

# Towards October 2024



## Aotearoa New Zealand Synod Consultation



Report of the 2024  
Consultation

 **Te Huinga o ngā Pīhopa  
Katorika o Aotearoa**  
New Zealand Catholic Bishops Conference

## New Zealand Catholic Bishops Conference

### Towards October 2024

#### A Message from the Bishops of Aotearoa New Zealand

*The “Towards October 2024” Synod process in New Zealand took place between February and April 2024. National lay organisations, agencies of the Bishops Conference, religious, diocesan bodies, educational institutions, young people’s groups, parish groups and groups involved in previous synodal processes took part.*

*Our people have spoken again with frankness and humility about their shared journey as the People of God, and about “how we can be a synodal Church in mission”. As we said when we presented our national Synod Synthesis in 2022, we may not agree with everything they have said, but we want their voices to be heard. Their responses to the various questions provide important insight into how we might together follow Jesus Christ, “walking his way, telling his truth, living his life” (Ecclesia in Oceania).*

*We thank Pope Francis for this unique and amazing opportunity to participate in the Synodal process again in this way. His words at the conclusion of the Synod Assembly in October 2023 reflect our experience:*

*“In this ‘conversation of the Spirit’, we have experienced the loving presence of the Lord and discovered the beauty of fraternity. We have listened to one another and above all, in the rich variety of our backgrounds and concerns, we have listened to the Holy Spirit. Today we do not see the full fruit of this process, but with farsightedness we look to the horizon opening up before us. The Lord will guide us and help us to be a more synodal and missionary Church, a Church that adores God and serves the women and men of our time, going forth to bring to everyone the consoling joy of the Gospel.”*

- ✠ Stephen Lowe, Bishop of Auckland, NZCBC President
- ✠ Paul Martin SM, Archbishop of Wellington
- ✠ John Adams, Bishop of Palmerston North
- ✠ Michael Dooley, Bishop of Dunedin
- ✠ Michael Gielen, Bishop of Christchurch
- ✠ Richard Laurenson, Bishop of Hamilton

**Cover photo:** Pope Francis (seated far right) during the First Session of the 16th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops held in Rome last October.

# HOW can we be a synodal Church in mission?

*a): At the level of each local Church: HOW can we enhance the differentiated co-responsibility in the mission of all the members of the People of God? What ways of relating, structures, processes of discernment and decision-making with regard to mission make it possible to recognise, shape, and promote co-responsibility? What ministries and participatory bodies can be renewed or introduced to better express this co-responsibility? Within the Synthesis Report, reference can be made more specifically to Chapters 8-12, 16 and 18.*

## **Church is Mission (Synod Report Chapter 8)**

1. Respondents understand that all the baptised are co-responsible for mission, and that the Church exists for mission. However, for many there is a sense that somehow they have not become missionary disciples: “We need to change within ourselves so that we have a heart for mission” and “a lot of people struggle to understand what the Church’s mission means for them”.
2. Lay associations seemed more at home with mission because most have a clearly-defined mission. They see lay organisations playing a vital role in providing a platform for individuals to engage in mission work. One group described the nature of mission as “being sent out to go somewhere and be doing something”.
3. Respondents understood the need to look after and encourage one another within the Catholic community. We are “journeying together in mission - we have a mission to one another, we are the subjects of mission as well as charged with doing it”. Welcoming and valuing everyone, without judgement, was seen as a core part of mission. Reassessing current ministries and needs at the local level is needed as a prelude to establishing new forms of mission which are sustainable.
4. Many examples were provided of ways in which people can be missionary disciples within the Catholic community, although not all called it mission. Most examples fell into one of four groups – assisting those who are ill, elderly, disabled or struggling financially; reaching out to those who feel they are on the margins of the community because of their life situation; encouraging those who are not participating in the community; and doing small, more hidden things for one another. There was particular concern for Catholics “who want to belong, who have been denied the sacraments because of their marital status, gender identity or life choices”. Catholic schools were seen as providing a significant outreach and welcome to people on the margins of the Catholic community.
5. Some saw mission within the Church community as “trying to live as a family with one another”. For others their mission had a method: “Identify the specific skills that God has given you and find a small, practical way to devote them to the Church’s benefit...target a few people to speak to or roles you can perform. Don’t try to change the world, try to make a difference to your local community”.
6. Young people had specific requests: “Support us in these groups, dioceses should take a step back and see which groups are attracting lots of young people and think about why ... move the focus from providing one-off events for young people to helping us build community.” It was noted that friendship is important to young people and seeing the Church

as a friend, or a place where they can build friendships, would help, as would involving them in real decision-making.

