

The DCS points out the standout themes that appear again and again in the Church — inclusivity, co-responsibility, accountability, the roles of women, the shortage (at least in the Western Church) of vocations to the priesthood and religious life, transparency, etc. As we journey we must name the “lights and the shadows” of our Church’s life.

There is a clear desire across the continents to “enlarge the tent” and move forward in mission; a desire to be more inclusive and to welcome diversity. But we need to watch our language. The DCS itself appears to be aimed at clergy or people with a theological background. It is difficult to understand in parts.

Ultimately, the overall experiences of the Churches are that we are learning to walk together, sitting together to break the one bread. Again and again we are reminded that no one is to be excluded. This is coupled with an experience of a less than satisfactory participation/input from priests and bishops in the process and the meagre presence of the voice of young people.

The final goal is high — “a Church that boldly proclaims its authentic teaching while at the same time offering a witness of radical inclusion and acceptance through its pastoral and discerning accompaniment. And while the Eucharist continues to be the “source and summit” of a synodal Church, synodal listening itself brings up many issues from rethinking a liturgy too concentrated on the celebrant, to the active participation of the laity and access of women to ministerial roles.

CHALLENGES TO ADDRESS

The challenge facing us is the creation of a world-wide Church that truly is “stretching out”, “making room for diversity without losing its spirituality and core historical value”. Almost all reports highlight the issue of “full and equal participation of women”, but there is no agreement on a single or complete response to bring about such full and equal participation. A key challenge will be enabling women to participate more fully at all levels of Church life everywhere.

There is very little mention of youth/adult ongoing faith formation in the DCS. There is an urgent need to renew the focus on our youth, while at the same time continuing to nurture those adults committed to their faith journey. “We are a learning Church, and to be so we need continuous discernment to help us read the Word of God and the signs of the times together, so as to move forward in the direction the Spirit is pointing us”. Biblical and faith formation is going to be a huge challenge.

Regarding ongoing faith formation, the Church has to be aware of not watering down the core message of our Christian beliefs to a lowest common denominator. The synodal process has given the Church a new energy and so expectations of rapid change are high. “For many, radical inclusion means radical change” and the challenge will be to see all within the context of the call to personal conversion and reform of the Church, while maintaining its mission based on the person and teachings of Jesus Christ.

The clerical abuse in the Church has turned many people away and this is a huge challenge for the future. While much has been done in this area, so much more remains to be done.

Ridding the Church of clericalism has to be a priority if synodality is to take hold. The DCS stresses the role of all the faithful, by merit of their Baptism, in a synodal Church — ALL can help to fulfil the Church’s mission. The involvement of the entire People of God becomes a challenge and a priority as the Church faces an aging clergy and a dramatic reduction in vocations to the priesthood and the religious life. “The laity are capable, talented and willing to contribute more and more, provided they are given opportunities” — therein lies the big challenge, coupled with the wish that no one should be excluded.

PRIORITIES AND CALLS TO ACTION (LOCAL DIOCESE/COMMUNITY)

People are moving away from Church, Mass, Sacraments etc., with the claim of being ‘spiritual’ but not ‘religious’.

Reassure those concerned about Synodality that the Church’s fundamental teachings will not change, nor how decisions are made within the Church. Local churches should speak about the Synodal process, awakening people to the renewal that is taking place. Most are unaware of the process.

Celebration of Sacraments of Initiation alone has not led to a daily life of faith. There is an urgent need for ongoing faith formation at all levels — youth and adult — which is proactive and where no one is excluded. This formation must be given the same priority and resources as the provision of the Sacraments themselves.

Arising from this synodal listening process is the desire and appetite for enriching our lives with the Word of God.

We must become conscious of the role of the laity, and in particular, women, in the Church we dream of. The desire is there for a genuine reform and renewal of our

Church and we are aware of the importance our faith witness is going to have in the consumerist society in which we live.

The sense of belonging has to be more than pious platitudes. We need a Church that is reflective of inclusiveness, recognising the inconsistency in the Church's message and what is perceived to be Christ's inclusive message, e.g., the makeup of families today, the LGBTQIA+ community, family planning and the Church's response to poverty and climate change.

PRIORITIES AND CALLS TO ACTION (The Catholic Church in Ireland)

Structures and processes for synodality are not in place; while structures in themselves are not enough, there is a need for ongoing formation to support a synodal culture.

The synodal process is broad and progress is likely to be slow. In the meantime the Church must continue to work on local issues; co-responsibility, lay participation, adult faith formation etc. The People of God struggle to believe, against and within an ever more secular background.

The Church needs to encourage clergy and religious to really commit to the Synodal process. It seems there has been a lack of interest on the part of many clergy and bishops to the process.

Clerical abuse in the Church has turned many people away — this still needs to be dealt with. We must not be afraid of the sins and shadows of the past. Those abused by the Church must be listened to and hurts must be healed.

Dreaming of a Church where everyone IS welcome, we have to be aware of the LGBTQIA+ community, those separated/divorced, divorced and remarried, those with disabilities, travellers, migrants, the elderly, those disillusioned or disenfranchised from the Church for whatever reason. There must be a genuine focus on our youth.

The role of women within the church and their exclusion from many roles, along with a broader understanding and support of different family types.

Care and support for our aging priests/religious, coupled with a new model of parish where everyone is using the gifts given them by God.

PRIORITIES AND CALLS TO ACTION (The Universal Church)

There needs to be a renewed and genuine focus on our youth, alongside a focus on a reinvigorated adult ongoing faith formation programme. The process of discernment must continue; we must be mindful that while participation was widespread across continents, only a relatively small number of practising Catholics participated in the initial stage of the synodal process, and an even smaller number of youth!

The Church must continue its momentum towards becoming a Missionary Synodal Church. The need to provide formation in synodality must be a priority.

The need for life-long biblical/faith/religious formation is another priority. The People of God need this education if they are to grow in an awareness of who they are and what God expects of them. This formation must also include examples of how we integrate faith and culture.

Again and again we hear the call for women to be given equal treatment in leadership and decision making. The Church has to respond to these calls and the response must be visible.

There has to be greater compassion and awareness of what comprises a 'family' today, sexual identity, human population growth, global warming and the ensuing crises. We live in a rapidly changing society of which we are a part; it is in this society that we are called upon to be disciples. An urgent call for better care of the earth locally, nationally and globally needs to be voiced. It has been hardly mentioned at all, though very close to Pope Francis' heart.

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