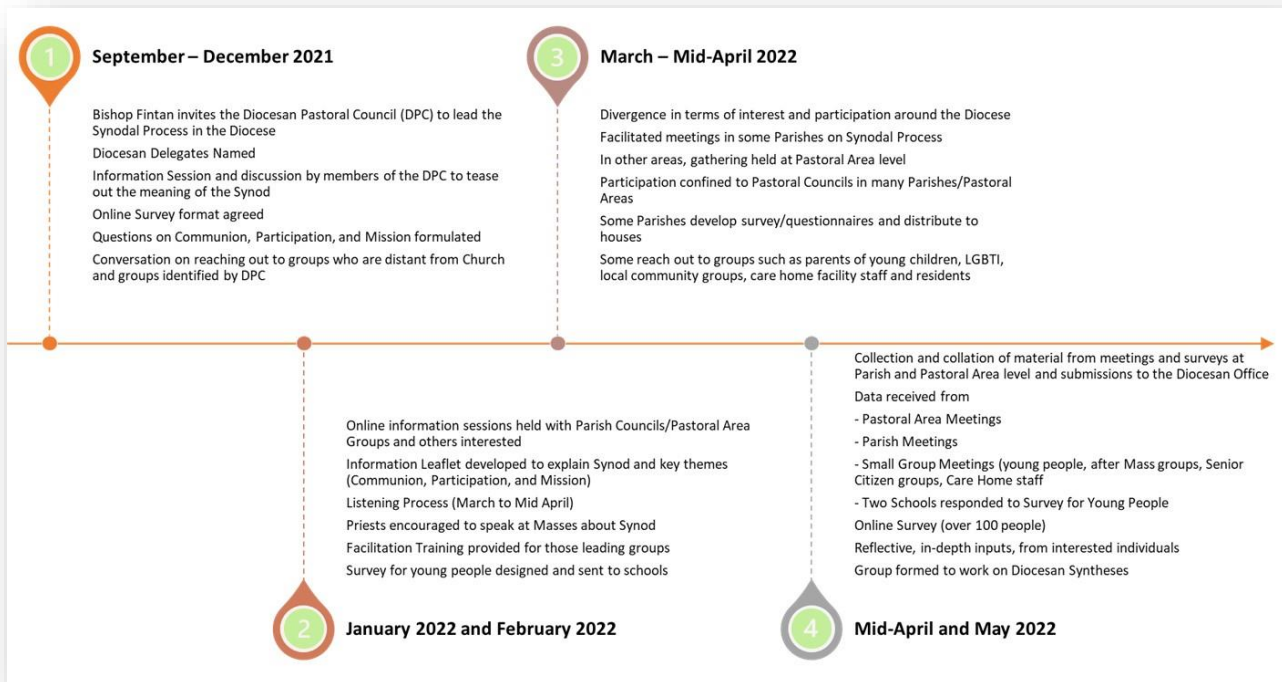


# Diocese of Killaloe: Synodal Process

## Diocesan Synthesis: Introduction



The process followed in the Killaloe Diocese is outlined above in some detail. The questions formulated for discussion during the Synodal Process in the Diocese were:

- How might we work to build a more inclusive ‘Communion’ or Church? Have you a sense of belonging to a Church Community? Do you know people or groups who feel excluded?
- How can we listen to the different voices in our parish? Are there important voices on the periphery? Who are these voices? How can we include them?
- How can we as a parish/pastoral area, do better in reaching out? How can we become a more engaged and energetic Church in our society? How can we unlock the joy of the Gospel and the message of Jesus Christ?<sup>1</sup>

Synodal Process Consultation Meetings were held at both Pastoral Area (representing 16 parishes) and Parish level (12 parishes). Other parishes engaged people through surveys, while some parishes were successful in encouraging people to use the diocesan online survey platform to participate. A significant number of individuals submitted detailed written feedback and reflections. The feedback indicates that the majority of participants were those who are involved in Church and are of an older (over 50) age profile.

