

THE PARISH OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION, MARYHILL

A PARISH SUBMISSION TOWARDS THE SYNOD OF 2023



INTRODUCTION

Editing

This synthesis is based on feedback from questionnaires, supplemented by input from our primary schools and informal conversations with individuals or couples who do not come to church for various reasons. We also had adult formation/education sessions, indicated in relevant sections. A working group collated this material into a template of 10 sections, refined by the Parish Co-ordinating Team. It was resubmitted – electronically & verbally – to the parish. This is the final document of this process.

Content

The document addresses each of 10 questions taken from the Preparatory Document of the Vatican Office for the Synod of Bishops. (www.synod.va). In each section we have collated the responses in a first part, related to the life of our own parish community, and then on the wider church reality.

The summary concluding this document highlights major themes, without minimising any others, and expresses three concerns this process has raised.

An executive summary (sent to 600 homes on our database) forms an appendix

1. COMPANIONS ON THE JOURNEY:

The Acts of the Apostles tells how the first disciples worked together under the guidance of the Holy Spirit to build the Church. Pope Francis invites every baptised person to work - or 'walk' - together under the guidance of the Spirit to build today's Church. You are invited to consider the following questions:

How are we already working/walking together? How can we do this better? Who is getting left behind and why?

Immaculate Conception (IC)

We believe that IC tries seriously to be inclusive and welcoming, in line with the parish slogan “In this parish all are welcome: none are judged”. The welcomers at the door are important and the Parish Priest is welcoming and inclusive, encouraging participation in social and other events. Parish communications are good, electronically and through the bulletin and, where necessary, by other means. The use of Church Services TV and Power Point have been important in this regard.

In the main, parishioners feel supported by Mass attendance and at times of loss or stress. Some say, though, that single people and the younger age group have some difficulty fitting in. Also, despite efforts in the parish, there are other groups who are excluded by the church generally: the divorced and remarried, cohabiting couples and members of the LGBTQ+ community. And, importantly, there are people in the parish who experience poverty (not only material) and are in danger of being ‘left behind’.

Suggested ways of tackling these problems include more social events, particularly for the young, and the creation of relevant parish groups.

The Wider Church

IC is not, we believe, typical of parishes in the Glasgow Archdiocese, a judgement reinforced by the number of people from other parishes who attend here. Many claim that their own parishes are unwelcoming, perhaps because of a persisting ‘clericalism’, and that they are made to feel inadequate if they do not live up to ideals of behaviour. Some feel abandoned when in stressful situations.

Those who are left behind, it seems, are often those in groups already mentioned: the divorced and remarried, cohabiting couples etc. It is essential that all parishes understand and embrace Vatican II, providing welcome and support for all Catholics, whether practising or those who experience the church to be distant or irrelevant.

On the worldwide Church, it can be safely said that, while Pope Francis is inspirational and widely respected, there is a serious attempt by forces within the institution to

oppose and undermine him. There must be an emphasis on, and a recognition of the ongoing need to implement the theology and reforms of Vatican II.

- *Adult Education & Formation; Important input from Br Brendan Geary on models of moral theology that cry out for renewal to broaden our embrace of people who are too readily excluded.*

2. LISTENING:

The first step in walking together is to really listen to one another, without prejudice or personal agenda. When we can listen like this, we may hear God's voice speaking to us through other people. You are invited to consider the following questions:

*How well do we listen, especially to people who have different views than our own?
How can we better listen to young people, women and minority groups?*

Immaculate Conception

The majority of parishioners believe that they are listened to through formal - e.g. the Parish Coordinating Team [PCT] - or informal channels. The Parish Priest engages with parishioners: before and after Mass, and at funerals and weddings and, for instance, with parents when administering the Sacraments.

Among parishioners, communication may sometimes be difficult because of age differences: where younger people seem to be alienated because of the traditional views held by some older parishioners. Again, newer parishioners express less confidence in speaking out. Possible attempts to solve these problems may include scheduling conversations after Mass and the creation of a parish forum where there can be open discussion of relevant questions with clear rules to ensure listening.

A sign that we are listening to other Christians is provided by relations between IC and Maryhill Parish Church. Joint services and social events provide a context for both formal and informal discussion.

