invite the wider community may be a way to engage these people.

There were requests to open churches for more hours during the day for communal worship, private prayer, and that devotions i.e., Benediction, Adoration, Taizé, etc., be increased during the week where possible. Mass should be made available early in the morning and later in the evening to accommodate those who work during the day or find it difficult to attend daytime Mass. Suitable spaces for Reconciliation are important during COVID restrictions and beyond.

The laity should become more involved in the life of the parish, in prayer groups, in parish ministries, and realize their vital role in the Church. There were requests to have more groups available for older adults and singles. Ministries and groups, such as bereavement support, catechesis, etc., should have many lay people involved as this helps to take some of the workload off priests who are inundated. Parishes may decide, after prayer, reflection, and discernment, to direct their efforts to a particular area of service.

Creation of an Archdiocesan-wide resource to enable laity to be notified of opportunities for action, volunteering, etc., would be helpful. Potential volunteers from parishes and those who don't normally participate in parish life could more easily see where the need is in the community. Appropriate training should also be made available where required. Laity outreach to the lonely and/or isolated should be a priority and contact to these people be maintained, despite difficulties with GDPR regulations.

The Church should not cause further division by making it more difficult for those who worship using the Extraordinary Form (Latin) Mass. It was pointed out that many young people are being drawn back into the Church with the Latin Mass. Women should also be appointed to more leadership roles in the Church and be counted and seen as equals.

Noticeboards should be utilized outside of churches, and one made available at the Cathedral, to reach people who do not use online sources and those who pass by. Notifications and messages of welcome should be provided in other languages when useful. Finding ways to include those who don't have IT skills or equipment when online events are offered is also important.

There was also a desire to have pastors rather than parish administrators who may not be as involved in community building within the parish as pastors may be. A mentoring program may be helpful to ease administrators into parish community life. There was also a suggestion that, where possible, the PVG process be expedited.

The second submission, broken down into the two questions posed:

How can we reach out to the 'lapsed', the disillusioned, the wounded, the angry, the apathetic?
We must be being willing to personally seek Jesus always and put Him at our centre. Our life of faith

can be shared with others, but we cannot share what we do not have. We must accept people as they are but also find out why people have ‘lapsed’, left the church, are disillusioned, etc., by gently asking, and by listening to the responses without judgment or agenda so that people feel heard. As a possible starting point, if we know of any non-Catholics who attend Mass, we might ask them what keeps them going. We need to be welcoming to all, especially to those who may not feel accepted because of their lifestyle choices and situations. We need to continue to pray for others and ourselves, that the Holy Spirit enable us to overcome any difficulties we encounter. Let us remember that we can ‘sow seeds’ but that only God ultimately changes hearts.

Let us be mindful too of our language; terms such as ‘lapsed’ may imply a superior stance which can be construed as patronizing. We must continually strive to rid ourselves of condescension and supercilious words and actions. By accepting people as they are and recognizing that we are all beloved Children of God whom Jesus suffered and died for, we can better support those who bear heavy crosses.

Let us pray for healing and forgiveness from those deeply affected by the sexual abuse scandals emanating from the Church, and let us look with humility, and a lack of defensiveness at sins, failures, and mishandlings, from those in positions of ‘power’. We should do our best to repair and build bridges to those who have been wounded.

We can provide, perhaps by creating a local laity-lead Catholic counselling ministry, and better advertise courses that reengage people who are seeking i.e., Landings, Catholic Alpha, and be prepared, as previously mentioned, to ‘meet people where they are at’ and show them charity, compassion, and mercy always. Another idea would be to offer special rededication services for those who are making moves to return to Catholicism after a long period of absence.

We all recognize the pressures school children and youth face to conform to the surrounding culture which all too often does not include God or is negative about religion. Distractions are nothing new, and it’s all too easy for our young people to lose interest, to become apathetic, and to stop being involved in Mass and other parish activities. The key to reengaging the youth is Jesus; they need an encounter with Christ, with follow-up and mentoring, to hopefully fuel a desire in them to deeper relationship with Him. An openness on their part is vital. They need Christ-centred role models and good examples of how to pray to guide them on this journey.

Misconceptions and misunderstandings about doctrine and scripture should be tackled early on in our young people’s spiritual development. Knowing our own faith may allow for more fruitful dialogue.

The Church’s teaching on environmental issues i.e., *Laudato Si’*, should be put into practice from parishes into in our local communities as much as possible. Let us bring more positive Catholic presence into the arts, theatre, and film to ‘evangelize the culture’, give examples of Christian life, and to break down some of the barriers and confusion surrounding Catholicism. The Church’s online presence should continue to provide inspiring and engaging content as it recognizes the ‘new media’ as means to evangelization.

How can we help them feel they still have a home, and a mission, within the Catholic Church?

The parish can be a social hub and a centre of community life; fellowship and relationship can be carried on to others who may only be slightly connected to the Church. We can offer parish ‘open-days’ and invitations to ‘come and see’ and personally ask family and friends to attend and be involved. Hosting musical events, such as organ recitals, and other initiatives such as ‘Nightfever’, may be a good way to welcome those who are not normally part of parish life. The laity may take the initiative to personally contact, invite, and follow-up with people; having the information database to be able to do this effectively is essential.

Having affable and available priests and Church hierarchy is very welcoming to all and makes visitors feel at ease. The example they set is noticed widely. And let us all make more of an effort to be

hospitable, for we all are called to mission, and we all have a role to play; we must remember Jesus' mercy on us and our duty to be merciful to others. Because we put our trust in Jesus, let us be fervent at sharing our hope in Him with others despite the challenges that we face.