<sup>1</sup> Note: these questions were adapted dependent on the audience participating. See Appendix 1

There were, however, significant other contributions:

- Respondents who indicated that they no longer participate and see themselves as outside or on the margins of the Church.
- Small but very significant conversations were held with community groups in one parish. In another, conversations with groups comprising young parents, both single and married, non- Mass-going young people and LGBTI+ persons were held. These conversations open a window on the perspectives of these cohorts and give insight into how they see the Church.
- Engaging with Young People was named as a priority by the Diocesan Pastoral Council, but it proved difficult to do this. It was agreed to work through the second level schools as parishes do not have the structures to meet with young people. In the end, only two schools took part in the survey of young people. Nonetheless, the feedback from this participation offers insight into the lives of young people and their perspective on Church.

The process has been, for those who participated, an event of the Holy Spirit, an experience of listening, engagement and reaching out, an experience of encounter and a time of hope. Many people accepted the invitation to dream of the Church of the future, the Church that the Holy Spirit wants us to be. The feedback is also marked by a realism about where the Church finds itself and the challenges we face. There are many positive suggestions and possibilities named which the local Church in Killaloe can engage with which offer opportunities for growth.

Generating interest and engagement with the Synodal Process proved difficult initially. However, given the slow start, the level of feedback received is much greater than seemed possible some months ago. Feedback suggests some reasons for the reticence to engage with the Synodal Process:

1. Tiredness and lack of energy were evident, arising from the experience of COVID, but also from the age profile of priests, decline in their numbers, and of numbers participating in Church.
2. The participative structures of Church suffered greatly during COVID, and in some parishes/ pastoral areas ceased to function. Without structures, it was hard to get off the ground.
3. In parishes where priests did not engage with the Synodal Process, local engagement was blocked.
4. People struggled to make sense of the language used and words like Synodality, Communion, Participation and Mission were off-putting to them, despite efforts to make them meaningful.
5. It was pointed out that many people in our parishes are happy to be involved in practical projects but are not comfortable in fora where they are asked to reflect or offer opinions.
6. A lack of trust that what was said would be listened to was expressed in some cases. This was especially so among those who have had experiences of Church which they have found hurtful.

# Diocesan Synthesis Part 2

## Collated Contributions and Themes Emerging

Over 500 pages of data were submitted from Pastoral Area and Parish Groups and from individual respondents. The drafting group has read, prayed about, and discerned together over many meetings, both online and in-person, the themes emerging from this material. In this work, we have been guided by reflective questions from both the National Steering Group and the General Secretariat of the Synod<sup>2</sup>. The feedback we received broadly fell into two sections.

**Section 1** speaks to areas in the life of the Church that participants see as needing healing, conversion and change in terms of attitudes, structures, pastoral practices, culture, and relationships so that the message of the Gospel may be heard in our times.

**Section 2** speaks to the hopes and possibilities, dreams, desires, and aspirations for the Church that were expressed by participants from the Killaloe Diocese.

We are presenting our synthesis in a format which outlines: -

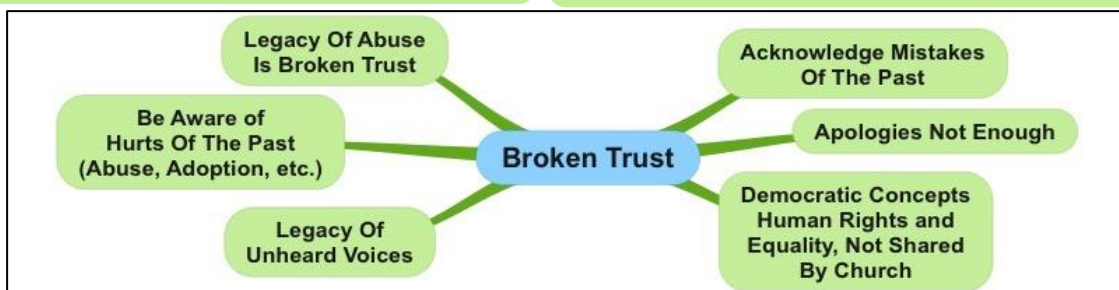
- Quotations from individuals/groups who were participants in the listening process
- A Mind Map of the important items that were discerned by the reporting team
- Commentary on what the people of Killaloe are asking to be heard as part of this Synodal process

**Section 1** speaks to areas in the life of the Church that participants see as needing healing, conversion and change in terms of attitudes, structures, pastoral practices, culture, and relationships so that the message of the Gospel may be heard in our times.

