



Archdiocese of Cape Town



SYNOD SYNTHESIS 2022

“Listen, I am doing something new!” Isaiah 43:19

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1. INTRODUCTION

A Synodal Church, in announcing the Gospel, ‘journeys together.’ We, the Catholic faithful of the Archdiocese of Cape Town, hereby submit our reflections from the Listening Circles held within our communities. We were called to listen to each other as the Holy Spirit spoke through each and every one of us. The power of prayer has accompanied us on this journey.

The Synodal process has been well received within our Archdiocese, with collated submissions received from sixty-six of the seventy-four parishes, as well as from nine other groups and individuals. These submissions have been synthesised into this document where we have captured the essence of all that was said. We are proud to have been part of this sacred process, guided by the Holy Spirit.

We are greatly inspired by our leader, Pope Francis. He is much loved. Catholics are proud of him and the loving example he sets to the entire world. He intends us to be a Church of communion, participation and mission, and is to be commended on his vision for the future Church in initiating this Synod. We accept his invitation “to all Christians everywhere, at this very moment, to a renewed personal encounter with Jesus Christ.” *Evangelii Gaudium* #3

2. THE TRADITION OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

There is an overwhelming sense of gratitude for the rich tradition of the Catholic Church, for our faith and the belief system which we have been taught. It is our moral compass and forms the basis of how we lead our lives. The Church is universal and instils a feeling of great pride in all its faithful that we are part of such a rich apostolic tradition that spans over two thousand years. There is a constancy that keeps us grounded. The long history of the Church which has been passed down from Christ to us gives her credibility. The universal liturgy allows us all to be members of one family sharing a common foundation to spread the gospel. This promotes unity and a global community.

We love and are inspired by the richness of the traditions of the Catholic Church: the Holy Mass that is central to our faith; the Sacraments of the Church that deepen our spirituality and grace; the prayers such as the Creed and the Rosary that are cornerstones of our faith; the devotions to Our Lady; the lives of the Saints that foster a deeper knowledge and meaning of the faith; the feasts and seasons of the liturgical year.

Catholics appreciate and value in a deep way how the Church offers a profound sense of belonging to the rich tradition and history of the Church which encapsulates the work of the Holy Spirit in the life and teachings of those who have gone before us. This embraces a great sense of gratitude to the Catholic Missionaries who spread the Catholic faith in our country.

Mary holds a special place in the Church. We have a very close and loving relationship with our Heavenly Mother and we pray for her intercession constantly. She brings to life and embodies the model of feminine energy and motherly love. She is God's Work of Art – in and through her we understand how God ordered our very 'being' and what it means to be fully human. As Mother of the Church, she embraces all her children without exception and leads them to Christ.

The Catholic Church has deep roots in its two-thousand-year history with unfathomable depth of wisdom, knowledge and richness. We have a rich heritage and tradition of music, rituals, prayer styles, liturgy, liturgical seasons, ceremonies and devotions, all with significant meaning that have endured over the Church's long history

In a world in which *Humane Vitae* seems to have very little relevance, the sanctity of life, held so dear in the Catholic faith, is of the utmost importance to us.

We are proud of the unique and sacred ministry of the priesthood, and are profoundly grateful to the men who give their lives to serving us in this sacred ministry.

Our sublime joy in our faith is our strength. The breadth and depth of the Catholic faith means that there is a place for everyone. We are the Church's future and we embrace this wholeheartedly. Our journey of faith in the Catholic Church helps us grow in faith through the catechesis and faith-formation process.

We admire and laud Pope Francis for his role in prioritising the care of our earthly home in his encyclicals. The Care of Creation is also of extreme importance within the Pastoral Plan of the Catholic Church in Southern Africa, which is most heartening.

Catholics in South Africa are inspired by the richness and diversity of the Catholic schooling system in the country, where many have been educated within the rich heritage and charisms of the dedicated and committed clergy and religious who formed the basis of Catholic schools for close to two hundred years. The contribution to the overall education system in this country by priests, religious sisters and brothers, as well as committed lay teachers, is enormous. We are deeply grateful for this.

