



For a synodal Church

FINAL REPORT



OF THE DIOCESAN PHASE
OF THE SYNOD 2021-23

Reflection from Bishop Toal on Receiving the Diocesan Synthesis on the Synod on Synodality.

It was a moving experience for me to receive the Diocesan Synthesis of all the reports produced for the Synod on Synodality at the ParaLiturgy on Ascension Thursday. It seems to me that a great amount of work has been done by all who have participated and I express my gratitude to you all.

A special word of thanks to Fr Tom Magill and his team who have prepared and organised the Synodal Process in the Diocese, and have now put together the Synthesis from all the responses received. The Synthesis highlights the Love for the Lord and his Church expressed and witnessed to by the People of the Diocese of Motherwell through participating with such faith and enthusiasm in the Synodal Process. A particular expression of this has been shown by those who have offered so much time and energy to ensuring we responded to the call of Pope Francis to participate in the Synod by organising and presenting the suggested format and then receiving and collating the responses. Many thanks also to all who have guided the sessions at Diocesan and Parish levels, and in the Schools and for other participating groups.

On Ascension Day the Lord asked the Apostles to remain in Jerusalem to await the outpouring of the promised Holy Spirit so they might indeed be his witnesses to the ends of the earth. They did so and joined in continuous prayer with Mary until the Holy Spirit came upon them at Pentecost and so began the Church's Mission. We, as the People of God today, have received the same Spirit and participate in communion with one another in the Lord's Mission. As we pray with Mary for the renewal of the Holy Spirit among us this Pentecost we thank God for the graces already received this year through the praying, listening, and communicating with each other experienced in the Synodal Meetings. We now ask the Lord to bestow upon us the gifts of Holy Spirit so that we might discern from the Synthesis how best to continue the Lord's Mission here in Motherwell Diocese in the challenging times ahead. May the Holy Spirit lead us in our search and may Mary's example and intercession keep us in communion with the Lord and with one another in his Body, the Church.

+Joseph Toal
27th May 2022

INTRODUCTION

The diocesan phase of the synodal process opened in the Diocese of Motherwell on 17th October 2021 with the celebration of the Eucharist. Bishop Toal presided and many priests and people of the diocese were present.

Two training workshops were offered to the priests of the diocese and five to the parish contacts during which they had the opportunity to acquaint themselves with the proposed methodology for the process (see [Appendix](#)).

Between December 2021 and March 2022, people throughout the diocese met in their parish groups to pray, to reflect and discern what the Holy Spirit was saying to the Church in the present moment in their particular situations.

The great majority of our 60 or so parishes engaged in the process. Only eight parishes did not submit any report.

11 of our 12 Secondary Schools and 50 of our 73 Primary Schools also participated and submitted reports.

The diocesan Catholic Men's Society, the Calix Society, and the Scottish Catholic International Aid Fund sent submissions.

The Scottish Prison Service Chaplaincy which serves HMP Shotts in our diocese will submit a separate report. We were unable to get access to Dungavel Immigration Removal Centre.

All the reports have been synthesised under the three great themes of Communion, Participation, and Mission. The ten questions put by the Holy See are highlighted in **red**. As will become evident, the reports contain many similar reflections, observations, and preoccupations. There is material here for the diocese to reflect and act upon as we renew ourselves and go forward together as a Church.

COMMUNION

Our shared catholic faith in Christ and membership of the Church, with the **celebration** of the Eucharist at its heart, is the bedrock of our communion. This is nurtured through our sacramental life, enhanced by the beauty of our liturgy and churches, strengthened by our sense of universality and is a source of sustenance in times of suffering and trial. There is general contentment with the celebration of the liturgy.

Faith sustains and strengthens us during times of trial, bereavement and anxiety, and brings hope and meaning to sacrifice and suffering. (St Joseph's & St Dominic's)

The liturgical celebrations inspire a common bond of belonging in the faithful. The Holy Spirit and our faith in prayer inspires our congregation. (Holy Family)

"Liturgical celebrations are a source of inspiration and give time to think and put issues into perspective." (St John Bosco's)

The pandemic lockdown awakened in many a desire for community and belonging. Often it is this sense of communion and shared identity, being **companions on the journey**, which attracts people to the Church, especially in our fractured society. The shared moral vision the Church offers taps into the desire of many who look for a different way of living and search for meaning in their uncertain lives.

