

The Leadership Team was invited by the Director for Mission at the Archdiocese to prepare a submission to reflect on the Synod Report prepared by the bishops of Australia. The Director requested that the submission be prepared by the Leadership within the Parish. The submission was tabled with the Director in April after workshopping with both the Advisory and Leadership teams. A report has been submitted to the Bishops. The full report that was sent can be found below.

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## **Nazareth Catholic Parish of Grovedale, Torquay and Angelsea**

### Report on the Synod



Our Parish Leadership Team gathered to reflect and discuss the Synthesis Report. Drawing inspiration from the scripture story of the Final Judgment in Matthew 25, we pondered the following questions:

- How many people have hungered to be heard and nourished by the Church?
- How many people have been unfairly judged and imprisoned by their lifestyle, gender or sexuality?
- How many people have remained strangers in their own faith communities and felt unwelcome in their Church?

To be a synodal Church in mission is to live out this Gospel story from Matthew- to embrace all people and to move forward in mercy and compassion, loving one another. Our contemplation was further enriched by the symbolism found in Michelangelo's masterful painting, further deepening our reflection.

Having unified in prayer, our team subsequently divided into two groups to discuss the chapters from the Synthesis Report: Chapter 8, Church is Mission and Chapter 16, Towards a Listening and Accompanying Church. We deliberately chose these two chapters as we had previously focused on Chapter 9, Women in the Life and Mission of the Church during an earlier Leadership Meeting.

As a result of our discussion on Chapter 9, we came to the conclusion that in our Parish, we count ourselves fortunate as women are actively empowered with leadership roles across various committees and in education. However, we collectively recognize and lament the historical inadequacies of the Church's response to women's rightful demands for equal recognition and participation in leadership positions. It is time for change.

We had designed our own reflection sheet for tonight and at the onset of our sessions, both groups dedicated the initial moments ensuring all members were clear in their understanding of terms being used such as "synodal" and "co-responsibility." This ensured clarity amongst all participants, thereby enhancing the depth of our discussions. We spent time in silence and in personal reflection.

### Church as Mission

As people committed to the mission, we recognize the need to identify and address each individual and the unique needs of each person within our community. Through the Sacrament of Baptism, we are not only initiated into the faith but also called to participate actively in the mission of the Church. All who have received the sacraments share in the mission. It's crucial to

understand that this mission extends beyond the clergy and religious to encompass all baptized Catholics.

Embracing this inclusive approach marks a departure from traditional thinking and necessitates a willingness to embrace change.

While change can be daunting, it is essential for progress. Change is not always easy. It is often easier to stay with the traditional way of thinking, but in order to move forward, there is a need to renew and refresh. Change takes creativity and requires lay and clergy to work together, embracing all people in the faith community. We recognise that the pace of change within the Church in the past has often been sluggish.

While it is important to preserve some traditions, it is equally essential to let go of those that hinder progress.

Families are the heart of our community and we want our children to desire the church.

Addressing issues such as women in leadership, including their role in the diaconate and ordination, as well as social justice, is paramount for the Church's future alignment with the needs of our families.

While there is a prevailing sense of hope within our Parish for the Church's future, it's evident that more needs to be done, particularly in catering to the needs of families and youth.

Young people have voiced their anger and distrust in a church that does not live out its very reason for being.

## Towards A Listening and Accompanying Church

The significance of listening cannot be overstated, and it is disheartening to encounter the statement from the Synthesis Report indicating that many were taken aback by the mere invitation to be speaking and be heard within the Church. Instead of prioritizing the preservation of the institution, the Church should have demonstrated respect and dignity over the years by being a listening and accompanying Church.

When any relationship breaks down, you hear "he/she never listens to me"

This has happened with so many groups within the church. The Church just never listened. Just listening, without judgment, acknowledges the actual experience and the struggle.

In our Catholic Church, we can find a living example of a synodal community in our education and health systems. These institutions serve as vibrant hubs where young families seek connection and community, finding solace and acceptance within our schools. No questions asked about their family status or sexuality. Just welcomed. All equal. Schools and health systems use inclusive language and encourage female leadership. They create places of strong connection, community and friendship. The Church could learn how to function more effectively if it followed their example.

Over the past decades, the Church has regrettably excluded numerous individuals from receiving Sacraments due to their sexual practices or lifestyle choices. Countless lives have been profoundly affected by the judgment of one person upon another. It is imperative that we cease this practice of condemnation and instead heed the timeless wisdom "Let the person who is without sin cast the first stone." It is time for a shift away from finger pointing and toward a culture of compassion, understanding and unconditional acceptance within our faith community. Much harm could have been avoided if the Church had approached these situations with empathy rather than reproach.

Within our group there was a shared sentiment that the Synthesis Report ought to exhibit a more robust commitment to change, and prioritise the needs of the marginalized. It has a duty to give a voice to the poor, not just the material poor, but also those who are poor in any other way.

In our discussion group, it was a shared concern that we have not passed on our Catholic legacy to our children and grandchildren. The love we have for the Eucharist is not shared and we recognize the sobering reality that it only takes a few generations for the essence of our faith to disappear. While some of our children harbor no anger towards the Church, there exists a sense of disinterest amongst them. Most of us found this hard to understand as they were raised in households where worship and devotion were central pillars of daily life.

The two groups gathered as one at the conclusion of the evening. We shared our thoughts and found common threads.

In conclusion, for our Church to authentically embody a listening and accompanying ethos, mere listening must be accompanied by tangible action. The Church has a poor record of this in the past.

It is imperative for the Church to adopt a forward-looking perspective that moves beyond heavy reliance on aging volunteers and actively engages with the youth.

Encouraging lay participation in preaching roles and employing more inclusive language in the Liturgy are essential steps towards fostering a more inclusive and accessible faith community. Embracing change and acknowledging the equality and the gifts of all individuals are foundational principles of a mission church.

Furthermore, a critical examination of certain Sacramental practices that exclude certain groups from participation is warranted and way overdue.

Achieving true inclusivity also necessitates the equitable inclusion of women in leadership and ministry roles within the church.

All leadership roles in the Church must be examined, including married clergy, and the formation of all people wishing to fulfill these roles must be addressed.

The Church must proactively reach out to the youth and families, recognizing that if it is indeed on a mission, then the voices and perspectives of all baptised individuals must be invited into the decision making process.

With families as the bedrock of our faith community, we need to allocate resources to ensure their involvement in the future of the church.

Those in positions of leadership at the present **MUST** listen. It is time to go back to the mission and vision of Jesus, rather than the high brow, aloof, pretentious, self-importance of some in the present hierarchy. The people have been patient, but their patience is wearing thin and they are now walking. They will no longer accept a judgmental Church. We live in a community where people are highly valued regardless of their race, gender or sexuality and the Church must do the same.

The Church must act decisively, with a sense of urgency, recognizing that time is of the essence. The clock is ticking and the hour is getting late, some would even suggest it's five minutes to midnight.