

Report from NJPN Open meeting 26 February 2022

A Justice and Peace Response to the Synodal Process

Over 40 representatives of justice and peace from dioceses, agencies, religious orders and justice and peace groups from around the country gathered via zoom to consider what might be a justice and peace contribution to the Synodal Process.

The day began with a reflection from a Celtic Daily Prayer, led by Paul Southgate, NJPN Chair, and the introduction to the day was facilitated by Anne Peacey NJPN Vice-Chair.

The Synod presents us with a huge challenge but, in the Synodal journey we have a fantastic opportunity to re-imagine the mission of the Church. We **can** seek a new way of being in a broken world. By virtue of the gift of Baptism we have a responsibility to speak out and voice our concerns and hopes, identifying those issues that prevent all our brothers and sisters from living with dignity and wholeness, able to make positive choices in their relationships and manner of living.

Key words in the Synod preparatory document are Communion, Participation and Mission

Communion: a relational concept, encompassing empathy, sensitivity, acceptance, identity, accompaniment,

Participation: again relational, it involves being given a space at the table, inclusiveness, status, recognition of gifts and talents, acceptance of weakness, affirmation, equity

Mission: an outward looking movement, a vocation or calling, journey, going out into the world. But what **are** we offering to our world? What **is** our message, what we say and how we behave defines us, as, for better or worse, that is how we are perceived by others?

We read in the preparatory documents:

The purpose of the Synod is:

‘To provide an opportunity for the **entire People of God** to discern **together** how to move forward on the path towards being a more synodal Church in the long-term’

1.3; VADEMECUM FOR THE SYNOD ON SYNODALITY

The focus of this current phase is listening, and we are invited to be part of the Synodal journey, beginning by a sharing of lived experience within our parishes/dioceses or wherever we find ourselves.

We are invited to foster a broad consultation process to gather the **wealth of the experiences** of lived Synodality, in its different articulations and facets,

VADEMECUM FOR THE SYNOD ON SYNODALITY 1.5 The Experience on the Local Level

The unfolding of the Synodal Process at a local level must involve respectful listening to the other. Is this our experience, thus far?

Have we considered how are going to listen to the voices of those who are not likely to attend an after Mass meeting, access the parish newsletter, read a calling message on the parish website, who don't feel part of the 'in crowd' with the luxury of time to chat at the school gates, feel unable to be part of a parish group, those who have been alienated by their experience of Church, victims of abuse, those excluded and unwelcomed because of issues relating to sexuality, gender, ethnicity or relationship status. Those who are struggling to feed their families, coping with abusive or broken relationships or the ongoing and often overwhelming problems that come with the complexity of the lives of many families. How do we listen to the vulnerable individuals and groups who are just about surviving on the margins of society? Have we heard these voices in our own parishes? Where do **they** fit in to the parish and diocesan structures? I would suggest these are all justice issues.

There is urgent need for change, we each have issues we feel passionately about, we have been advised that the Synod will not result in major change of specific doctrine or regulations BUT if **Communion, Participation** and **Mission** are taken seriously then a very different model of Church will emerge, resulting in a less hierarchical structure, a more collaborative model with less clericalism, more open dialogue, respectful relationships between lay and ordained, a greater knowledge and understanding, a partnership through our common baptism where faith journeys are shared not regulated and directed. **A huge shift of heart and mind.** This re-focusing would result in a more open community of faith where all issues would be open to discussion.

Our task for the day was to consider what we, as a J&P Network could offer to the Synodal Process so that we might contribute to building (or indeed re-building) this welcoming, affirming, inclusive movement of hope.

We spent time listening and discerning in small breakout groups, considering how we become a Church which reflects the Gospel values of justice, peace, and love. The groups then further considered what J&P activists wish to contribute to the Synodal Process, and what needs to change so that we proclaim, in an authentic way, a Gospel of hope to a hurting world.

The afternoon session began with short feedback reports from the morning breakout groups, before participants returned to their groups to agree on a sentence or key issue arising from earlier discussion. Group statements were shared, and contributions will be collated and form the basis of the NJPN report to the Synodal Office.

The afternoon closed with a final prayer and those present felt that the event was worthwhile, a very good, inclusive process with great networking opportunity.

Anne Peacey April 2022

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