In the world of the twenty-first century today, it is important to hold onto the tradition, know its origins, but also to embrace change. The strong traditions of the Church are also its weaknesses. The major restrictions that may hinder the progress of the Church are many and varied and include issues such as mandatory celibacy for priests and the prohibition of woman priests. Nevertheless, the Holy Spirit of Hope will be with us all as we move forward in faith.

3. THE INSTITUTION OF THE CHURCH (Church Structure)

There are marked differences of opinion and mixed feelings regarding the recognised, long-standing structure of the Church. It is most evident that people love the structure and discipline of the institution of the Church, which offers strength and constancy in a fast-paced, secular world. There is a sense of unity and rootedness in a centralised leadership that keeps us grounded and centred. The hierarchical structure of the Church at every level, while criticised and most definitely needing change, is still recognised and accepted, together with the rich tradition of the Church.

Nevertheless, this structure is receiving more and more criticism, especially with regard to its rigidity of structure and the extremely slow pace of change. This is seen as a barrier to unity at all levels, but especially at the levels of Church leadership. The issues of clericalism and patriarchy cause division and despair amongst the faithful, due mainly to the change needing to happen at the highest levels of the institution of the Church.

There is a sense of helplessness felt by many of the faithful, who see apathy from many Catholics who do not stand up for the very basic rights not adhered to by the Church. As a matter of urgency, we need to be more inclusive and look at the role of women within the Church. The exclusion of women from leadership roles, from diaconate or priesthood, seems discriminatory – especially when the topic is often not allowed to be discussed. The role of women within the hierarchy of the Church is still relegated into a secondary supportive service. There is, however, a strong acknowledgement that at parish and community level, it is the women who carry the Church. These women need to be allowed to move to higher levels within Church structure. We need to promote the dignity of women and explore, at the very least, the possibility of the female diaconate.

Another strong call around inclusivity, heard at many levels of community structures, is for us to recognise and embrace the members of the LGBTQ+ community, often marginalised and left to hover on the fringes of community life.

The need for innovation and change is vital. The lack of progress is widely perceived and verbalised as is the feeling that initiatives for change in the Church are met with indifference or rejection. We need

to be as innovative as the other offerings around us. We need to stop relying on what brought people to Mass one hundred years ago and start innovating in order to attract the current generation. The competition is fierce.

The question being asked today is: Can Synod 2023 find a way to induce a change of heart among the people of God which could lead to a radical transformation of the Church? This has to begin with us – by making every effort to build our archdiocese and parish communities that are relevant to the needs of the world today, outward-looking, ready to reach out and serve others, witnessing to our Catholic faith in word and action.

4. A SENSE OF THE ARCHDIOCESE OF CAPE TOWN

Within global circles, Cape Town is considered one of the most unequal cities in the world. This inequality is reflected within the Catholic Church in the Archdiocese. With seventy-four parishes spread throughout the city and its surrounding rural areas, the Catholic Church is a microcosm of the society in which it is situated. Both the negative connotation of inequality and the more positive aspects of diversity are evident in the responses of the Catholic faithful within our Archdiocese. So, within the structures of the universal Church, we find the following very diverse aspects of life in Cape Town: * The legacy of apartheid * Race * Language * Culture * Sexual orientation * Liturgy * Class structure * Economic status * Education * Marginalised communities * Missionary priests from other countries.

While most of these aspects are covered in further sections of this report, the following have been noted as being very real issues with which we struggle within our Archdiocese:

- ❖ Language barriers
- ❖ The movement of priests within the Archdiocese
- ❖ The racial demographic of our communities
- ❖ Parishes that have more than one community and church building.

Notwithstanding the above, there is plenty we can celebrate within our Archdiocese. We are a diverse community with a great deal of advantages. We have a common faith and belief, we share the same values and traditions and we are committed to the one true Church. By the very nature of this unity and diversity within the Church, we interact with each other. This gives us the opportunity to build bridges of trust, respect, sensitivity and charity on every level of our Catholic society. This requires sacrifice, bravery and hard work. The Holy Spirit is calling us to learn from each other which will lead to growth and renewal of our communities and, ultimately, a better world for ourselves and our children.

