

Our Lady of Loretto & St Michael Parish Synod Summary

This is a summary of the responses gathered at a number of meetings held throughout the Musselburgh parish as a part of the recent Synod listening phase.

There were full parish meetings in person and online, meetings of parish groups, small gatherings of parishioners in their own homes and individual and family contributions. Everyone was encouraged to pray, reflect and then share their responses as a part of the parish summary. As responses were collated a number of common areas emerged.

Love of God and each other

Given this is a self-selecting group drawn from the church community it's not surprising that many people spoke of the importance of faith to them, and how they missed it when they weren't able to attend.

The value of connection through the pandemic lockdowns was especially recognised. Opportunities to be part of liturgies online were valued, as well having members of the parish community keeping an eye out for them.

We are a community that has grown and changed in recent years. While the community was traditionally drawn from generations of local families, more recently people have joined the parish from beyond Musselburgh, not just from wider Scotland but from throughout the world. A lot of work has been done in the parish by our parish priest and parish members to draw communities together, and there is a strong sense now of blending and appreciation of what every individual offers. Part of this is a recognition of our common faith and love of God and neighbour.

Welcoming Community and being an inclusive church

With this context, the synodal conversations talked of the need for our parishes to be welcoming communities.

Practically, in our parish the need for to offer space to meet socially and informally was seen as important, especially as people return after Covid.

An attitude of welcome was also emphasised. It was acknowledged it can often be difficult to join parishes, especially where they are based around long standing communities.

Who is welcomed is also an issue. People spoke of the pain of exclusion for families and friends who are divorced, part of the LGBT+ community or from a different culture. It was acknowledged that often both individuals and the church institution do not make welcome easy, despite love of neighbour and the stranger being at the heart of Christ's message. We should practically celebrate the diversity of our faith community in our parish and wider church.

Our young people also often don't feel included. Younger children are, but there is often little space or specific activities for teenagers and young adults. Making sure that there is a place for everyone in the community to feel they can contribute was recognised as essential. This doesn't necessarily happen, and once we lose the majority of young people it's hard to hang on to the rest. It was felt that we need to include young people in wider parish groups, rather than having "youth specific" groups for them.

There was also a sense that people need to be able to discuss issues that are present in the Church and community, within our faith community. This is part of welcome, and nothing should be off limits.

Sacraments: This was another area where welcome and love of God and Neighbour seemed to be lacking. There was a feeling that the institution limits some of those in the community from feeling welcome by limiting access to the Sacraments. This causes pain and confusion, and there is often little explanation as to why it's the case.

Impact of Rules and Regulations

Many spoke of the negative impact of the institutional church's rules and regulations on their lives and those of families and friends.

There was a sense of confusion and lack of clarity on many of these rules, often because of a lack of explanation or time taken by clergy or the institution to put them in any context especially that of Christ's message of love of God and neighbour.

Many felt the rules were made with little understanding of the lives of ordinary folk, and questioned how effectively rules can be made if parish communities are not known by the people making rules.

People felt excluded and saddened by the rules such as those concerning exclusion from Communion and want to understand how people can be included if the 'Church' is seen to be excluding people due to life choices such as divorce, or members of the LGBTQ+ community.

People argued the Church should make everything accessible, regardless of knowledge and understanding of the institution. It was also felt that people should be allowed to question the rules of the Church. In particular there were responses questioning the necessity for celibacy in priesthood. It was argued that creating openings for a married priesthood would tackle the shortage of priests, open the priesthood to a better understanding of the challenges of family life and give the church access to a range of skills and gifts currently unused.

Role of Women

The role of women in the church was a strong theme, with many questioning why they cannot be more included in the management of the parish and the wider church.

Many felt the Church had excluded many gifted women from ministry and service, causing a significant loss to the church as well as a frustration and anger for many women and their families. Some felt this was sinful, and a rejection of God given gifts and talents.

While women's formal ordained ministry was suggested, it was also argued that other options for ministry and service existed already but these were not formally utilised in our diocese e.g. in some countries women take a paid role as Parish Life Directors.

Many also spoke of the number of women and men with knowledge and qualifications in ministry, theology and pastoral education who could contribute to parish and wider church life but often don't have the opportunity. In many cases it was felt the church structure disabled people, instead of enabling them, thus losing the gifts and talents of the community

Education/ formation

Linked to this, many people do not feel skilled or informed on how they might contribute to parish or wider church life.

- Opportunities for faith formation have significantly dropped off in recent years.
- Previous educational opportunities have not been developed further, or people's involvement in education programmes such as Limex has not been utilised.

There was even a sense that people do not fully understand what it means to be 'Church'. Is it just a building or are we 'Church' as a community?

Decision Making in the Parish and Church

One of the key themes for people was a desire to be involved in the decision making of the church, at both parish and wider levels.

Especially at parish level it should be the local faith community making decisions, as the people in it best know the needs and abilities of the parish. Currently it doesn't feel that the diocese takes parishioners' views into account, consults or even informs at times of crisis. It was proposed that a clear line of communication should exist between all parishes and the diocese so that lay leadership can be informed at such times. It was felt this would also support our clergy.

At parish level people want to know who is responsible for decision making as well as the financial state of the Parish.

It was argued that it was important for all parishioners, regardless of who they are, to know and believe they could be part of discussions and decision making.

Working together

A strong desire existed for working together, both with other organisations in the community and with other Churches.

In Musselburgh this was based on previous working together and an appreciation of its values however it was recognised that church structures across denominations often meant nothing was happening fast, and this was a cause of frustration.

At the same time, the restrictions around sacramental participation made it difficult to experience full fellowship and sharing with other denominations.

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