7. Examples of mission beyond the Catholic community fell into five categories: assisting the disadvantaged and marginalised in society; being active in social justice issues including those relating to Māori, the indigenous people of New Zealand; work in the community to care for creation; taking opportunities in daily life to support or help others; and evangelization.

8. Evangelisation outside the Catholic community appears to be the most difficult, and many people are uncertain about it. There was a view that communication strategies would help, with the Church being more visibly active in social justice and other issues. There was a plea for “laity to be innovative in their evangelisation, for example, using the digital world”. There was also a caution from the Bishops: “The concern raised in the Synod Report Section 17h – how ecclesiastical authorities can regulate and supervise online apostolic initiatives – is significant. Online encounters provide both opportunities eg to engage more effectively, and dangers eg cherry-picking ideas; echo chambers”.

### **Women in the Life and Mission of the Church (*Synod Report Chapter 9*)**

9. The issue which frustrated people the most about the role of women in the Church was the failure, after decades of trying, to have inclusive language in the liturgy. Women are confronted by their non-inclusion at every Mass, and resolving the issue is seen as a priority, able to be done, and urgent. This was supported by priest groups and lay groups alike. The use of inclusive language was not restricted to liturgy. It was noted that the use of language in Church texts, images and narratives could be more ‘user friendly’, inclusive and draw from women’s experiences.

10. There are many women working in a variety of ways in parishes - “women writing reflections for bulletins, giving homilies, administering in small parishes, pastoral work, looking after church buildings and priests”, and “women are currently carrying the heaviest load in the Church” at parish level. Respondents are seeking removal of obstacles to lay people, especially women, participating in other forms of ministry which require deeper and more extensive formation, such as chaplaincies.

11. For some there was an over-whelming desire to see more female participation in liturgies and the belief that this would help “lessen the hold of clericalism”. Being able to preach was a particular desire - “having a trained wider group of preachers at the Eucharist, women and lay men”. A national women’s group noted this did not have to be in the context of the Eucharist: “Women are well educated in faith and social issues. What if we allowed spaces for women to preach?”

12. Te Kupenga, the Catholic tertiary education institution, recognised the need to “continue to be cognisant of the important role of females in teaching, management and governance, and to show cultural sensitivity. As staff are geographically widespread we need strategies to support inclusiveness”. Theologians of various types, liturgists, bioethicists and canon lawyers are examples of roles where the involvement of women could be fostered.

13. Tribunal staff asked for a change in canon law so that a woman can be a sole judge in a marriage case, and for lay people, especially women, to be trained as judges, defenders of the bond, and advocates for victims. They recognise that training involves tertiary

qualifications in theology and canon law, which pose obstacles to lay involvement, and they are seeking ways to overcome these obstacles.

14. Groups which considered the ordination of women as priests had differing views. A group of priests said: “The question of clericalism and women’s ordination is a false path in which we lose a lot of time and energy. The main question is how we lead others to Christ”. For a group of young people from an immigrant community “the role of the laity and the wider community is to support the priest and the church in its mission ... the seminary, which purpose is to harvest priests, can still be only for men. Other vocations can be available to women. The church doesn’t need to meet the definition of the secular world that purports gender equality.”

15. Another group saw the issue of women’s ordination differently: “As for the role of women in the Church, our conversation quickly focused upon women priests. Women don’t really know why they can’t be priests and there are feelings of resentment and anger around this issue”.

16. Some respondents expressed their frustration with the restriction of ordination to men, wanting selection processes to be “open to all adults with adequate life experience and wisdom, with ordinands and Bishops chosen with the input of the people they will serve”. For some people the issue affects their commitment – “In terms of mission there is a diminishing desire to prop up a discriminatory system”.

17. There was more support for the ordination of women as deacons. Responses included: “remove obstacles to women deacons and identify further paths for women’s co-responsibility”. For one group the ordination of women as deacons is overdue: “Apologise to women for the lack of movement towards a female diaconate and the taking of their gifts for granted”. One response also raised the question of whether women could be installed as deacons rather than ordained: “Women deacons, either installed or ordained, would help a lot with preaching and the celebration of sacraments”.