### Broken Trust

“The failure of our Church authorities to deal with this sinfulness has closed the door for many”

“People are hurting over Church scandals, mother and baby homes, and much more than an apology is needed”



The impact of revelations of abuse by people in positions of trust and leadership in the Church and in Church institutions and the failure of Church leadership to address these issues adequately is an ever-present reality in the Irish Church. The feedback from the Synodal Process in the Killaloe Diocese

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.synod.va/content/dam/synod/common/phases/en/EN\\_Step\\_10\\_Synthesis.pdf](https://www.synod.va/content/dam/synod/common/phases/en/EN_Step_10_Synthesis.pdf)

suggests that there is greatly diminished confidence in the Church as an institution and that the legacy of abuse is one of broken trust. Deep hurt and anger are reflected in some submissions and calls for change that needs to go deeper than repeated apologies.

## Address Exclusion of Women (Empowerment)

“A significant number of people believe that their participation in Church is on hold until women are included in all aspects of ministry”

“The Churches attitude to women is antiquated and needs to be completely overhauled”



It is the view of those who responded that women are excluded from leadership and decision-making bodies in the church. These submissions call for greater empowerment of women at all levels of church life and openness for them to participate in all ministries. There’s a strong view that the inclusion and empowerment of women in the church cannot be sidestepped any longer. The majority of those who responded, of all ages and gender, call for and would welcome the ordination of women.

The submissions also acknowledged the vital contribution that women make at Parish and Diocesan levels. They are seen as the backbone of the local church and the glue that keeps the church community together. They are seen also as a vital link between the church and community organisations.

## Groups Who Are Marginalised

“I feel I am not very welcome because I’m gay. It is not something I chose; it is the way it is. I finally got to a stage where I am accepting it... however, I am still struggling... for years I thought being dead would be easier. People should not have to feel like that .... in my heart God loves me.”



Voices that were heard both in group and individual submissions were those of the LGBTQI+ community, divorced, those in second unions and separated couples. The hurt experienced by these

people through Church teaching and the fear of being judged by the Church is palpable in the feedback. Their voice was echoed throughout by a very significant number of submissions from others who call for change in Church teaching, Church language and for the Church to reach out to include all these groups who are marginalised. There was a call for the Church to be more accepting of people who, because of their circumstances, find themselves in ‘grey areas’.

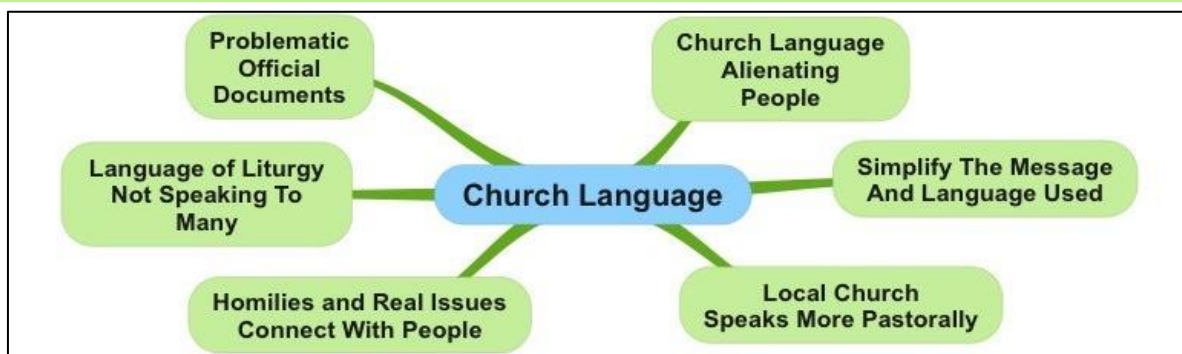
A number of people pointed out that Jesus himself was marginalised and if we are to follow him, we must reach out to those who are on the margins. Moving outside our comfort zones to embrace those who are different was identified as a challenge for both priests and laity.

One submission expressed a wish for a member of the travelling community to one day hold a leadership role in the church. More involvement of people from different countries in the life of the Church was welcomed by many and a call for more inclusion of refugees and migrants.

A minority of submissions stated that the Church should not ‘pander to the minority’ and that core principles of the Church should not be changed.