The Wider Church

The Catholic Church has a hierarchical structure with a tradition of top-down communication, making it difficult for individual Catholics to express their views or influence decisions. There is a feeling among laypeople that those in authority have little interest in hearing their views. Anecdotal evidence suggests, in fact, that bishops rarely reply to letters they do not agree with. Consequently, many Catholics, it appears, simply lose interest and turn away.

There has to be a sincere recognition that if we are all the Church, certain consequences follow. Those in authority have to listen as well as teach, being open to differing views and accepting the validity of people's experience. This ought to lead to enhanced roles for laypeople - especially women - roles increasingly important in developing parishes and supporting dwindling numbers of clergy.

3. SPEAKING OUT

We are invited to speak out boldly and responsibly.

What helps us to do this? What prevents us from doing this? How does the relationship with local media work (not only Catholic media)? How well do we choose the people who speak on our behalf to the wider community?

Immaculate Conception

Parishioners in IC can, as has already been noted, express their views through formal channels like PCT and informal parish groups as well as at the occasional Wednesday evening lecture. Some, it was felt, are more comfortable speaking in smaller groups. In addition, though, the need for a parish forum has also been mentioned. There is also a case for having a platform - possibly electronic - to enable parishioners to speak out.

When speaking to the wider community, many Catholics are more confident dealing with social justice concerns than they are on matters of faith. Homilies provide important material on faith questions. On social justice, our J&P group does an excellent job speaking on these issues and spreading information about Catholic Social Teaching.

The Wider Church

Pope Francis speaks out well in public statements, in interviews and through social media, gaining widespread respect and encouraging others to speak out too. This witness is weakened, though, by obvious disharmony in the Church: where public debate and disagreement can be healthy and productive, discourtesy and hostility are destructive.

Clericalism - affecting both clergy and laity - persists, often bringing with it fear among Catholics of speaking out, a sense that, instead of being encouraged to talk frankly, they will be intimidated or excluded.

There was a perception that, in its public statements, the Church concentrates on matters such as divorce, abortion and end-of-life legislation to the detriment of the morality of war, poverty and discrimination. And, on such questions, the Church should be making more public statements on both local and national media.

- *An important weekly contribution comes from our Justice & Peace group, who are also embracing some self-formation on CST*

4. CELEBRATION:

The celebration of the Eucharist is at the centre of our Catholic communities, and forms the basis for our ‘walking together’.

How well do communal prayer and liturgical celebrations inspire and guide our sense of community? How well do we allow and enable every member of the faithful to participate?

The Immaculate Conception

Responses confirmed that the quality and relevance of the liturgy inspires a sense of community and is further enhanced by the warm, welcoming, and open atmosphere created. Other opportunities to come together such as the parish retreat and Divine Renovation add value to this sense of community as does regularly encouraging more people to take part in liturgical celebrations. Those sacramental celebrations which draw in people not regular at the Eucharist are also treated sensitively, most especially our funerals. With the co-operation of our schools the sacraments for children are also moments of real celebration and evangelisation as are weddings and baptisms. To engage more of the parish community on these events is an important consideration. Live stream is seen as a major benefit in allowing many more people to participate.

The Wider Church

Most respondents reported that the wider church was not enabling every member to participate. Many detailed the number of specific groups who are currently excluded indicating that everyone should be welcomed regardless of their gender, lifestyle or background. The welcome felt in the IC was not experienced in other parishes with many people feeling that “all are welcome none are judged” does not apply in the wider context. The situation regarding the Latin mass was seen by some as leading to an unhealthy division where we do not pray together

5. SHARING RESPONSIBILITY FOR OUR COMMON MISSION:

Every baptised person is called to use their natural and supernatural gifts and talents to participate in the life and missionary service of the Church.

Do we understand what this means? What stops us from giving our gifts and talents to the Church? How does the Church community support its members who serve society in various ways (social and political involvement, scientific research, education, promoting social justice, protecting human rights, caring for the environment etc.)?

Immaculate Conception

Very many parishioners already use - or wish to use - their talents for the Church. Some, though, are kept from doing so by family commitments. Others do not become involved for various reasons. Some are deterred by what they see as the presence of cliques; others regard the Parish as too dependent on the PP's leadership; some do not know how they could help or have lost their vigour through age. Others simply feel uninvolved.

There is, in fact, a difference of opinion between those who think the Church could do more to support its members who are serving society and those who see the Church as doing well, particularly at the local level.