5. EVANGELISATION

The call to evangelise is strong. It is heard in our parish communities, in our Archdiocesan circles and in the South African Catholic community. We are commissioned to “go out and spread the Good News” (Mark 16:15). The Southern African Catholic Bishops Conference has enunciated this call in its Pastoral Plan for Southern Africa, and this is echoed in the Parish Pastoral Council Statutes of our

Archdiocese, to be actioned within our parish communities. As we emerge from the darkness of a global pandemic, people are searching for new meaning for life, for the presence of the Holy Spirit to fill our lives with hope for a better future. We applaud Pope Francis for answering the call of the Holy Spirit and including all in the Catholic world to participate in the Synodal process, leading us on a path of evangelisation.

Evangelisation is the preaching the gospel with the intention of sharing the message and teachings of Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit is calling us to cultivate a missionary spirit of evangelization and service through the parish ministries, and for a much greater participation in these ministries through creating opportunities and inviting parishioners to be involved. Our mission is to give Christ to others. We need to do this in all our actions and words – both big and small. We are being called to journey together as One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church without leaving anyone behind. Our faith is a gift to all, not just to those who are trying to live it, but to those who are falling along the way and need us to help them come back.

Sadly, there are some who feel that, in common with the Western world, we are failing in the “great commission”, in our mission to evangelize, to engender a life-changing, energizing commitment to Jesus. A new spirit of evangelisation is needed. The call is loud and clear. Some suggestions to answering this call came in the form of the introduction of programmes such as Alpha and Divine Renovation within parishes. This is proving successful in a small number of parish communities, who are more than willing to assist others.

The Holy Spirit is calling us, too, to move further into the realm of Ecumenism, where the reaching out to and working together with other churches can make a more united impact and difference where needed. The importance of inter-faith dialogue cannot be underestimated. The ecumenical Women’s World Day of Prayer is an excellent example of such Ecumenism.

Just as Jesus’ followers were over two thousand years ago, we are called to become witnesses to our faith, and “make disciples of all nations.” (Matt 28:19)

6. PARISH PRIESTS AND DEACONS

The priesthood is unique. It is a most holy vocation and there is a deep love of Catholics for our clergy. We are most grateful that every parish has access to a priest. Despite the many barriers expressed at parish level, the love, respect and commitment to “our priests” is deep and genuine. There is positive recognition and gratitude for the many priests in our Archdiocese who have left their countries of birth to bring the Word to us and to lead us. There is an understanding that life is not easy for a parish priest within the inequality and diversity of our Archdiocese, and there is enormous respect for the humble, unselfish and non-judgemental way our priests treat the faithful in their care.

Our priests are seen and respected as leaders within our communities. However, while on the one hand there is gratitude for the access to a priest at parish level, there is on the other hand concern that many of our priests perform duties for the Archdiocese that take them away from their parish work.

Questions around the allocation of priests to parishes has been raised on a number of occasions.

Other barriers of concern were noted:

- ❖ Language barriers, both in a lack of understanding of what a foreign priest is saying, and the inability of many priests to celebrate Mass in any language other than English.
- ❖ Cultural barriers, especially regarding different African cultures, showing a lack of respect through ignorance, both on the part of the priest and the parishioners.
- ❖ Age barriers, mainly where the priest finds it difficult to identify with the needs of young people today.

Concerns were also raised as to the lack of uniformity among priests in our Archdiocese with regard to the rules of the Church. Issues raised in this regard centred mainly around the reception of the sacraments; that many priests seem to have their own individual views or rules about the conferring or withholding of certain sacraments, especially Baptism, Confirmation and Marriage.

Different opinions were expressed regarding the rules of celibacy of priests and the sacrament of Ordination being only for men. The faithful have decided views for and against these rules.

Participants called for a review of the requirements for the priesthood. This includes a return to priestly celibacy as a voluntary vow and the consideration of "*viri probati*" (proven married men) for ordination, forming part of a response to the crisis of priesthood today. There was also a call for the diaconate to be open to women, allowing for their particular charism to enrich pastoral activities.

A heartfelt wish was expressed by many that priests visit parishioners in their homes more often.

There is a call for review and change in both the seminary training of men for the priesthood, and the ongoing formation of priests in ministry. Some faithful who have had experience of newly-ordained priests in their parishes expressed the view that the training given does not adequately equip these young men to deal with the complexities of multi-cultural communities that are often extremely dysfunctional. While there is an understanding that the shortage of priests is a huge factor, there is a call for newly-ordained priests to spend more time in the roles of curates and assistant priests within parishes in order to gain more experience before being placed in the role of parish priest.