Several participants have said that the restrictions arising due to the pandemic have actually given rise to opportunities to get to know more of the church community. They feel in a position where they can be more open to discussion about their faith. (St Aloysius' and Sacred Heart)

The Church is viewed as an important focus for community, bringing people together. The charitable work which the Church is involved in is also seen as something very positive. It is also seen as an important source of moral teaching, setting out clear ideas on right and wrong, even if these are not always agreed with. (Secondary Schools' feedback)

Within this shared identity, there is room for diversity -- for instance in different spiritual practices and paths, depending where people are at in their spiritual journey. Our unity does not demand uniformity but does require we recognise Christ in the manifold ways he encounters us.

The synod process is a good start to allow this to happen. Ignorance of how the Christian community grows and develops is a mystery to many. Hence lay leadership can seem to be alien to those who attend Mass on a Sunday. (St Mary's, St Isodore's, St Mary Magdalene's)

How are divergencies/differences addressed? There is a duality of thinking. You are either for one thing or against it. How do you create a safe place where people can listen to each other in a non-dual way? (St Mary's & St Aidan's)

Our dialogue begins with listening to God's Word, listening to our inner response and respectfully and silently allowing others to speak their story on the road. (The Most Blessed Trinity)

Communion is fostered in many ways in our parishes: through lay ministries, the SVP, pilgrimages, planning groups and so on. Our Catholic schools can be a particular strength when they enable families to (re)connect with the parish.

The Church makes us feel relaxed and comfortable where in most cases the Parish Priest is approachable and relatable. An "ideal" Priest is someone who is a welcoming figure and does not discriminate regardless of age, sex, gender etc. but is open to and understanding of all. Being part of a Parish helps us identify with a community, a place free of judgement and where we can be close to God. It can be a place of support for many people. (Secondary Schools feedback)

A return to shared social events and communal **celebrations** would be welcomed by many.

However, it was recognised that ours is an imperfect communion. Some people are left on the margins and may not experience the welcome they need – the lapsed, the separated and divorced, the elderly, people struggling with finances, addiction and ill-health, the homeless, refugees, the abused. How can the Church offer opportunities for these people to be heard and helped? The role of women in the Church, the place of LGBT+ people and the low numbers of young people attending, especially the under 40s, were of particular concern in many parishes. The need to listen deeply to these groups was emphasised.

There was a feeling that we don't in fact listen enough and can have a tendency to view those minorities with suspicion, cast judgment or even close our ears to those who need them most. Clear consensus of what we should be doing however by demonstrating compassion, sympathy, and love. (St Ambrose's)

"Not sure we enable those who live outside the rules of the church eg practising LGBTQ, remarried, cohabiting to fully engage. Do they know they are welcome? We should support and encourage those whose marriages have broken down to attend Mass and receive the Sacraments as long as they are able to do so, and should also support understanding of the process of annulment far more widely. (Our Lady of Fatima)"

The Church can come across as judgemental and punitive. There is no space for the marginalised, divorced, gay, lesbian, poor and disadvantaged. We should be welcoming to all. Those who feel left out are less inclined to participate. A change in Church laws would

allow some to be full members of the Church and receive the Sacraments. Let God do the judging. (St Bernadette's)

There was a sense that the church struggles to truly listen to the young, divorced and those who struggle with church teaching, especially in areas of sexuality and sexual morality. (St Margaret's & St Serf's)

There are people who clearly don't feel welcome in the church: divorced and remarried people, lapsed, LGBT etc. Not enough effort is made to be open. Although the Church has moved from a pre-Vatican II stance there are appears elements who wish to return the Church to an older model. (St Bride's Cambuslang)

[In] The journey very often you don't know where you are going and sometimes you think you are alone. (St Monica's)

People can find it difficult to speak out about certain things such as divorce and homosexuality. Many people can feel "shut out" and feel that they can't stay with the church because church teaching says their lifestyle is "wrong." Church has not moved on and is burdened by history. (St Aloysius & The Sacred Heart)

Women, marginalized in today's world and who in the church are largely ignored, have no role in decision making of any significance, be it at parish, deanery or diocesan level. (St Patrick's Strathaven)

Women usually make up most of the Church attendees and are usually keen to be part of the Church's family. However, women and especially young women, are largely ignored. Some women have been made to feel that they are not capable or intelligent enough to participate fully in the life of the Church. We have been discouraged by the attitudes of some of the clergy. (St Mark's & St Anthony's)

Some of our school pupils listed various attitudes and practices in the Church which they find difficult and others to which they think the church should pay more attention:

Guilt, High Expectations; Too structured; Hypocrisy; Lots of BIG questions; Not educated enough; Not being accepted; Abuse of power/authority; Have different beliefs pushed on you; Use of Latin; Harmful views on LGBTQ+ and gender; Fitting in, in an overly old-fashioned way, set in their ways community. (Secondary Schools' feedback)

[T]he church should be worried about things like climate change, war, droughts and floods, poverty, inequality. (Primary Schools' feedback)

Some concrete suggestions to enhance communion were offered: on-going catechesis and formation, parish-based sacramental formation, base communities, offering families more support in their faith, creating a welcoming environment in the church, fostering a willingness to grow in the faith, encouraging a deeper ecological awareness and common action. Online Masses and services are to be welcomed especially for the housebound but also as a first

step back to fuller participation. Co-operation among parishes could be enriching

Use cross-fertilisation of methodologies between parishes: allow different approaches adopted somewhere else. The effectiveness of other approaches in celebration became apparent through online masses during the pandemic. (St Mary's & St Paul's)

The lockdown experience has led us to a broader experience of liturgical celebration, since we visited a large variety of churches and communities. The variety was quite remarkable and, in many occasions, very uplifting. We feel that more awareness of variety could be beneficial to the Church. (Diocesan CMS)

PARTICIPATION

There is a clear understanding of the hierarchical nature of the Church and the leadership role of the parish priest, especially in fostering communion. Over the past decades there has been a growing sense of co-responsibility among the laity, especially in the celebration of the Liturgy with Readers, Eucharistic Ministers, Welcomers, RCIA etc. There is an awareness too of the heavy burdens which the hierarchical model places on the Ordained. People's understanding of **authority and participation** in the Church is changing.

We are all called to spread the Gospel of Christ and therefore need to find ways to reach those who feel marginalised, show empathy and care and therefore ensure that we all journey with Christ together as the "People of God" led by the Holy Spirit. (St Michael's)

We feel that 'authority' within our local Church is for all practical purposes in the hands of the Parish Priest and the Bishop. This is not ideal. It is burdensome for the priest and bishop and not making full use of the talents within the Church. (Diocesan CMS)

This synodal process has been welcomed by many as a deepening of their participation in the life of the parish. Awareness too is growing of all the baptised sharing in Christ's priestly, prophetic and kingly nature and the personal responsibility which comes with this.

Reminding Catholic adults of their baptismal call to be 'Priest, Prophet, and King' would mean adults could evangelise, spread the common mission of the Church and engage in dialogue within the Church and wider society. (St James')

Every baptised person is called to participate in the common mission by using their talents and skills, by how they behave in their life, by sharing their faith and having a positive catholic identity loving God and their neighbour. However there is a need for adult education in faith, to empower people with the tools/skills/knowledge to allow us to be missionary disciples. This education will help people to have a positive catholic identity. (Cathedral)

There is a clear need to recognise the joint responsibility of laity and clergy for the governance of the church. In this regard there is a feeling that persists in our church that structures in place actively stop women attaining positions of authority; there is need for sexual balance in all such matters. (St Patrick's Strathaven)

Is the "we" the laity or the clergy? There is no formal structure for it (viz. the synodal process), there is no forum, communication, discussion between laity and the clergy. We are not used to sharing. (St Bride's East Kilbride)

The recognition that everyone has a voice and that the Lord speaks through the entire People of God is to be encouraged and respected. **Listening and speaking out** are skills to be honed.

Needs to be more inclusive, with people on fringes. More time spent listening and not talking. Encouraging more people into the Church through events. (St Bride's Bothwell)

A recurring view was that the Church needs to work both at its listening skills and dialogue with its people. It was suggested that where appropriate small group structures may help with this. (St Barbara's)

There is an art to listening. It comes through prayer that helps us listen to the Lord and ourselves. This in turn slows us to listen to others. (St Athanasius')

If I have peace within it helps me listen to another. If I'm busy and distracted about my own issues then sometimes I can find it hard to concentrate and listen to the other. (Calix Society)

Situating discussion and reflection within a prayer environment in small groups is very helpful especially in fostering non-judgmental and supportive attitudes. The pandemic has shown the willingness of many to volunteer their time and gifts.