The Wider Church

There is a feeling that the Church must involve the laity more, at various levels within its structures, including having lay representatives at the Bishops' Conference. The Church, too, must have a greater role in public life: it is imperative that we speak up for the poor and against injustice; and it must more confidently build positive relationships with local politicians, who can work to promote the common good. If the Church focussed more on Catholic Social Teaching, it would become more involved in promoting social justice and it would equate sin with more than just sexual matters.

Other issues require attention too. As a lay-led institution, the Church is not strong enough on issues of concern to women, while there should be concern that Catholic schools fail to produce Catholic children. Given the continuing division between the Christian churches, it should be remembered that when churches are working together, a strong positive signal is sent to our society.

- *Adult Education and Formation; input from Fr Jim Lawlor on Communion, Participation and Mission, (the Synod's subtitle) rooting the synodal process in Vatican II*

6. DIALOGUE IN CHURCH AND SOCIETY:

Dialogue requires perseverance and patience, but it also enables mutual understanding.

To what extent do diverse peoples in our community come together for dialogue? How can we improve dialogue between our own communities, i.e. between parishes/deaneries, and with lay ministries? What issues (in the Church or in society) do we need to pay more attention to? How well do we dialogue with and learn from other areas of society, such as politics, culture, diverse groups; how can we improve?

The Immaculate Conception

It is generally agreed that in the Immaculate Conception, dialogue between the PP and the parishioners is of mutual benefit. Listening, understanding and acting is evidenced by the connections which exist within the parish eg in groups such as SPRED, SVDP, J&P and SCIAF, which are always open to further suggestions to extend and diversify their work. In addition, seeking out, listening to and meeting with groups within the local community which for various reasons are marginalised, perhaps refugees or those in poverty or homeless, is a priority within the parish.

Young people in Catholic schools experience equal opportunities and inclusion, and may have a similar expectation of their Church.

The Wider Church

Among those often marginalised by society, but more especially by the Church include LGBTQ+ people, same-sex couples, those who are divorced or separated, couples cohabiting, and even single parents. In these cases, the Church's attitude is often determined by those who wish to participate in the Sacraments. Such attitudes require even more listening and dialogue in order to connect with and support these groups who often feel judged and out-with the society they live in – literally marginalised.

Some noted that the Wider Church has a good history of providing support to some marginalised groups. There are very good examples such as The Wayside Club and other self-help groups within parish halls and the wider community. Now the Church itself must find ways of connecting and being inclusive, non-disparaging and non-elitist, and continue to develop uses of social media sites that connect with a diverse range of people in our communities.

More specifically, marginalisation can also extend in wider society to being, female, an immigrant, poor, mentally or physically disabled etc and the Church must use its influence and position in society to counteract and remedy these attitudes. This can be done by utilising parish groups and particularly young people to be more welcoming, less judgmental, admitting past mistakes and avoiding moral superiority.

7. ECUMENISM:

The dialogue between different Christian groups has a special place in the synodal journey.

What relationships do we have with members of other Christian traditions or denominations? What are the benefits and difficulties? How can we take the next step in walking forward with each other?

The Immaculate Conception

Over the past few years, we have built a strong relationship with our Church of Scotland neighbours, Maryhill Parish Church and other churches in wider Maryhill. The Immaculate Conception is doing very well at engaging with our Christian neighbour under the banner 'Together we make Maryhill'. Parishioners are proud and excited at how outward looking, inclusive and revolutionary this partnership is, as we grow together. Looking to the future, many people are keen to build and strengthen our relations with our other Christian neighbours and even other faiths. There is a sense that we each have a lot to gain from sharing and exploring our common beliefs and focusing on these while we celebrate more events together – both spiritual and social. There are calls for more joint services but also to attend other churches' services and to make those churches welcome at our own services.

The Wider Church

Most parishioners would like to see better relationships across denominational divides. Some even expressed a desire for openness to working better with other faiths. While some parishioners didn't respond one way or the other, no one expressed a desire for the Catholic Church to work in a more isolated fashion. However. There is a definite detectable movement, in some quarters and among some clergy, that undermines ecumenical co-operation.