There is a sense of deep respect and admiration for the many permanent deacons within our Archdiocese, and gratitude for the important work they do within parishes. The shortage of priests combined with the heavy workload of our clergy in our Archdiocese exacerbates the need for many more deacons in our parishes. The requirements for acceptance to the diaconate programme need serious consideration and reviewal. It is widely agreed that the first steps towards change and transformation with regard to priests would be the acceptance of women into the diaconate programme and the ordination of married deacons to the priesthood.

7. LITURGY AND THE SACRAMENTS

The sacraments have a unique significance in the Catholic Church. They are rich in tradition and structure, yet are most relevant in the world of today. Catholics have deep respect for the liturgy of the sacraments which provide the bedrock of our faith. There is a sense of awe and joy as we participate in the sacraments that deepen our spirituality and grace.

HOLY MASS

The celebration of the Eucharist is the centre of our faith and the rootedness of our Catholic communities. There is deep gratitude that Mass is celebrated in every parish every Sunday and that, in many parishes, Mass is celebrated every weekday as well.

There is a heartfelt call from many for our churches to be seen and respected by all as beautiful and sacred spaces – “holy ground” – where the Blessed Sacrament is present within the tabernacle. There was concern expressed around the lack of silence before Mass begins, showing a lack of respect for the sacred space and people praying there.

There is considerable diversity within our parish communities, and this is often not evident in our celebration of the Eucharist. The predominant language used for our Masses often excludes cultural groups who feel alienated due to a language barrier. The singing of hymns and the use of sacred music to complement the Eucharist is of the utmost importance and yet often this does not reflect the diversity of the congregation. There is a widespread call for priests and parish leadership to ensure that all groups are catered for in Mass liturgies. Changes could easily be made to accommodate children, young people and different cultural groups so that all feel welcomed and included. The need for interpreters for the deaf within our parishes is very real and needs to be addressed.

SACRAMENT OF RECONCILIATION AND HEALING

A widespread need was expressed for a greater appreciation of the Sacrament of Reconciliation which is a sacrament of healing unique to the Catholic Church. It is felt that the practice of this sacrament is dying. However, there is a general feeling that the renovation and renewal of this sacrament would need thought, action and ultimate change at a much higher level than the local Church. An immediate change could be the reintroduction of healing services in our parishes, which provide mental, physical and spiritual healing for the faithful.

PARALITURGIES AND ADORATION

Gratitude was expressed by parishioners who are fortunate to have access to Adoration chapels within their parishes. There is a call for this practice to be extended to many more parishes, but at the same time there is a recognition that logistically this is not always possible. However, the possibility now that churches are more open after Covid for para-liturgies such as Holy Hours, Benediction, Prayer Services for specific needs, Penitential Services and public praying of the Rosary, needs to be explored by parishes.

8. PARISH LEADERSHIP AND MINISTRIES

Both the Pastoral Plan of the SACBC and the Parish Pastoral Council Statutes of the Archdiocese of Cape Town reflect deeply on the structure of parish leadership. The model of the priest being the pastoral leader and the laity forming the other layers of leadership has been recognised and the time is right for this to be strengthened. In the parishes where this structure forms the model of leadership, there exists a successful synergy between clergy and laity.

The manner in which we lead within the Church at both diocesan and parish level needs to change as society has changed. The management of people has evolved. There is a call for the identification of strong leaders who understand the needs of the community and are willing to serve to provide these needs. There are gifted people in every aspect of ministry in church life. While many criticise the inclusion of business with faith, a business model should be applied in parishes which includes teams with members having different skills to execute the best services. Qualified, skilled and experienced professionals amongst the laity can contribute substantially to this. The parish and the ministries of the parish will thrive with good leadership within this model. The two important tasks of running a parish – spiritual guidance and the operational running of the parish – should be separated. The priests and deacons should be responsible for the spiritual aspects, while experts in the parish should take charge of the other issues, such as administration and finance. The carrying out of a skills audit within parishes in order to better delegate responsibilities and deploy talent would be of enormous benefit to our parishes.