18. The Bishops Conference attracted the attention of some groups as being a body which by its nature is not open to women. The Bishops themselves were conscious of the difficulties at this level and asked: “Might there be an opportunity to have women participate in NZCBC meetings and advise the Bishops, in the way Te Rōpū Māori does?”. (Te Rōpū Māori is a group which sits with the Bishops to discuss and advise on decisions of particular pastoral interest to Catholic Māori.)

19. In relation to Section 9) of the Synthesis Report (“It is urgent to ensure that women can participate in decision-making processes”) the Bishops noted that “although decision-making sits with Bishops, section 1h concludes by saying “each taking decisions in accordance with their responsibilities”, decision-making *processes* (eg consultation, advice) can and should involve women”. The Bishops also asked if the participation of women in the cardinalate, which does not require ordination, might be a possible topic of study at the global level.

20. Diocesan agencies and bodies were seen as areas where a balance between men and women is occurring, although some areas eg senior management and finance, lack female representation in some dioceses.

21. A change in canon law would be needed, but consideration could be given to allowing Bishops to include women and lay men in their diocesan College of Consultors. The

functions of the College are not the same as those of the Diocesan Finance Council and the Diocesan Pastoral Council in which lay people already participate.

22. From the responses it appears that many of the difficulties for women in relation to leadership occur in parishes. Responses included “the clergy must refrain from treating the female laity as staff”, and “to be a synodal church in mission we need to start listening constructively to one another. The reality for many is that clerical egos are getting in the way of this. It’s a big problem for women in particular, in that we are not respected by many of the ordained”.

23. The generous work done by women in parishes was acknowledged by both priest and lay respondents. It is decision-making and leadership which are the issue. “Women are doing roles within the church, readers, Eucharistic ministers, office procedures etc. Women need to be given more input into leading some of the decisions that have an impact on the life of a parish and in the diocese”, and “Women, who are heavily involved in the day-to-day running of parishes, need to be more represented in parish governance”. A national women’s organisation was concerned that “the contribution of women must be recognised and valued in pastoral leadership through co- responsibility. Unfortunately some women still feel undermined in their parishes. We should endeavour to have proportionate or equal membership of men and women on Pastoral Councils”.

24. There was concern about the understanding priests recently arrived from overseas have of the place of women in New Zealand society, and pleas for better induction programmes, such as: “The programme for the orientation of international priests needs to be broadened and intensified. Many international priests have no understanding or appreciation of the place of women in the New Zealand Church and society”.

### **Consecrated Life and Lay Associations and Movements: A Charismatic Sign (*Synod Report Chapter 8*)**

25. Input from those in consecrated life focused mainly on the matters for discernment rather than on their own position in consecrated life. The proposal in Section 10h of the Synodal Report - means of promoting encounters and collaboration between Bishops Conferences and Religious Superiors - already exists in New Zealand. A Mixed Commission composed of Bishops and Religious Superiors meets annually for several days and has done so for decades. There are also meetings between Religious Superiors and the Bishop in some dioceses. There was a request that all religious, not just Religious Superiors, be involved in these meetings, both nationally and in dioceses.

26. There is great diversity among the lay associations and organisations, and some sadness about the demise of lay associations prominent in the past, such as the Christian Family Movement. Some groups such as Passionist Family Groups, Focolare and Couples for Christ have memberships and gatherings which involve all ages. There are other groups oriented towards fellowship, spiritual growth and particular forms of mission, such as the St Vincent de Paul Society, Hearts Aflame, the Catholic Women’s League and the Knights of the Southern Cross.

27. While not technically lay associations, Catholic schools across the country are for many people the place where they encounter the Church, even if they are not participants in parish activities. Schools are already places where co-responsibility is exercised, involving lay

people, priests and the Bishop, and there may be lessons which could be learned from the schools.

