



# Submitted Synthesis from Deanery Meeting

**Deanery: St Mungo & St Ninian**  
(Falkirk & Stirling)



Archdiocese  
Of St Andrews  
& Edinburgh

*St Mungo and St Ninian Deanery*

**Deanery Synod Meeting, 11 January 2022, St Francis Xavier, Falkirk**

**– Draft Synthesis**

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Two questions were considered in the spiritual conversations held by the parish representatives.

- 1) 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?
- 2) 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.

**Question 1**

The responses received can be placed into three broad categories.

**A) *General responses made regarding 'How can we foster and deepen each person's relationship with God through Christ'***

**B) *What are we doing well that needs to be maintained***

**C) *What needs improving***

**A) *General responses made regarding 'How can we foster and deepen each person's relationship with God through Christ' included:***

- Prayer and the importance of communal devotion
- Use of the sacraments
- Knowing and living scripture
- Having spiritual conversations
- Bringing people together - building community and relationships

**B) *What are we doing well that needs to be maintained:***

One group responded that the following were carried out well and need to be maintained:

- Provision of the sacraments
- Contact with vulnerable people
- Formal education
- Faith formation

### ***C) What needs Improving:***

A number of themes emerged, centred mainly on *Adult Faith Development, Community, Outreach/Faith in Action* and *Children and Young People*. These are addressed below in turn.

#### *Adult Faith Development*

There was a desire for people to develop their personal relationship with Jesus Christ, enriching their faith through activities such as catechetical programs, Bible study, faith sharing and spiritual talks. Likewise, there was a desire for lay people to develop their charisms and for these to be recognised and encouraged.

People don't necessarily know Church teachings or where to find them. Catechesis should be led by those who are properly formed and ongoing catechesis should be provided for all age groups. Taking the faith home and providing help to parents to do this and RCIA type support for parents and children was considered important.

There is, or should be, a role for (trained) lay people in providing adult faith formation. Religious orders, too, were recognised as bringing something specific and irreplaceable to this task.

#### *Community*

The importance to participants of communal worship and prayer as part of their relationship with God was apparent.

There was a sense of needing to get people back into church after the covid pandemic, but also a realisation that there are competing activities and demands on people's time. Activities of various kinds can be used to stimulate engagement and welcome back parishioners, as well as attracting new members.

Bringing people together, getting to know each other, engaging with, accepting and welcoming new members from diverse backgrounds (including LGBTQ+ people, people with disabilities and ethnic minorities) were mentioned as being important in building communities. A sense of 'belonging before believing' and not being judgmental can also help.

Although not all groups commented on the role of the laity, it was noted that the laity were an important part in developing and sustaining parish activities.

Some of the responses indicated that there were gaps/deficiencies in the life of their communities that needed to be addressed, such as: identifying areas that require volunteers; identifying the volunteers; open, honest and attentive communication.

#### *Outreach and Faith in Action*

A number of points were raised around developing relationship with God through service to others, such as the SVDP, Caritas awards, community projects and the creation of missionary type

groups to enable outreach to those in need within the parish community but also importantly to those on the peripheries of the parish (street pastors), and finding outlets to put faith into action, such as addressing social injustice (provision of food parcels, school uniforms and toy swaps).

### Children and Young People

Numerous responses regarding the spiritual welfare of children and young people highlights the importance to the participants of family, passing on the faith to the next generation and how this could be improved to help foster a growing faith and relationship with God for the young.

The home-school-church collaboration was seen as important, with more engagement with schools and families desired, along with help for parents to take the faith home. Involvement for children after sacramental preparation, such as participating in a Mass for children, would encourage young people in their faith.

Formation and leadership to the young should be from well-formed young people, with young adult groups available to provide social as well as faith sharing opportunities.

Efforts should be made to connect with young people and to find out from them what keeps them interested and engaged; children's liturgy may not be enough. One group noted that the numbers of children and altar servers have been decreasing since the 80s. Information and activities that children can use themselves, such as a children's bulletin, could help.

To encourage vocations a number of suggestions were made including retreats, youth gatherings, laity spending time with priests outside of providing the sacraments, introducing saints as role models instead of celebrities, encourage altar boys and children's groups, and strong catechesis and more opportunity for post-confirmation involvement in the life of the Church for children at this critical age.

### Other points

Keeping churches open throughout the day (and possibly through the night), would allow people to come into the presence of the Blessed Sacrament more often, with more Eucharistic Adoration available.

Social media outreach such as support groups should be explored (ensuring authenticity.)

## **Question 2**

The question considered in the conversations brought out a concern amongst the participants to be joined with those who may be "lapsed", disillusioned, wounded, angry or apathetic, with a strong desire to reach out and help others continue their own pilgrim journey in and through the Church.