Sadly, for a myriad of different reasons, this is not the case in most of our parishes. The experience on the ground is that only a handful of lay persons step forward and assist in the running of their parishes and taking the load off the parish priest, who invariably carries the burden for everything. The restrictions placed on parish communities during the Covid pandemic did nothing to help this, heightening the lack of participation and commitment to serve in ministries. With the lessening of these restrictions has not come the willingness to participate in church life again, leaving parish leadership struggling to move forward.

It is also evident that many leaders in parishes are often thrust into positions with a great willingness to serve, but without the skills needed to lead as servant leaders. However, what is most heartening is the recent development of a parish leadership training programme in the Archdiocese. It is hoped that many parishes will avail themselves of this opportunity.

The issue of parish finances is a huge one and a cause of considerable concern to parish leadership and parish finance councils. It was noted that in some parishes, there is a practice of tithing in the churches. People who do not pay their tithe (often because they have no money to do so or live on a social grant) cannot request baptism or burial from the church. This causes a great deal of hurt among faithful Catholics who are at Mass every week, but then cannot be accompanied in these times because of money. There is a call for the bishops to put a stop to these practices. An unhealthy focus on money is also evident in some parishes where there is an insistence on the payment for prayer requests and to have a house or car blessed and this is done in the name of fundraising.

There is a strong belief that, in every parish community, there are many of the laity with specific gifts who would love to participate in the many ministries of the Church, and serve God and the community through their giftedness. We pray that the Holy Spirit will guide us to light the flame within the hearts of these faithful ones, and keep it bravely burning within our communities.

9. PARISH COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Parish communities are called to become spaces where the faithful can experience themselves as a Family of God that journeys together. The role of community development and growth is vital within the leadership structure of every parish. Places of worship need to be known as community centres and be as accessible as possible, not only as a physical location (i.e. proximity to the community) but also as spiritually-welcoming places that encourage greater participation of all its members in the life of the parish, including the youth and those on the peripheries who are often overlooked. A parish is often judged by both insiders and outsiders on the vibrancy of its community development.

As in all organisations, a parish consists of many different groups, and while these groups are unified and draw like-minded individuals, sadly it is often these groups that can divide a community, especially one that is defined by its spiritual nature rather than its social one. The groupings can be simple ones, such as a preference for a specific weekend Mass, or singing together in a choir, but they can also be more complex when socio-economic status is involved or racial groupings or nationalities. The bringing together of such groups is a difficult and often daunting task, needing much energy, consideration and time. Strong parish leadership can contribute enormously to the development of a parish community.

A sense of community is often engendered by the rich rituals and committed groups within the parishes. This is particularly noted in parishes where the deeply meaningful funeral rituals are appreciated and valued within the community. The Spirit is also present in the many sodality groups which provide deep spirituality and unity within parishes.

There is an urgent call for support groups to be established, at both parish and diocesan level. These groups could offer basic and much-needed support for the many needs articulated in the listening circles: for parents, for divorced persons, for those with mental health issues, for those with special needs such as the deaf, the mentally challenged, the sick and housebound, the homeless, the unemployed. The list is endless and might seem overwhelming. But we need to make a start.

In addition, the young people in parishes are seen as an important demographic for community building; providing community-building opportunities for young adults could in turn be a source of leadership for activities among children and adolescents.

This topic would not be complete without mentioning the fundraising aspect of community engagement. The unhealthy financial situation in which many of our parishes find ourselves due to the pandemic calls for an important emphasis to be placed on fundraising. Despite the negative connotation often put on this aspect of community life, it can be a most successful tool in building a sense of community within a parish and cannot be ignored.

10. MARRIAGE AND FAMILY

It is perceived by many that a family is, in the eyes of the Church, a heterosexual couple with children. While there is no doubt that this is indeed the model of a family, it is being challenged in society today as not the only model. Different and diverse models of family are now acceptable and the Church needs to move forward in the acceptance of such models. It is rightly argued that, at both parish and Archdiocesan level, recognition and acceptance of all types of families is welcomed, but the teachings of the Church have not moved forward towards this recognition.

Family life, in whatever form it takes, is seen as the bedrock of society, and the breakdown of family life is a sad occurrence, happening all too often in society today. Questions are raised around the marriage preparation given by the Church, which is seen by many as inadequate. There is a call for the marriage preparation to be more thorough, more developed and more expansive.