Prayer needs to be rooted in the synodal process in all aspects. God works through people. (St Mary's & St Bernard's)

The importance of coming together has never been more apparent than following on from COVID and lockdown – most people felt that now more than ever was a time to be part of a parish as it gave people a sense of community and belonging. (St James')

It should be recognised and accepted that speaking out about concerns is not being negative. It should be encouraged. Raising awkward topics is often based on prayer and love of the Church. (Our Lady & St Anne's)

The most productive evenings were the ones when Lectio Divina was followed faithfully and the spiritual discussion which followed was fruitful and informative. (St Edward's)

The obstacles to greater participation in **discerning and deciding** should be recognised. At times there is a lack of a platform for speaking – Parish Pastoral Councils are not uniformly in place and there is no Diocesan Pastoral Council. Governance of parishes and diocese is restricted to the ordained. Communication within the parish and diocese can be patchy – a clear communications strategy would be of great help with transparency at its heart. At other times, fear of humiliation, ridicule or retribution, clericalism, lack of self-worth and confidence or simple embarrassment prevent people from speaking. Perceived parish cliques can also marginalise – there should be a time limit to working in any specific role. The celibate and male-only priesthood may also be an obstacle to the fuller participation we seek.

Why can't at least some priests marry? There would still be room for a celibate priesthood but celibacy would not be enforced on all. The same might be said about the ordination of women to the priesthood. Why not? In all such decisions the voice of the faithful should be considered directly before any final decisions are made. (St Patrick's Strathaven)

Women can participate to a certain level but cannot be deacons of the church or priests. (St Vincent's)

Clericalism needs to be eradicated and at times some priests can be arrogant and off putting. (St Ignatius' & St Brigid's)

Fear of the “other” also damages participation. This may come from outdated attitudes, prejudice and narrow-mindedness, our sources of information, or fear of difference.

The perceived stance of the Church on certain social and moral issues can be a block to commitment, especially for young people. A male-dominated hierarchy is also problematic for many, especially when it comes across as authoritarian.

Need to see opportunities for the young to engage with the Church. Our faith is “sold” as a very complex set of principles and dogma – not in terms that the young particularly understand or they wish to know more about. Faith could enter in conflict with social beliefs if not channelled appropriately, so the young automatically disengage. Young people feel not part of the Church because they don't share all that they have learned it's part of our faith – some true / some myths. (St Mary's & St Paul's)

Authority is an area dominated by priest and diocese and it is very one directional. (Christ the King & St John Bosco)

At times, too, there seems to be a disconnect between the Church and the world making the Church seem out-of-touch and the **dialogue in Church and society** difficult. The secular and at times hostile media can exacerbate this.

“Cultural” Catholicism still exists to some extent and prevents a fuller involvement of some in the life of the parish -- people who rarely come to Mass but yet consider themselves Catholic, people who limit their commitment to Sunday Mass, and people who have a kind of “pick-and-mix” religion.

If someone enters the Church on their own terms and believes only the parts of the gospel that suit them, they will live a lukewarm faith which is of no benefit to them or the Church. (St Augustine’s)

There is a strong sense of cultural Catholicism. This is centred around Glasgow Celtic Football Club. However, it has little to do with a committed type of Catholicism based on profession and practice of Faith. A decline started in the 60s. It has increased in more recent times. We are witnessing a deforestation of the collective Catholic memory. (St David’s, St Mary’s & St Dominic’s)

Family and work commitments also hold back volunteering. Families are juggling many things and can be under a lot of pressure. At the same time, many parents don’t invest in the life of the Church in the same way they invest in other parts of life, especially regarding their children.

MISSION

There is an increasing awareness that all the baptised **share responsibility for the common mission** of the Church. Fewer priests highlights the call of all the baptised to mission and evangelisation – traditionally called the Lay Apostolate. The understanding of the centrality of prayer and the spiritual life for this is seen in many ways– faith-sharing, prayer groups, prayer partners, Adoration, Lectio Divina, Ignatian prayer, online reflections, to name a few.

There is a desire for fuller involvement in the mission of the church. People need to know how to become involved. People are crying out for adult catechesis in order to become more knowledgeable and confident when discussing their faith with others and with their children when they ask questions. We need to know how to actively listen to each other, know more about scriptures and the work of the Holy Spirit. (St Ninian & St Cuthbert)

The Social Teaching of the Church, her charitable and humanitarian outreach, and her work with the marginalised world-wide are real strengths and a powerful witness.

