

Submission from: Archdiocese of Dublin – Section 1

How can we imagine the life of the Church in Ireland where people are co-responsible for the Church's mission in different ways?

CO-RESPONSIBILITY

There is a growing awareness within Parish Pastoral Councils to better understand and implement co-responsibility locally. At the same time, the small groups indicated levels of “complacency and paralysis” about assuming responsibility. Enthusiasm is mixed with a sense of frustration, doubt and disappointment about the synodal process, as it has evolved after the initial stages. The process is slow and some fear it may not bear fruit, while for others, there is a sense of trust that this is from the Lord and it will always take time. Groups also indicated that the future of the Church depends on a good outcome from the process. The recent consultation surfaced the need for clarification about what co-responsibility is and what it is not.

There is a sense of ownership, which distinguishes co-responsibility from volunteering, this is indicating a need to address imbalances in clerical and lay roles currently found in the structures of the Church. This process will take time, requiring a “change in mind-set,” (Benedict XVI, 10 August 2012). In turn, this will require a deeper understanding of co-responsibility, rooted in our baptismal calling. Concern was expressed that the clergy have not fully “bought into” co-responsibility. As we heard in this consultation, “priests need a change of mindset”, “handing over for co-responsibility.” Nevertheless, the overwhelming mood of the responses was hopeful and optimistic. “Co-responsibility includes openness to diversity including different ethnic groups and gender profiles.” There was convergence that we need to move “from a mindset of ‘management of decline’ to growing inclusive and welcoming faith communities.” As new ways of being Church emerge, there will be failures and disappointment, but sustained by hope, we are not daunted or deterred.

PASTORAL COUNCILS AND LAITY

While Parish Pastoral Councils continue to have a key leadership role, the development of lay leaders has surfaced in the consultation as a priority. Groups indicated that the Church would need to develop further structures and practices to support lay people as they take on co-responsible leadership in Church settings. The consultation also envisioned that the participation of the laity must go beyond parish to include all diocesan levels of participation.

FORMATION AND TRAINING

The consultation surfaced a developing consciousness of the call towards a synodal Church. There is an appreciation that gifts and ministries are grounded in Baptism. The gradual acceptance of lay ministries in the Church will require a further investment in lay ministry and leadership. This will lay a foundation for the new style of Church, building up a literate and engaged laity. Good examples of this are the areas of funeral ministry leadership, the development of the new ministry of catechist and Parish Pastoral Councils. In the responses submitted, there was strong consensus about the need to grow voluntary ministries and to embrace more fully formation for service in the promotion of lay leadership.

THE YOUNG

There is a concern about the absence of the young in our faith communities. The gatherings affirmed that the engagement of young people in the life of the Church begins with recognising their needs and valuing their contribution. Their values regarding issues such as social justice, climate change and the future of our society are important. Together we need to read the signs of the times, to see how faith can guide and invigorate these concerns.

WOMEN AND CHURCH

The consultation speaks of women's role in the life of the Church, including the sense of marginalisation expressed by many women, must be acknowledged and acted upon. This will involve a culture change, identifying women for leadership roles. Groups indicated that when women are excluded from leadership the community suffers from the absence of their witness and giftedness.

PRAYER

The way forward needs to emphasise the importance of prayerful discernment, as we have learned already in the synodal process. This connects to an expressed need for increased opportunities for prayer led by lay people stressed in small group feedback. This will require training and support. Groups also indicated that “there is a great hunger for prayer” and highlighted the need “honour the desire for prayer in parishes.” A key question which arose in the gatherings is, who can lead prayer?

CONCLUSION

“Conversations in the Spirit” were highly valued and continue to be valued as transformative in parishes, pastoral councils, deaneries and at other levels of Church. Only when we listen to God and listen to understand each other can we discern where the Holy Spirit is taking us. Many groups speak of a culture shift and it is true that only a change of received culture will make full participation possible, valuing all charisms and ministries. The Synodal Pathway is demonstrating the importance of building a sense of identity, a vision of Church, with priests and people working together recognizing the equality and dignity of all the baptized. This renewed understanding is at the heart of synodality. In conclusion, the consultation outlined some fundamental orientations that will enable a climate in which co-responsibility can grow, these are:

1. Growing inclusive and welcoming communities
2. The development of lay leaders aligned to structures
3. Investment in lay ministry and leadership
4. Recognising the needs of young people and valuing their contribution
5. Identifying leadership roles for women
6. Grounding all development in prayerful discernment together