The marriage and birth control laws of the Catholic Church are seen as a problem. The Church's position on contraception should be reconsidered as this teaching is unfavourable especially towards the poorer people in our communities. Many have verbalised that there is no space to have open discussions around safe contraception use and the Church's teachings thereof.

The call for the recognition of blended families within the LGBTQ+ community is strong and requires attention at every level of church life.

Families need assistance with many issues and although the Archdiocese has a Marriage and Family Life Desk, this is not well-known.

THE ISSUE OF DIVORCE

Understanding the teachings of the Church on marriage and divorce is very complex, and there is evidence of great misconceptions and incorrect knowledge around this subject. Many of the Catholic faithful, and indeed many in our society as a whole, believe that divorced people are excluded from all sacraments. This topic was very widely mentioned within the Listening Circles, with comments such as the following occurring constantly:

- ❖ The breakdown of family life leads to divorce and divorcees are treated as if they are not part of the Church. Divorcees feel more welcomed in other denominations which are seen to be more forgiving.
- ❖ Many Catholics seem not to understand clearly the place of divorced and remarried Catholics in the life of the Church especially in participating in the sacraments. Catholics are still confused on whether they can participate in the sacraments or not.
- ❖ There is a strong feeling that the Church community disassociates itself with people experiencing divorce, instead of embracing them to feel part of the oneness. People who are struggling with marriages, separation and divorce are perceived to be stigmatized in the Church. In their time of need and trauma we seem to turn our backs on them when we should be caring for them and providing loving caring support for them.

On a similar issue, several respondents registered their dissatisfaction with the annulment process, stating that the process of getting an annulment is problematic, lengthy, complicated and costly. There is a perception that annulments are not easily granted, even if there are good reasons for them. This is a cause of hurt for many people, who wish to continue worshipping fully as Catholics following divorce and a second marriage. On the other hand, the annulment process, if done properly, was experienced as a positive cathartic experience.

11. FAITH FORMATION

Ongoing faith formation is part of evangelisation as it is vital for Catholics at all levels and ages to be fed intellectually and spiritually outside of the Mass. In the extraordinarily busy and fast pace of life today, this is becoming increasingly difficult. The Centre for Pastoral Development in the Archdiocese provides structured programmes for Formation both in Catechesis for children and youth as well as for adults in the RCIA programme. There are willing, hard-working catechists available in most parishes who give of their time and energy implementing these programmes of faith formation.

It is, however, evident that there are gaps in the system, especially at the level of early formation. This is confirmed by many who are both the recipients and the providers of this formation. More emphasis needs to be placed on the formation of the family as the domestic church. This should become the starting point for what we see as a universal call to holiness, and the Church's role is to support this spiritual growth through pastoral programmes that build up families as schools for holiness. Continuous refreshing and nurturing of parental involvement in instructing their children on the faith plays a vital role in the life of the Church and the children. This requires a greater missionary role from the parish in supporting and enabling parents to accompany their children in the faith. Equally, it requires a much greater commitment from parents.

While some parishes noted how inspiring it is to see parents “holding their children’s hands” through their Catholic life and bringing them to church, there were also many words of criticism for the lack of commitment of parents to the faith formation of their children. Too often there is evidence of parents considering the enrolment of their children in the catechetical programme as their only involvement in bringing their children up in the faith. This lack of support is often reflected in a negative attitude of the young towards catechism lessons, which has the ripple effect of disheartening catechists. It is a vicious cycle seen all too often in parishes. A large number of parents see formation only as a means to the sacraments of Eucharist and Confirmation for their children, not seeing the need for regular, ongoing formation.

We are fortunate to have in our Archdiocese a large number of Catholic primary schools, the majority of which are both affordable and geographically close to most parish communities. It is sad to note that many Catholic families choose not to send their children to these schools where they will not only receive good faith formation but will also be steeped in the ethos and charism of Catholic life. Much more marketing of these schools is needed within our parishes.