We are thirsty for the inspiration that drove the Church after Vatican II and would like to get back to the energy of the past. We believe the Church needs to be more politically engaged in the social justice issues of the age, to be good news for and fighting for the poor and marginalized, to stand for justice. This will particularly attract younger people (the future of the church), who are as seized by injustice as every previous generation. We want to support and encourage much greater focus on the Prophet and King elements of the Church’s

mission, where the Prophet tells truth to power, crying out in the wilderness the injustices of the world and is political (there is no more political text than the Gospels) and the King cares for those in our midst – the poor, the needy and the vulnerable. (SCIAF)

Locally, groups such as the SVP, CMS, Legion of Mary, Justice and Peace, Calix, care groups, ecological groups, bereavement visitors, charitable giving and so on all build up a powerful profile of the local church. Compassion, understanding, acceptance, and welcome both within and without the Church are powerful tools of evangelisation.

There is a desire for an outward-looking, non-judgemental and inclusive Church evidenced in individual members living out their faith.

The message that came through over the course of the four weeks was that the participants try to live the Gospel in their own lives and that is how they bring people to know and love God. There was a consensus view that we should not ‘sugar-coat’ our faith, or ‘water it down’ to suit everyone. (St Columbkille’s)

We do not think that our faith is about activities taking place inside a building. We feel that what matters is not about getting people into the building for religious events so that we can feel good about increased numbers. We are more concerned about getting people out of the building to influence the wider society. (St Columba’s)

A strong sense of journeying with the various communities within the parish. The only worry is that many people don’t feel part of the parish communities. We pray that we can develop a culture of inclusion. We must ask of ourselves, “Am I excluding someone?” (St Leonard’s East Kilbride)

Many non-attenders still live out their faith- are there barriers to them living out their faith in full communion with the church. (St Patrick’s Shotts)

There is a growing awareness of the need in the Church’s mission for outreach to migrants and refugees, to those struggling financially, as there is increased commitment to environmental and ecological issues.

The Church has become heavily involved in environmental issues which greatly affect the poor areas of the world in particular, in line with man’s responsibility for the world. (Sacred Heart & St Gerard’s)

The recent COP conference has allowed a shared dialogue between the Church and society. Although our motivation as stewards of the earth, may be different from others engaged in similar ecological projects, there is much common ground to be found. (St John the Baptist’s)

There are challenges and opportunities in this area as we **form ourselves in synodality**. Many of the laity are now highly skilled and their talents should be used both at parish and diocesan level. The importance of the Church’s use of

social media was brought up many times. On the other hand, many feel ill-equipped to promote the Gospel and look for more on-going formation both in the content and the communication of the faith. The abuse crisis and hostile reporting of the Church have exacerbated people's confidence in talking on matters of faith and damaged their trust in the hierarchy. In the **dialogue in Church and society**, there is at times uncertainty regarding what the Holy Spirit is saying to the Church through changes in society and what the Church has to offer the world.

Is there fear in the hierarchy, due to past misdemeanours in the Church and likely criticism from a hostile media? (St Joseph's & St John Ogilvie's Blantyre)

Some people feel that the Church should be more authoritative about its teachings ... others struggle with the authoritarian judgemental attitude of the Church. (Our Lady & St Joseph's)

There must be a balance between tradition and moving forward in the Church ((St Monica's)

Our Catholic schools with their links both to parishes and families present a wonderful opportunity to develop mission and evangelisation. The diocese could invest more in oversight of RE and commitment to the faith development of our young people.

Young people are attracted by spirituality but the tools of the faith we've depended on don't resonate with them any longer. (St Andrew's)

Education is paramount at all stages of mission and no more so for children and young people. A strong emphasis was placed on the triangle of parents/parish/school as the foundation for growth and practice of the faith, all three together, none in isolation. (St Teresa's)

There is a desire for the Church to be once again visible in the public square, from traditional processions through to Catholics taking their place once again in public life and greater openness on the part of the institutional Church to the secular media. There should be a greater confidence in promoting our message, finding our voice, with courage and respect. A greater transparency and dialogue within the Church between clergy and people will help build that confidence. Greater co-operation between parishes and dioceses is also needed.

It was mentioned that the Church was too passive in society, there was no one authority speaking on behalf of the Church to the wider population. The Church requires to be more forthright in matters concerning major events affecting our locality, our country and the world (St Patrick's, Coatbridge)

We are not good at communicating and marketing ourselves. We need to start acknowledging where we do well as well as acknowledging our shortcomings. (St Mary's & St Aidan's)

We need a deeper understanding of why we believe what we believe & say what we say so that we can understand the Churches authoritative position on big social issues. (St Mark's & St Anthony's)

There is a growing awareness that we share a common baptism and common mission with other Christian Churches which may be related to our seemingly diminished role in society. **Ecumenism** has come a long way in the past decades. Rabid sectarianism has withered for the most part though it is still evident at times. Areas for fruitful co-operation are: social justice issues, common witness in an increasingly consumerist, secularist, and indifferent society, prayer and bible study. Churches Together is still alive and very active in some places. The Church of Scotland is the main Christian Church in our diocese with the Episcopal Church of Scotland (Anglican Communion) and the free Churches also represented. There are also many Muslims living within the diocese but there seems to be little or no dialogue with the Islamic faith.