- *Adult Education and Formation; input from Dr Mary Cullen on Received Ecumenism and how this theological principle (of faith and order) influences our relationship with Maryhill Parish Church and beyond (in work and life)*

8. AUTHORITY AND PARTICIPATION

A synodal Church is a Church where everyone participates and everyone shares responsibility.

How well do we identify our goals and how to reach them? What good examples do we have of governance, teamwork and shared responsibility? How do we promote lay ministries and the responsibility of lay people? What fruitful experiences can we share of lay leadership? How can we develop fruitful participation and leadership?

The Immaculate Conception

Anecdotal and specific evidence suggest we do participate and share responsibility well in the Immaculate Conception. We explicitly align ourselves to the ecclesial vision of Vatican II and the building of a sense of community, an ecclesiology of *communio*. (We call ourselves a 'Vatican II' parish to disassociate from the undermining of the Council, implicit or explicit.) We seek to build community among us but also to serve the wider community. Collaboration and decision-making reside in the Parish Co-

ordinating Team and the Parish Pastoral Council. Other groups (e.g. Fabric and Finance, Justice & Peace) work to inform and involve people in the life of the parish.

The Wider Church

Respondents felt the church nationally and globally does not have a culture of nor mechanisms for participation and shared authority. Some clergy are anti-Francis and are not encouraging the Synod philosophy. Concern was expressed over national stances on some key issues, and noted the unhealthy division caused by the ongoing promotion and celebration of the Extraordinary Form, blatantly defying the use of a single rite, envisioned by Vatican II, ratified by Pope Francis in *Traditionis Custodes*

In addition, Clericalism among some clergy *and laity* perpetuates a separateness and a dependence on priests, ‘spoon-feeding’ parishioners and centralising decision-making. This attitude belongs to a different era and seriously hinders congregations from ‘stepping up’, rendering it impossible to break free from a cycle of clericalism. The whole People of God should be involved in church life. We need to re-promote the Vatican II paradigm of the whole Church, nationally and globally. This would create more routes to participation, decision-making and transparent consultation processes.

9. DISCERNING AND DECIDING

A synodal Church makes decisions through discernment of what the Holy Spirit is saying through our whole community.

How well do we promote participation in decision making and how well do we make decisions together? How can we improve our methods so that everyone’s voices can be included? How can we grow in communal spiritual discernment?

The Immaculate Conception

Most respondents are regular Mass attendees who are very involved in life of the parish, but participants also include people who are happy just to come to Mass, some who want to get more involved, and some who no longer attend at all. There was a general feeling expressed that the IC is very inclusive, and a great variety of people are involved in parish activities. Spiritual Discernment grows where many voices are included, so participation by as many parishioners as possible is desirable. However, there is a feeling of guilt from some about not being involved in life of the parish. So we must improve our efforts to welcome and encourage more into the decision-making process. However, in parallel, many said they were involved via other vocations – through work at local schools or caring for family members. We want to include such people in shaping decisions about our pastoral and spiritual life

The Wider Church

The wider church is deemed not to achieve this successfully. Respondents reported priests who try to do everything themselves, ‘scared of the world’. Clericalism prevents whole parish participation. There was an expression of past hurts from the church which led to people not getting involved. Strong feeling was expressed that priests should act on the principle that ‘it’s not my parish – my job is to serve’ here. Possible solutions suggested included the affirmation of welcome to groups who have been excluded (including divorcees), and a formation of decision-making forums. Rather than an informal elite of parishioners taking control, a formal solution (learning from the “elders” in CoS) would help make participation more transparent.

10. FORMING OURSELVES IN SYNODALITY

Synodality, that is journeying together, involves ongoing learning, and being open to change.

What do we need to help us to be more capable of ‘walking together’, listening to one another, participating in mission, and engaging in dialogue? What training do lay leaders need to ensure they exercise their authority in a synodal way—i.e. that every member of the community is welcomed, respected and listened to?

The Immaculate Conception

There was an overwhelming agreement that the IC does journeying together very well. The relationship with MPC, the inclusive messaging, the importance of preaching, the use of technology and the social events on the hall were all highlighted as helping this. Suggestions for improvement included - creating more opportunities to get to know other parishioners through social and liturgical events; visiting more families; travelling together (e.g. car shares); more inter community groups and outreach; perhaps the establishment of a ‘buddy system’ for new parishioners. Specifically on technology, website development (with private message function) was suggested, and a question posed on how better to involve the virtual parishioners. Concluding Divine Renovation was also highlighted as important.