## Church Language

“To build a more inclusive parish community we can begin by using language we understand”



Many people expressed a view that they find the language used difficult to comprehend and that there is a need to use more contemporary language. It was commented in some submissions that the language used in some official church documents is harsh and shows a lack of understanding; this is experienced by many as being non-respectful and dismissive of them and is judgemental of their reality.

The challenge for the church is to remain true to its message while finding a language that is easily understood and inclusive. It was acknowledged in submissions that the inclusive pastoral outreach of the local Church, expressed as empathy, kindness, compassion and care for the individual, contrasts with the coldness of the official Church language and teaching.

The language of the liturgy was named as an obstacle to meaningful participation.

“Jesus used beautiful words to heal, comfort and connect with his disciples . . . words from the Church need to be soft, beautiful and touch the heart”.

**Section 2** speaks to the hopes and possibilities, dreams, desires, and aspirations for the Church that were expressed by participants from the Killaloe Diocese.

## Re-energise Outreach to Young People

“Ways need to be found for young people to experience Church with a sense of belonging and participation”

“... churches don’t always seem welcoming to newcomers/young people”



The submissions from Young People, though small in number, allow us insight into their world. Their memories of First Communion/Confirmation are important to them as positive experiences of Church as well as significant family moments. However, few now participate in Church and with exceptions, most belong to families who no longer participate. The young people view the Church as out of touch with their reality. They point to Church attitudes towards the LGBTI people and women as outdated. They see the Church as “judgemental”, and fear being judged themselves by people of faith. The language of the liturgy/Mass is seen as dated and boring; they ask for other forms of prayer experiences. They are attracted by positive role models e.g. school chaplains/teachers/interested adults. Young people see social media as a medium for connecting with them, specifically mentioning platforms such as Instagram, Tik-Tok and Facebook, as their medium of choice.

The desire to reach out to young people, and to involve them at all levels of Church was a very strong theme among other cohorts. Indeed, engaging with young people was emphasised as a priority by a majority of participants. Many expressed sadness about the absence of young people from parish liturgies.

An evident tension point was that older generations hope that young people will return to Mass. The young people ask the Church to move towards them, and their world, developing with them other ways of praying in non-formal settings which speak to them.

## Welcome & Inclusion/Opportunities To Participate

“Allowing greater involvement in all aspects of Church is critical if we are to have a truly active and vibrant mission of the future.”



While the inclusion of those who feel on the periphery of the Church was identified as a key issue, participants also asked for the full inclusion of all those who are inside the Church. To become a truly welcoming Church, there is a need for social structures, gatherings, and welcoming ministries. Several suggestions submitted were Parish social gatherings such as meet and greet, parish tea party and a cup of tea after the weekly Mass. Also advocated were welcome letters to new families in the area, personal invitations to events and the establishment of formal welcome groups.

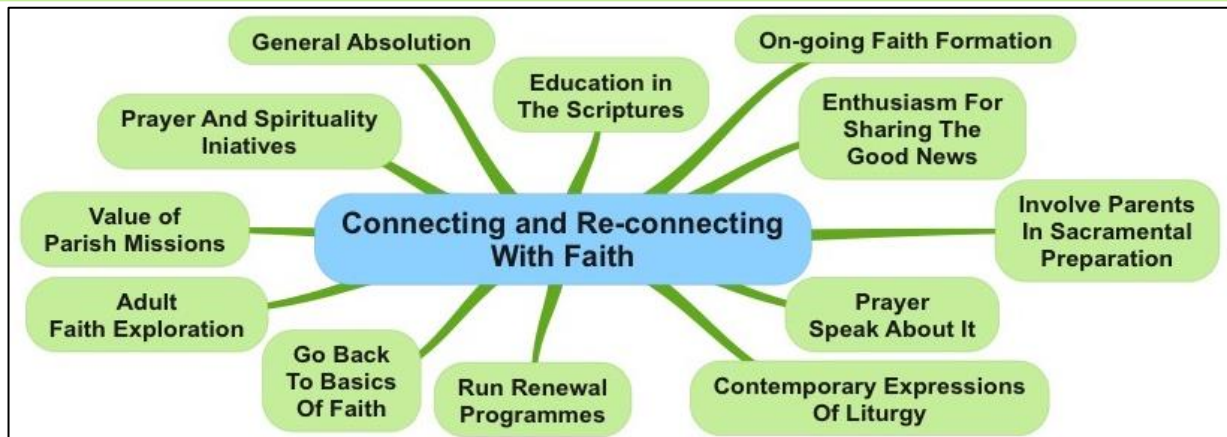
Increased lay participation in all aspects of the Church community and beyond, from the Parish to the Diocese was advocated by many and the empowerment of lay people to become active participants within the church community. Suggestions made include the creation of focus groups for young people, outreach ministry to other parish groups, facilitated discussion groups on faith and church matters, training courses, regular parish surveys, and awareness groups for those experiencing addiction. The need for personal invitations to participate was seen as essential if people are to be encouraged to get involved.