28. In the responses there were signs that people are seeking forms of association which will nurture their spiritual growth and sense of connection. These are often described as being smaller communities within parishes which “promote shared commitment and fellowship”, care for one another and spiritual growth. Some would like these small communities to be active in hospitality to strangers, social justice and practical care for creation. Being local was also important: “The Church is us, our local community in our local neighbourhood”. The listening in the synodal processes has brought to the fore a desire to continue relating to one another in this way: “Communal listening is appreciated because people feel heard ... There is a need to be known ... We need to create small group forums to share and be truly known. How can we promote this model in parishes? In an individualist society this is counter-culture”.

29. Some lay associations already have small group structures in parishes across the country, but there seems to be a desire for something else, or alternatively, perhaps those associations need to review their purpose, practices and mission. There were several requests for resources, money and people, to be put into investigating how the need expressed for small faith communities could be met: “We spend money renovating buildings, but spend little energy building small, intimate, non-judgmental, and inclusive communities of hospitality where people feel safe and can minister to each other”.

30. Others felt that the time has come for new initiatives: “We are called to step out and create opportunities. Step out first, stop waiting for the ‘right time’”. This stepping out would not be initiated by Bishops and clergy, it is the responsibility of all the baptised: “We can do the fostering of our baptism. Transformation begins at the grass roots level.”.

### **Deacons and Priests in a Synodal Church (*Synod Report Chapter 11*)**

31. Responses about the selection of seminarians were almost always accompanied by a desire for similar scrutiny and processes for clergy coming from overseas. There were several proposals about a diocesan selection panel for seminarians which could also be used for clergy from overseas being considered for ministry in the diocese (one diocese already has such a panel). These panels should include women and possibly representatives selected by the Diocesan Pastoral Council and the Council of Priests. Clear public policies and criteria for the acceptance of priests from overseas would be needed to guide the work of the selection panels. There is a desire that “pastors are genuinely committed to the ‘Francis’ model of Church, prioritising their pastoral role, living servant leadership lives and rejecting all forms of clericalism”.

32. In many responses there were concerns about the need to broaden and intensify induction programmes for priests recently arrived from overseas. Examples of why this is needed include some of the priests being unfamiliar with the place of women in the New Zealand Church and society, with the application of canon law in Catholic/non-Catholic marriages, and with ecumenism, as their experience in their home diocese and culture was different.

33. The leadership style of priests is seen as crucial in fostering synodality and co-responsibility. Groups acknowledged that priests minister in a complex multi-ethnic

environment “where a number of expressions of faith can conflict with one another”. The Bishops noted that “preparation for leadership in a diverse synodal Church needs to be emphasised during seminary formation” including “the ability to dialogue, especially listen”. Another group noted that the connection of clergy to the community can assist both their leadership and their personal well-being.

34. Ideas included opportunities for priests to experience synodality, including that led by women, and possibly a manual on best practice for synodality. A group of priests would like to meet synodally once or twice a year, “to share from the heart things that are going on so we can feel supported and not alone in the journey - it will strengthen relationships and connections”.

35. Lay people brought their experience of appraisals and performance reviews into the context of clergy accountability and seek similar processes for their pastors. The Bishops considered that “performance reviews could be useful as long as they help priests and Bishops be better pastors”.

36. Comments about woman deacons were threaded through many responses. Some simply referred to “men and women deacons” whenever they were talking about deacons. Others were more explicit: “Remove obstacles and provide formation for a range of lay ministries for men and women alike, including for women deacons and chaplaincy”. The Bishops considered that “diaconal ministry could have ‘a stronger orientation towards service to those who are poor’ (Synod Report 4p) and not focus almost exclusively on liturgical ministry”.

### **The Bishop in Ecclesial Communion (*Synod Report Chapter 12*)**

37. As “the visible principle of unity” in the diocese the Bishop has responsibilities for a diverse people. He must attend to many needs, some of which were identified by respondents: more extensive recognition of Māori; new migrants; priests from overseas; vocations; evangelisation; the inclusion of women; the exclusion felt by some conservative Catholics; welcoming LGBTIQ+ persons into the parish and diocesan community; ministry to and inclusion of the divorced and remarried; the needs of young Catholics. All of these very human needs which relate to the unity and pastoral care of the Church community must be addressed by the Bishop in the context of “discerning and coordinating the different charisms and ministries sent forth by the Spirit for the proclamation of the Gospel and the common good of the community (Synod Report 12b)”.