We have been fortunate to have good connections with North Motherwell Parish Church and have participated in various events and projects, both spiritually and socially. Practical projects bring us together. (St Bernadette's)

The increasingly secular and atheistic state of society in which we live can make us feel marginalised by our religious belief and therefore embarrassed to speak openly about it. (St Joseph's & St Dominic's)

The greater acceptance of intermarriage with other Christian faith groups has helped to increase knowledge and understanding. (St Bride's East Kilbride)

CONCLUDING REMARKS

This synodal experience has awakened a great enthusiasm even among many of those who were initially quite sceptical. The experience of being given a voice and being listened to, new to many, was warmly welcomed.

There was an evident love for the Church throughout the process. Comments critical of present practice were made to build up rather than tear down.

The environment of prayer in which the meetings were held contributed greatly to the discerning process.

There is evident a certain unity of mind and vision for the Church dreamed of in the parish reports. It is of a welcoming and inclusive Church where everyone has an equal place irrespective of gender, sexual orientation, or age. It is a church where membership is rooted in Baptism and in the equal share all the faithful have in the priestly, prophetic, and kingly role of Christ. In this church, clericalism will gradually wither as authority and decision-making are seen to belong to the whole People of God. There is hope for a confident but humble Church, aware of her own weaknesses and mistakes, but ready to take her place in the public square with a well-formed clergy and laity. There is a clear understanding how the Church can serve the world through a sense of belonging, clear identity, and a strong moral voice which takes seriously contemporary issues such as the environment and integral human ecology. This is an outward-facing Church which reaches out to the most marginal in our society and world. And it is a Church formed in deep prayer and spirituality in which everyone can say to our world with St Paul, “For what we preach is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake.” (I Cor 4.5)

There was a general recognition that this was a small beginning to this new way of being and working as Church. The questions posed opened up large areas for further reflection, change, and action.

Expectations have been raised and there is confidence that the diocese as a body under the bishop's leadership will meet them. The hope has been expressed that we won't have to wait until the bishops come together in Synod to begin reflecting together on the implications of this diocesan process. A seed has been sown which will bear fruit when synodality becomes the accepted way of being Church and is seen as one of her essential characteristics.

APPENDIX

Prayer, listening and discerning under the guidance of the Holy Spirit were considered to be the essential activities of the process. Consequently, tools such as questionnaires, surveys and such like were eschewed since they militated against these activities.

Meeting together in small parish groups was considered optimal. Four meetings were suggested so that there was time for trust to build up within the groups and for individuals to grow in confidence.

Each meeting would unfold in two parts, a *Lectio Divina* followed by a Spiritual Conversation. A break between them for socialising and conversation was suggested.

Two or three of the questions put by the Holy See were the focus of each of the meetings.

Over the four meetings, there was a continuous reading of the story of the disciples on the road to Emmaus as the *Lectio*. During the *Meditatio* each member of the group was asked to voice one or two words from the story which struck home. They were then asked in the *Oratio* to speak a short prayer based on that word or words. The *Contemplatio* introduced the group to sitting in deep silence with others.

In the spiritual conversation the group brought the fruit of their prayer into dialogue and discernment. Each individual was encouraged to say something on the questions being considered while all the rest remained silent and did not initiate a discussion. In a second movement, each individual was asked to respond to something someone else had said. The conversation was brought to a conclusion with some responses from the entire group. Moments of silence were encouraged throughout this process.

The aim of this model was pedagogical, theological, and contemplative. The pedagogy aimed to encourage the individual to move from simply uttering a word, to voicing a simple prayer, to expressing a reflection. In this way it was hoped that each individual would grow in confidence and the group would function well.

The theological aspect rooted the process in prayer so that the synodal experience would be seen as something spiritual and ecclesial, an encounter of the group gathered as Church with the Father, through Christ, in the Holy Spirit.

The contemplative aspect was experienced most especially in the silences during which the individuals and the group were asked to note their interior movements and feel the presence of the Holy Spirit. This hoped to highlight the importance of contemplative prayer in the discernment process.

Group leaders and note-takers were appointed to ensure the smooth running of the meeting and to record everything that was said.