The responses to Q2 can be placed into four loose categories:

### ***A) Meeting, Listening, Sharing with others***

***B) Witness and personal testimony***

***C) Community***

***D) Miscellaneous points***

***A) Meeting, Listening, Sharing with others***

A number of streams of thought came to the fore regarding the process of reaching out, engaging and encouraging others on their journey, with points raised falling into a number of subcategories:

***i) Preparing ourselves for meeting others***

The responses indicated that formation is important and that good catechesis is needed in preparation for evangelisation otherwise we may lack confidence in speaking about faith well. We need to be enriched and have spiritual depth – “Taste and see that the Lord is good”.

***ii) Meeting others – events and support groups***

A variety of suggestions were made with a view to ‘enhancing approachability’ and going out to the margins to meet people. Suggestions included:

- Social events outside of Mass that people of no faith would find attractive. This was a recurring theme. Events involving food (dinners, bbqs) are an effective way of bringing people together!
- Meeting people where they are, and being involved with them in what they find interesting
- “Welcome back” events
- Support groups for lapsed / disaffected / divorced
- Importance of reconciliation opportunities

***iii) Engaging with others – listening***

One of the strongest themes emerging from the conversations was about how to engage with people, concentrating mainly on the initial stages of engagement, by really listening to them to gain a better understanding of where they are and building trust. Key points raised included:

☒ The importance of getting to know the culture which surrounds us

☒ Get to know people better: what impacts them, why are they lapsed, what obstacles prevent them attending Church? Is it poor relationships, scandals, work commitments? Do they feel the Church is trying to spin them a positive message? Are we sure we’re responding to the questions people are actually asking? Are we listening before speaking?

- There is a need to have relationships with individuals – an individual approach is key, as all have different reasons.
- Honest conversations with school pupils, friends and colleagues about how our LGBTQ+ brothers and sisters feel. Do they feel loved, welcomed and respected?

***iv) Sharing and imparting the truth of the Good News***

Once again, having the right approach for different individuals and groups is important. People are at different stages of faith, which, if recognised, will give an opportunity to respond in an effective way. In all cases, though, it is important to be truthful in dealing with others and confident to discuss the Catholic faith openly. This links back to the Adult Faith Formation section in Q1.

### ***B) Witness and Personal Testimony***

As well as the points raised in how we meet and engage with people, participants also recognised the importance of authentic, joyful, charitable living of the faith which attracts and gives an unspoken witness before we say anything. There is a need to be a living example of our faith and be unapologetic about it, doing this with all those we encounter, at work, in shops, and at the school gate – to be examples of living a ‘holy life’, living a life in Christ.

Prayer groups and personal sharing of our own faith and experience will help to foster faith in others, establish common ground, drawing the ‘lost’ into an involvement with Christ, ourselves and the Church.

### ***C) Community***

Just as the participants wanted more events to help draw other people into the community of the parish, so they desired to build up community among its existing members.

- Know the needs of the local community and engage in a focused way, responding to the needs we’ve identified. That said, every parish is comprised of families. Every parish has to engage families and build up family life.
- People should be encouraged to get involved in existing church activities - if they are unattractive then consider how they can be changed. Online Masses have made people less active and charitable ministries have suffered. People need to understand that online isn’t a good substitute, there is a need for genuine in-person outreach.
- Consider more evening services for those that work and have other commitments, including weekend work and juggling around childcare.

### ***D) Miscellaneous***

Other responses concerning what would assist or help others still feel they have a home and a mission within the Church included:

- Ecumenism – working with other Christian churches to reach those on the margins. Learning from others what they are doing well.
- Women in leadership positions [like Sr Anna Marie!] could help.

## **Summary**

*Then they took the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks on its back, and he sat on it. Many people spread their cloaks on the road, others greenery which they had cut in the fields. And those who went in front and those who followed were all shouting, 'Hosanna! Blessings on him who comes in the name of the Lord! ...' Mk 11:7-9*

As the Parish representatives gathered at the deanery synod meeting it brought to mind groups of pilgrims called and congregating on their journey, taking stock as pilgrims on their path of holiness, sharing thoughts on what they felt they needed to weave garments fit to lay before the Lord, from the individual and communal threads of their lives.

There was a sense of movement in the lives of the participants, individually in their wish to move closer to Christ but also as a community, in their wish to get to know each other, to live in vibrant faith communities and reach out to others.

The participants suggested many areas for improvement, pointing to a desire for growth in their own and others' spiritual lives and in their faith communities. They expressed deep concern for the spiritual well-being of young people and children in their families and communities. In making these suggestions, they also recognised that people will be at different points on their faith journey and that different approaches will be required to provide for the needs of different individuals and groups.

Five prominent themes that emerged from the spiritual conversations were the need for:

- i) More Adult faith formation opportunities
- ii) Building Community and Outreach
- iii) Provision for children and young people
- iv) Outreach - meeting people where they are, understanding the cultural setting, really listening
- v) More effective evangelization and sharing of our faith.

And five less prominent but nevertheless significant points were:

- i) The need for authenticity
- ii) Scandals in the Church - people need to know and understand more about them
- iii) The importance of developing the charisms of the lay faithful
- iv) Recognising the ministry of young people
- v) Creating social events and spaces outside of Sunday Mass to engage with others.