38. The Bishops observed that “From our experience in New Zealand, there is no need to be afraid of what synodality asks of us ... Synodality does not mean the breaking down of hierarchy or the ordered nature of the Church. The heart of synodality appears to be *‘reciprocal listening, dialogue, community discernment, and creation of consensus’* (Synod Report 1h) so that each member of Christ’s body can play their part in a co-responsible manner”.

39. This confidence in synodality was also expressed by a group of priests: “We do not know the outcomes, but we have a way to move together on the journey, by listening to one another and the Spirit. It is an important step of collaborative ministry which in the end offers support for all; priests, parishioners and the wider community”. The genuine excitement among respondents about synodality extends to wanting their Bishops and priests to be



excited as well, and to both lead and work with lay people in further implementing it in parishes and dioceses.

40. Respondents recognised that “the Bishop is, in his Church, the one primarily responsible for proclaiming the Gospel and for the liturgy” and took the opportunity to put forward responses in this area. There were calls for a review of the language of the liturgy, forms of liturgy other than the Mass, simplifying rituals and more silence. Some want to “explore new models and support initiatives for liturgies outside churches – in the streets, in homes, in groups. Talk about what’s possible not just what we’ve always done. Let Jesus out!”.

41. Some respondents felt that there should be greater publicity about the measures the Church is taking in Safeguarding, accompanied by acknowledgment of wrongdoing, in order to counteract the impression of “cover-up”. Acknowledging the grief of survivors in prayer and liturgy was seen as important.

42. As with priests and deacons, appraisals and performance reviews were considered to be appropriate for Bishops, which the Bishops considered could be useful.\

43. There were only two responses to the question of selecting candidates for bishop. The Bishops said that “the New Zealand experience in selecting candidates for the episcopate (Section 12I) is that the Bishops Conference has had good scope to participate”. Another group said: “We believe that ministers should be called forth BY the community, FROM the community, FOR the service of the community and society”.

### **Towards a Listening and Accompanying Church (*Synod Report Chapter 16*)**

44. The synodal process has given new prominence to listening to one another and to the Holy Spirit, and this has a community dimension as well as an individual impact, as some groups recognised: “In listening to one another, we strengthen bonds and connections, getting to know one another which creates healthier communities where people feel they belong” and “all people are included and invited to contribute when we provide the hospitality of listening”.

45. There was strong support for the listening of the synodal process to be “encouraged at all levels of parish life, allowing the people of God to be heard and to learn to listen to one another”. Several groups noted that “It is also part of our mission to be listening outside our church doors to the needs in the wider community”. But listening needs to lead to change: “Show that the Church has listened to the people through the synodal process by making significant changes, not just saying we have listened”. “Such listening will also mean asking, and hearing, why people do not, or no longer, see themselves as part of the faith community. This asking in turn means listening to the answers and taking note of them and being prepared to change accordingly.”

46. There was support for the ministry of listening and accompaniment outlined in the Synod Report (16p). Spiritual directors, chaplains, and parish groups in particular thought it was an idea with great promise and proposed that an ecclesial structure in the church for the ministry of listening, rooted in our Christian call and baptism be established. Several groups thought that formation would be necessary, both for listening at an individual level and within synodal processes, as well as those in listening as an ecclesial ministry.

47. Other respondents recognised that relationship and encounter are needed for listening and that we might need “to put ourselves in different spaces... going to where people are in order to listen” and that formation would be needed to help people to take this step - “there are many who feel excluded from the Church today, and sometimes listening to them is hard, therefore training/formation is needed”.

48. Caution might need to be exercised during formation processes - “In terms of the proposal about the Ministry of Listening and Accompaniment, it is important to properly discern who should be involved with this sort of ministry, as the wrong people may do more harm than good”. Trained and experienced spiritual directors were considered by many to be a resource for formation in listening and accompaniment, and spiritual directors’ groups who participated offered their gifts for this purpose.

49. Prayer and reflective silence are seen as essential in order to listen to and walk alongside others, and “the change that results is then exciting, positive and joyful”. For one group the conversation about listening and silence carried over to their experience of the Mass: “... “silence is the Latin Rite’s particular genius. Without silence there is spiritual frustration and increased marginalisation for many, including some disabled and neurodivergent people”.

