

REFLECTING ON THE SYNOD RECOMMENDATIONS (3)



Holy Order in the Church

The Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests from Vatican II provides us with an understanding of the role of parish priests in the life of the parish. The Council was clear in identifying the role of priests as we see in this paraphrase of article 6:

"The priest is the leader of his parish in the name of the local bishop and has a specific spiritual power for this work. His role is to teach and, sometimes, to correct people and to present the Christian doctrine with clarity and force. Toward this end, he is a teacher of the Faith. He teaches by how he lives and by how he presides at the rites, as well as by his words. He has a special duty to assist the weak in their faith and to provide for young people, married people, parents, the sick and dying, and men and women religious. Priests have a special and unique obligation to assist the poor and lowly, as Christ himself did. The priest's task is to promote a communal life, not merely individually faithful people, and the centre of that is, again, the Eucharist. As we have said already, the Eucharist is where the Christian life originates, and communities themselves, as the Body of Christ, must be charitable, missionary in spirit, prayerful, and faithful. The priest, therefore, must never become ideological but must adhere only to the Gospel."

Priests and lay people working together

The Council also addressed the relationship of priests and lay people as we see in this paraphrase of article 9:

"Priests are also among the baptised and take their place in the family of God as members of that family among other members. All who are in the Body of Christ have passed through the waters of baptism and all share in the life of Christ, including priests. Therefore, when they preside at public prayer or govern the life of the parish, priests

should be certain that it is Christ's will not their own that they do. Toward this end, they must work with the rest of the faithful promoting the dignity of the lay people and supporting their role in the Gospel's work. They should listen to the laity with a willing spirit and accept their competence, trusting them to know modern times. Priests stand among the laity to serve them as leaders and to bring holy order into the life of the Church. As such, they should accept the gifts of lay people and allow them to minister side by side even working on their own initiative sometimes. As leaders, priests must reconcile differences yet alienate no one, defend the common good yet protect the faith, welcoming all to Christ. And lay people, for their part, must love and support their priests, treating them as shepherds and fathers, working faithfully with them."

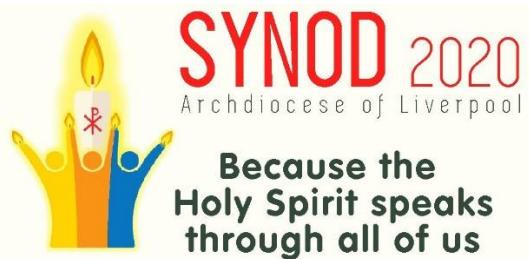
Permanent Deacons

The Constitution on the Church also addressed the ministry which deacons undertake. Vatican II restored the role of the permanent deacon after many centuries as we see in this paraphrase of article 29:

"In the very early years of the Church, deacons, too, participated in the ministry of their bishop. However, over the centuries the diaconate has fallen into disuse. Because of the needs of the world, this Council now gives approval to the restoration of the diaconate. Deacons have a ministry of service to administer solemn baptism, dispense the Eucharist, witness marriages, bring viaticum to the dying, read the Scriptures to the faithful, administer sacramentals, officiate at funerals, and be dedicated to charity and administration. Under the rules of the restored diaconate, even married men can be ordained deacon. But if an unmarried man is ordained, he must remain celibate forever."

Synod Recommendation #3 Ordained Ministry

We, the people of the Archdiocese, recommend that the pastoral plan include a strong commitment to ordained ministry including a programme of support and formation for priests, deacons, and seminarians, and coordination of their work alongside lay ministers.



REFLECTING ON THE SYNOD RECOMMENDATIONS (4)

A Warm Welcome

Imagine being invited to someone's home. Upon arriving, your host says, "I'm so glad you came," but then walks away, to chat with others in the room but leaves you standing there all alone. Now, remember a time in which you felt genuinely welcome. Your host's invitation let you know that he or she valued you and wanted you to be part of the group. He or she greeted you warmly, and if they had to tend to other guests they introduced you to others. The host ignored no one and, at the end of the evening, he or she said, "Please come back soon." Now that's a hearty and authentic way to welcome a guest!

Real invitation and welcome like this must be genuine within our parishes just as in other places in our lives. The 2013 Apostolic Exhortation 'The Joy of the Gospel', urges us to be bolder and more generous. It urges us to invite and welcome people in God's name and in the Synod this desire to welcome all corresponds beautifully with the desire to evangelise. The two go hand in hand. Now is, therefore, the perfect time in the Archdiocese for us to start inviting people to return to our parishes with a warm and generous welcome.

Many people who have wandered away from coming to Mass aren't sure how to return. Many don't know that the Church loves them and would embrace them. And indeed, in the past, we have tended to judge people and often condemn them. We often saw certain people such as the divorced or remarried, couples living without marriage, couples in civil unions, people using birth control, same-sex couples, Catholics married "outside the Church," and even single parents as sinful and unworthy. And people whose faith has grown cold and who just don't value the parish right now were called by the chilly name, "lapsed." We saw them as somehow guilty of sins much more significant than our own and we judged them much more harshly than we did ourselves. And then, even though we are not without sin ourselves, we sometimes threw stones at such people.

But how would Jesus respond to this, do you think? We have only to look at the John's Gospel chapter 8 to get our answer. "Neither do I condemn you," Jesus said to the woman. Indeed.

Reflecting this, the powerful Apostolic Exhortation 'The Joy of Love', invites us to offer these and others like them (including ourselves, by the way) mercy and patience. Most of these people are

doing the best they can and, we should note, many of them are living with great love in their homes. God has not rejected them because God does not cut us off but loves us continually and unconditionally.

"I sincerely believe," Pope Francis tells us in 'The Joy of Love', "that Jesus wants a Church attentive to the goodness which the Holy Spirit sows amid human weakness, a Mother who, while clearly expressing her objective teaching, always does what good she can, even if in the process, her shoes get soiled by the mud of the street" (#308).

"Goodness amid weakness" – isn't this also the story of our own lives? We are the ones whom God now invites to welcome others as ambassadors for Christ! When we make people feel welcome among us, even those who may not adhere perfectly to Church teaching, we are inviting them to celebrate with us this wondrous and mysterious love of God for humanity.

Think of your parish as a family. It is, after all! With Christ as our head, the Spirit connects us as a family of faith. Like any family, some are more active in family affairs while others hold back. Sometimes people feel like "outcasts" in the family for things they have said or done. Not everyone in a family follows the dreams of the parents, and yet, all are welcome.

So, too, in the Church. None of us is perfect, but each of us is welcome! Most of the people we want to help return to the Church are very close to us. They live in our homes and neighbourhoods. They're often our family members and close friends.

Being a "welcoming parish" is much more of a challenge than being merely a "friendly parish." Shaking people's hands at the door and handing them the parish newsletter is friendly. But to be truly welcoming, we must go further. We must include people generously. We must withhold our judgements of them. We must give everyone the benefit of God's mercy which God offers to everyone.

Synod Recommendation #4 A More Inclusive Church

A. We the people of the Archdiocese recommend that the pastoral plan include action on the part of both parish and archdiocese to announce the welcome we offer to everyone.

B. We the people of the Archdiocese recommend that the pastoral plan include dialogue with those who feel excluded, in order to develop initiatives so that the whole Church can reflect on what it means to be more inclusive.