The RCIA programme provided for adults is vibrant in many parishes, but sadly lacking in others. It was noted how good it is to see so many RCIA candidates ending up working hard in parishes. This is an indication that the RCIA programme offers excellent insight into the faith, and the love and acceptance received in the Church is truly a good place to be, a good spiritual home. It was suggested by some that parishes support new converts from the RCIA programme for another year after they have been received into the Church.

The Archdiocese also offers good programmes for the ongoing formation of adults, where they can deepen their understanding and knowledge of their faith. There is a distinct call by adult Catholics to deepen their faith; it is the role of parish leadership to ensure that this can happen.

The greatest need expressed in our parishes is for post-Confirmation formation. We are losing our young people at this critical time in their lives. We are urged to seek pastoral solutions for the complex issues faced by our young people in the world of today. This needs to be a priority to which time, energy, human and financial resources are given.

12. YOUTH

The Youth are not the future of the Church, they are the present of the Church. In every parish community there are young people who have been brought up in the faith. They have, to a large extent, been brought into the Church by their parents or grandparents and have willingly entered into the early sacraments of Reconciliation and Eucharist. They have attended catechism classes throughout their primary school years; many have even had the benefit of attending one of the many Catholic primary schools within our Archdiocese. And then, for the main part, we seem to fail them. We let them down by not encouraging and assisting them through their teenage and young adult journey, due mainly to the fact that we are not hearing from them what their needs are and catering for these needs.

This disconnect is leading to the youth looking elsewhere for the answers to the questions they struggle with in today's difficult and confusing world. We draw the wrong conclusions for the absence and low numbers of youth involved in church activities by thinking that there is a lack of interest by the youth to get involved. This is not the case – the fact that they are, to a large extent, moving to other, more vibrant and charismatic faith communities, proves this to us. Addressing the needs of the youth needs to be a priority, especially at parish level.

The youth see the Church as being for old people. Older parishioners run our churches, hold onto their church positions and are reluctant to embrace the youth in church activities. The older generation feel threatened by the youth.

The Synod Listening experience has raised a valid question: How is the Church going to keep our Youth? This is a cry for help that can indeed be answered – by the young people themselves. While not confident in their faith, they are indeed confident in verbalising their needs, and we need to listen, and listen well:

- We need a Youth Leader in every community, contracted by the parish or group of parishes to work specifically with the young people;
- We need a structure of Youth Leadership within parishes, with representation on the Parish Pastoral Councils;
- We need strong vibrant programmes, run by young vibrant facilitators, to accompany our young people pre and post Confirmation;
- Our Liturgies need to be enhanced with input and inspiration from our young people, especially in the areas of communal prayer, music and dance;
- We need to join parishes together so that programmes such as Edge, Genesis and Life Teen can be funded and run effectively in every area and within easy reach of our young people;
- We need to learn from the parishes in our Archdiocese who are succeeding in these programmes;
- Financial resources need to be allocated specifically to this need.

But there is hope: the number of young people and active groups who participated in the Synod Listening Circles is encouraging, and the concern and willingness to help expressed by older members of communities gives us a strong foothold and much encouragement and strength for the journey ahead. The problems and challenges are in the open, accompanied by a great willingness for change, which is most encouraging.

13. JUSTICE, PEACE AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The Catholic Church, throughout its history, has inspired us in working for justice and peace. Pope Francis continues this proud tradition, calling us to be ever present in the social justice sphere of our communities throughout our cities, our country and the world. We are asked to be the ‘voice of the voiceless’ for the unemployed, the marginalised, the disenfranchised, the oppressed, and the vulnerable. The call is to show endless mercy and compassion and create spaces for these voiceless within our communities with dialogue and action. This was Jesus’ call, and it is our responsibility as Christians to listen to and answer this call. Our action is needed to provide hope for so many voiceless in our society.

This is a daunting task, and it is all too easy to be critical of the efforts of the Church. A common phrase is that ‘they’ need to do more, while not stopping to consider that we are part of the ‘they’ – every one of us – and that together we can do more. Action in this sphere of life is answering a universal call to holiness. May the Holy Spirit guide us in this task, which, while difficult, can be the most rewarding to both the providers and the recipients.

14. COMMUNICATION

We have been catapulted into the digital age faster than we could have ever imagined, with digital communication progressing at a faster speed than anything ever before. It is vital that the leadership within our church communities keeps abreast with the digital media, a way of life now in today’s

society. Our Archdiocese and parishes need to consider communication through technology as a priority, concentrating both human and financial resources to this need.