The Wider Church

There was a feeling that the Church nationally is failing to walk together with the world and other people of faith. Reasons for this include the legacies of sectarianism and clerical abuse, and a lack of language and expertise to communicate faith to a secular society. Other fears expressed were that the institutional Church ignores its worldly flock, and that synod responses themselves might be suppressed. Suggested solutions include an investment in communications, taking a truth and reconciliation approach to sectarianism, a review of church stances on key issues eg the participation in and receiving the Sacraments, leadership training of clergy, and an affirmation of church mission on global poverty and injustice.

- *Adult Education and Formation; our shared reading and reflection on Divine Renovation challenged us to see parish differently. While some years ago it has had some influence on the notion of collaborative ministry and life.*

CONCLUSION

Themes

The issues and concerns, blessings and graces mentioned in this synthesis are of equal weight. Issues around inclusion, clericalism and a narrow morality are of particular concern

For all we say, our church still excludes women. Gay people, people in complex relationships, people who are poor (in various ways) are also excluded. A language of imperative has become urgent - we *must* challenge this culture.

Clericalism is on the rise (also among lay people) There can be no Synodal Path if others presume to be different or separate from the People of God. This clerical culture must be addressed and rendered accountable.

Our church is known to be rightly vocal in defence of the unborn, the ageing or sick and vulnerable. We are less vocal about other areas of social sin and moral evil. While Pope Francis challenges us, the church needs to broaden its social and moral horizon.

Concerns

The questionnaire and template for this synthesis have proved to be blunt instruments and the change in the timeline created an extra pressure.

We feel it is important there be complete transparency as this process moves to its next stage. Everyone who wishes ought to have sight of deanery and diocesan submissions.

A significant concern is that having engaged the faithful in an extensive consultation, hopes for renewal in communion, participation and mission have been raised. We can only hope and pray that, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, this process will bear fruit for the church, truly committed to a synodal pathway of renewal and communion.

APPENDIX

Executive Summary Document

Comments relating to the Immaculate Conception.

1. There is a strong feeling that we are doing well in respect of all the themes raised in the consultation: building the Church together, listening to each other, enabling the

faithful to speak out, liturgical celebrations, using our talents in service, dialoguing with society and other churches, and sharing responsibility. This contrasts with views on the wider Church.

2. However, we should recognise that some people here still feel they are excluded, especially LGBT+ and divorced and separated people, also those experiencing poverty, so we should seek to engage directly with these groups to draw them in.

3. We should make it easier for people to speak out and express their views by providing opportunities to come together also recognising social media offers opportunities for capturing inputs and engaging young people in this way.

4. We should encourage more people to join in with the sacramental life of the Parish beyond Parish Mass; live streaming can continue to help with this. However, we need to recognise that for many people, family commitments are all-consuming.

5. The increasingly strong links we have with Maryhill Parish Church are highly valued especially as a form of witness to the community and we should continue developing them and now seek to engage with other churches locally.

Comments relating to the wider Church.

6. Clericalism leads to the Church being unwelcoming, unwilling for people to speak out, failing to listen when they do, judging those seen as falling short, lacking appropriate sharing of authority, and encouraging unthinking dependence on priests. Promoting the Latin Mass is divisive. The Laity can also promote clericalism.

7. The Church excludes or at least marginalises many groups including women, the LGBT+ community, those who are divorced and separated, those whose lifestyles are considered to fail to meet an ideal such as cohabiting couples or single parents and those from a variety of what are deemed to be “wrong” backgrounds.

8. The Church needs to do more to promote social justice in line with Catholic Social Teaching and to focus on outrages such as war, global poverty and injustice and discrimination rather than only being heard in relation to issues like divorce, abortion, and end of life decisions.

9. The Church needs to be better at engaging with other churches and faiths and the wider world but is hampered by those who undermine ecumenism, by the legacy of sectarianism and clerical abuse and by lack of language with which to communicate faith to a secular society.

10. Ways to improve include embracing the paradigm of the Church promoted by Vatican II, fostering the contribution of lay people especially women and young people, consciously welcoming the excluded and rejecting judgemental attitudes, improving transparency in decision-making, embracing ecumenism, engaging confidently with society, and focussing on reducing global poverty and injustices.