50. There were many other responses about the nature of listening. The diversity in the Church has become more evident to many through the synodal process, and people have become more comfortable with diversity, because we are “journeying in the beauty of the diversity of our Church, which creates a unity in our focus on Jesus”. When listening “presence is important, without judgment. It is important also to be open, to be willing to be uncomfortable and experience rejection, and above all to be respectful”. Presence also includes availability: “We should all be asking ourselves ‘am I able to be available?’. We need to allow ourselves to be available and flexible for what the Spirit asks of us”.

### **Structures for Participation (*Synod Report Chapter 18*)**

51. For some respondents the word “structure” raised wider questions: “The whole structure of the Church needs to be re-examined. Does the parish structure still work?”. The questions included physical structures: “Church buildings which are physically set up in the style of a lecture theatre promote a ‘passive’ vision of church which undermines co-responsibility and stifles liturgical creativity...”.

52. It was evident that for many co-responsibility has a meaning beyond just lay people and clergy sharing leadership responsibility, for example, “differentiated co-responsibility ... means that each of us is responsible ... co-responsibility means really seeing ourselves as the Body of Christ.” Co-responsibility was also seen as being about belonging and inclusion, for example, “co-responsibility has been mentioned a lot ... to feel responsible you first need to feel like you belong, are included and that you matter. Jesus was relational. Our Church needs to be as well.”

53. A group of priests related co-responsibility to mission: “A new leadership model with differentiated co-responsibility needs to be ‘centrifugal’, giving people energy and momentum to go out on mission”. The same group cautioned that “there is a danger that co-responsibility and collaboration can be conflated with flattening the leadership structure to one modality rather than a differentiated co-responsibility which respects the different roles”.

54. Formation opportunities are needed to nurture and form co-responsibility, for both laity and clergy -we must be “willing to unlearn in order to learn” - particularly for clergy recently arrived from overseas who may have been used to a more authoritarian leadership model in the Church which reflects their culture. The leadership style of priests is crucial in fostering co-responsibility. It was noted that some parish bodies have a model that is still highly clerical, and that “co-responsible leadership involves real sharing of power – a governance structure in which decision-making is truly inclusive of lay people” and that lay people need to “show a level of commitment to supporting such a process”.

55. There were some suggestions that there be “synodal councils” at various levels in the Church, but most responses envisaged the existing pastoral councils and finance committees becoming synodal in nature. This has implications for how their membership is decided and how they operate: “The Church needs to be a non-hierarchical, listening and accompanying Church with everyone at the table. At a round table everyone is a leader”.

56. For some people clericalism is potentially a problem for the existing pastoral bodies becoming synodal bodies: “There is no room for clericalism in any of its manifestations, including within some members of the laity, nor any sense of entitlement”, whereas others recognised the need to “nurture and understand the vocation of the clergy” and work collaboratively and supportively with them. If existing canonical bodies are to be synodal bodies – or there are to be new synodal bodies - the role of the Bishop or parish priest in them will need to be carefully studied and explained, and changes made to canon law.

57. Governance was seen by many in the light of their experience of synodality: “Genuine synodality requires input by groups which include clergy, religious and laity, into decision-making at diocesan and national levels of Church governance and leadership”. It was noted that “Canon 129 needs changing to state that lay faithful can exercise the power of governance according to the law”.

58. However, one group said: “Increased lay participation, and involvement at governance level, may erode faith and limit vocations ... Ultimately, governance responsibility rests with those in Holy Orders as part of their office”.

59. There is a strong desire that every parish and diocese have an obligatory pastoral council which operates in a synodal manner “with priests and Bishop as participants, not with power of veto”. The importance of the parish pastoral council was noted by both priests and Bishops. A group of priests wrote: “If we have a good parish council, we can lead in a team and not do it on our own. In listening together with the parish council we can find some ways forward for our parish”. The Bishops said “Sharing best practice for parish councils operating in a synodal manner (eg discerning together, rather than rubber-stamping ‘Father’s idea’) would be useful”.

60. Concern was expressed about how representative diocesan and parish pastoral councils are. One group related this to how membership of these bodies is decided, saying “Leadership teams should not be chosen by priests - they need to be representative of the various communities in the parish”.

61. The shift work which is common especially in lower paid roles can prevent participation in Church bodies: “Flexible structures promote better participation, according to work schedules, even if it means changing the traditional time that a certain committee has always met”. The changes in the ethnic composition of the Church in New Zealand over the last two decades is another factor in participation which some parishes are trying to overcome: “The

diversity of parishioners is not always reflected in parish leadership teams". There was also acknowledgement that there are cultural differences in how different ethnic groups see leadership, especially in the Church.