It is widely felt that we are not actively pursuing a communication and digital ministry to reach the faithful and minister to them through the digital platforms. There are several good examples of Catholic digital ministry globally. This is the way forward if we are to succeed in evangelising to our youth and “marketing” the Church through social media platforms, websites and the like.

Regular communication to share information, the minutes of meetings of various organization within the parishes and newsletters could be accessible to all in our parish communities. Digital surveys could become a regular means of assessing needs and requesting assistance. Parishioners could become used to receiving regular communication via their devices.

However, we need to remember that social media and electronic communication cannot and should never replace human interaction. We all need to be participants and not spectators. The rich value of meeting with each other and hearing each other’s views must never be lost.

15. SCANDALS WITHIN THE CHURCH

The sexual abuse scandal has rocked our Church and done enormous damage to it, even to this present time. It has been poorly managed and the cover-up was considered by many as being even worse than the abuse itself. Sexual abuse needs to be prevented from ever happening again. Even after all these years, there is a sense that the wrongs have not been adequately set right and a deep need exists in the Church for atonement and healing. There is still a huge amount of rawness and hurt by so many. The public scandals have hurt us all and sadly brought much distrust, misunderstanding and division both within and without the Church.

Participants are upset that the Catholic Church’s reputation has been tarnished by the reports of sexual abuse and paedophilia. The sexual assaults always make front page news on all media platforms. People forget about the good that is happening within the Church and that there are many more priests doing good; they only remember the bad. It has led to people leaving the Church as has been seen in many parts of the world where the stories of abuse were overwhelming.

Despite all of the above, it is evident that the Church has done a great deal in the drawing up and implementing of Child Safeguarding policies, at national and diocesan level, as well as within Catholic schools. This is welcomed and appreciated and has enormous support in communities.

16. CONCLUSION

This synodal process was a new process for us. It took us a while to learn what it was about and understand it. From the lessons we learned, we should have probably started with a very much simpler approach to the synod. Instead we started with a sophisticated concept and process rooted in an ancient history. In retrospect, it might have been easier to make our starting point simpler (not

simplistic) and build up the layers of sophistication from there. Having said that, the listening circles around our Archdiocese were, for the most part, successful and fruitful. We would like to have reached more people, but are satisfied that we had good representation and we appreciate the many people who came forward with deep sincerity to participate in this process. We thank them for taking it seriously and for giving it much thought and for giving of their time. We have tried to represent their feedback fairly and unambiguously to ensure that their voices are heard and the essence captured in this synthesis document.

We know that this is an ongoing process and that we are starting on a new journey of being Church, so this is the beginning. We need to ensure that, at all levels of the Church, this synodal process is maintained. The local parishes have provided their input. The next phases until October 2023 need to be communicated and reported on so that we, the People of God, can follow and participate in the journey of our collective message to Rome.

The significance of this process taking place across the entire Catholic world was not lost on us. Each culture will no doubt have its own way, but the universality of this process and the global scope of the exercise is ambitious and staggering. We are grateful for the opportunity, and are honoured to participate and pray for its success.

There are many actions that can immediately be taken at parish and diocesan level and we should seize the opportunity to act upon the messages heard from our parishioners where it applies to our parishes and Archdiocese.

We need to practise synodality in all we do. There should be a noticeable change in how we do things from now on.

The synodal process must be supported, and real dialogue is required at all levels of our Catholic communities. Key concerns must be recorded and passed on in a transparent and real way. Dialogue needs to be ongoing with continuous feedback mechanisms in place. Empathetic listening is important as it will make mediating easier. Respondents are cautioned against being impatient. While Catholics are wanting to see change, the task is mammoth and will take a long time to implement.

The hope was expressed that this would not be the last time that the Church has these kinds of discussions.

In conclusion, one is left wondering (and wishing), that leaders of the world would adopt the principles of synodality by starting to listen to one another more. Listening is a core requisite for seeking peace between people. It is our wish that this sacred process, inspired and guided by the Holy Spirit throughout the Catholic world, will be a light to the nations and bring a sense of peace and tranquillity to the earth.

CAPE TOWN: JULY 2022