62. We have not yet responded adequately to those whose participation is limited by disability, for example: "Disability advocates are needed. Many people in our congregations have hidden disabilities that do not allow them to fully participate in the life of the Church". The lack of young people in parish bodies was also a concern for many.

### **63. Practical suggestions relating to dioceses and their Pastoral Councils:**

- The chairs of the Diocesan Pastoral Council and the Diocesan Finance Council must be lay persons.
- The Diocesan Pastoral Council must be consulted about the strategic plan for the diocese; before the diocesan budget is approved or parish taxation rates are altered; and must receive the diocesan annual financial report.
- The Diocesan Pastoral Council must be consulted before a church is built, closed, demolished, sold, or reduced to profane use; on all matters of importance in the diocese.
- Canon 515 needs to be changed so that when parishes are notably altered or suppressed the Diocesan Pastoral Council and parish councils of affected parishes are consulted.
- The law should be changed so that the Diocesan Pastoral Council continues in existence and advises a diocesan administrator or apostolic administrator when a diocesan Bishop dies, resigns or is transferred.
- Dioceses should have a synod within a 10-year period.

### **64. Practical suggestions relating to parishes and their Pastoral and Finance Committees:**

- Each Bishop should mandate parish pastoral councils and parish finance committees so that members of these bodies must have a real say in parish matters.
- All parishes should be required to have an Annual General Meeting and there is full reporting of the financial situation of the parish to parishioners.
- Each Bishop should ensure that the parish priest presides at parish Finance Committee meetings but is not a member of the committee he consults with, and the priest is not the chairperson.

# HOW can we be a synodal Church in mission?

*b): At the level of relations between Churches, between groupings of Churches at different levels and with the Bishop of Rome: **HOW** can these relations be creatively articulated in order to find “a dynamic balance between the dimension of the Church as a whole and its local roots” (Synthesis Report chap. 5, lett. g)? Here reference can be made above all to Chapters 13, 19 and 20 of the Synthesis Report.*

## **The Bishop of Rome in the College of Bishops (Synod Report Chapter 13)**

65. The Bishops noted that *ad limina* visits have become more dialogical in recent times.

66. Consultation with Holy See bodies needs to include faster responses from them so that local Church activities are not unhelpfully impeded. Delegation of some decisions to Nunciatures, and the Nuncio having his own finance council could help improve the speed of decision-making.

## **Groupings of Churches within the Communion of the Whole Church (Synod Report Chapter 19)**

67. The Bishops commented that although Eastern Church communities in New Zealand are small, their presence is more significant than most realise. The Latin Church provides good practical support to these communities eg sharing worship space.

*The syntheses of the responses to the chapters for reflection in the Synod Report (first question - chapters 8-12, 16, 18; second question – chapters 13, 19, 20) have been placed first in this document. There were also significant responses related to chapter 1 Synodality: Experience and Understanding, Chapter 7 On the Road Towards Christian Unity, and Chapter 14 A Synodal Approach to Formation. The syntheses of these responses are included below.*

## **Synodality: Experience and Understanding (Synod Report Chapter 1)**

68. People are more experienced now with the small group process and find it energising. They spoke about a sense of inclusion, being heard, having new listening skills, and “everyone wanting the active participation of everyone”. The Bishops noted synodality’s experiential nature: “Synodality works by becoming immersed in the dynamic, rather than standing back and analysing it”.

69. This new experience was not confined to lay people. A group of priests said that “being humble and not interrupting other people adds a whole new dimension as we really listen to what another person wants to say”. The Bishops took part in their own synodal sessions and described it as “the Christological dynamic of self-emptying / de-centering to make space for others must become an ecclesial reality if we are to go beyond ‘my position’”.

70. There is a desire for “universal promotion of the synodal process in church organisations such as parish administration and discussion groups, doing the synodal process creates a synodal church”. For this to become our way as a community, formation is needed: “Synodal

process workshops to be rolled out throughout the diocese in the same way Safeguarding workshops continue to be rolled out – available to all who are involved in any ministry within the Church”. We need to look to the future as well – are the young people in our Catholic schools experiencing synodality?

71. One group had concerns: “Synodality has proceeded through preferential listening, evidenced by leaders and participants who have a strong motivation for change. This excludes every-day and conservative Catholic voices, leading towards distorted perceptions of the Spirit ‘at work’ in the Church, and groupthink...”.

72. A national group of young people saw the synodal process differently: “Sense of hope - we are going in the right direction. We are going on a spiritual pilgrimage - the Holy Spirit is leading us; we are not just drifting along. Forward focus. We are going somewhere as a Church”.

### **On the Road Towards Christian Unity (*Synod Report Chapter 7*)**

73. Shared ecumenical Advent and Lent liturgies take place in parishes, and in some places, joint support for those who are disadvantaged. There is less engagement at diocesan level. At the national level the Bishops participate in regular meetings with other Church Leaders, and work with them in meeting with the Prime Minister about issues of concern. The Anglican, Methodist and Lutheran Dialogues take place.

74. In the words of a group of Sisters “there is much room for ecumenical engagement”. The Bishops observed that “ecumenism in New Zealand focuses primarily on Catholic-Protestant relations and seems to have become somewhat ‘tired’”.

75. People spoke about churches acting together to relieve poverty and to care for creation. Questions were raised about ecumenism in seminary formation, as some priests do not seem interested. Priests recently arrived from overseas often appear to have little understanding of ecumenism, possibly because they are from countries where the Church cannot work ecumenically. There was a plea for seminary formation and formation for priests to give them practical ways of encouraging ecumenical relationships among their parishioners.

76. There is a desire to “remove barriers to receiving communion by taking the approach that ‘all who are baptised are welcome at this table’”. The Church’s approach, both theological and pastoral, to this issue needs clarification and explanation.

### **A Synodal Approach to Formation (*Synod Report Chapter 14*)**

77. Respondents identified the need for formation for both lay people and clergy in various aspects of synodality eg listening, the Conversation in the Spirit process, discernment and co-responsibility. There were numerous requests for formation relating to baptism. There is a “need for the baptised to understand the theological depth of Baptism, to understand that all who are baptised participate in the priesthood of Christ and Baptism serves as a leveler, uniting individuals in equality irrespective of social status or background”.

78. Formation for the understanding and exercise of co-responsibility is also sought, for both clergy and lay people. This includes, in particular, support for the parish Pastoral Council, how it is best created and how it can operate in a synodal manner.

79. There were strong pleas from groups of young people for formation and mentoring for young leaders in mission: “There are many young adults who give generously of their time and talents to the Church and are very active in mission. However, we feel like we are lacking support from our elders and see many of our peers burn out in ministry ... help us grow as we give. Invest in the spiritual formation of young people, train us for leadership in mission”. Young people identified specific needs: “opportunities for nurturing young people ... at parish level”; “priests and others trained to be a support network for us”, and “specialist groups for formation and pastoral care of leaders of young adult communities”.

80. Te Kupenga, the New Zealand Church’s national provider of Catholic tertiary education, recognised that the synodal process may necessitate changes in their course provision: “As a provider of tertiary education to the future priests and ministers in the Catholic church of Aotearoa, our courses should reflect developments in theology and ecclesiology, especially synodality”.

81. A diocesan selection panel was proposed for seminarians, which would include women and representatives selected by the Diocesan Pastoral Council and Council of Priests. Clear public criteria for the acceptance of seminarians would be needed to guide the work of the selection panels.

82. The seminary community acknowledged that “it is good for us to be connected to the wider community as much as possible”. They considered that they could improve the connection and the seminarian’s visibility through “a wider experience in parishes on Sundays to experience the diversity of styles of liturgical prayer”, “looking for opportunities to welcome people to the seminary, including inviting people from parishes and schools” and “attending seminars in parishes and with groups such as Divine Renovation”.

83. Some groups wanted candidates for priesthood to live in a parish community for the bulk of their training, rather than a seminary. The Bishops supported seminarians having “opportunities to engage with and listen to diverse sectors of society”, and see the seminary’s relatively small size assisting in connecting the seminarians to the daily life of the community. The Bishops also noted that “the dangers of clericalism seem more prevalent in some cultures and undertaking seminary formation within the culture(s) the aspiring priest will serve has distinct advantages”.