Some participants see priests as disconnected from the realities of people’s lives; these would like to see the clergy outside the church, meeting people where they are at. The creation of some form of regular listening process was suggested where priests and lay people come together to talk about faith and life. ‘We can’t think we have all the answers.

A minority mentioned the need for a transparent and properly constituted Pastoral Councils as well as time limits on membership. Rotas for existing ministries would encourage others to see that Church is not closed to new participants.

## Connecting and Re-Connecting with Faith

“Any Faith formation needs to be accessible, encouraged and genuinely speaking to the needs of the parishioners.”



Calls for people to connect and re-connect with faith was a theme in many submissions. For some, there was a desire to keep traditional liturgies and return to faith practices such as parish missions, adoration, house Masses and confession. Faith renewal programmes were proposed and new ways of connecting with faith including contemporary ways of praying, mindfulness, parish retreats, faith sharing, bible study and intergenerational prayer groups. Others wished the Church to reach out, bringing the Mass church services to unfamiliar settings to broaden the understanding of the Church community. Re-creating and creating liturgies relating to life events and renewal of liturgies such as harvest liturgical celebration. Reconnecting with faith meant a return to the core teaching of Jesus Christ for some. Others conveyed the desire to hear faith stories from those living out Christian values every day.

Many submissions emphasised the involvement of lay people in the organising and facilitating faith groups, with particular mention of involving parents in sacramental preparation. Use of technology and social media platforms such as webcams and Facebook to connect and create opportunities for faith formation. Catechetical and liturgy training (online) for lay people to facilitate such groups was seen as needed. The comments in these submissions, especially around the scriptures, would seem to indicate the value of developing opportunities for scripture education at a wide level and encouraging people to participate. Obstacles to connecting with faith include the use of ‘outdated’ language, lack of joy in our liturgies, lack of personal invitation to parishioners, and lack of religious education in post-primary schools.



## New Possibilities versus Stay Where We Are

“... women and married men might play a greater role in Church ...”

“Morals of the old and New Testament are still relevant”



A clear tension of views was identified in the material gathered during the listening process. This was presented as: - those who see an urgent need for change, directly opposed by participants who wanted the Church to remain as it is today.

In many submissions there was a call for optional celibacy and married priests.

From those who advocated change, many new types of ministries were called for with the specific issue of current celibacy and gender regulations being seen as barriers to developing a more diverse and vibrant ministry within the Church.

A minority view noted a concern that it may already be too late to change and that we may have passed the point at which change would be effective.

There is a tension between those who want to see a broader development of ministry and those who want to retain the existing model of priesthood.

# Killaloe Diocesan Synthesis

## Conclusion & Next Steps

Pope Francis has said that “Synodality is precisely the path which God expects of the Church in the Third Millennium”. The process proposed for the Diocesan Phase of the International Synodal Pathway offered us as a Diocese the opportunity to consider how we are becoming a synodal Church. We were asked to consider how inclusive and participative we are as a Church, and on how we are engaging with the world around us.

The very invitation to take part in a Synodal process and to be self-reflective about these kinds of questions is something very new to our Christian Communities. We are grateful for this opportunity and sincerely thank all who participated. Learning to listen to the Spirit together and discerning where God is calling us to respond requires us to work in a way with which we are not familiar. We are now challenged to grow as a Diocese and as Parish Communities in our understanding of Synodality and in our practice of it. A key aspect of this is learning to discern and how to listen to the Holy Spirit, walking and talking together as Church.

The feedback outlined in this document is reflective, honest and comes from a desire for an inclusive and welcoming Church. The majority of participants in the Synodal Process are people for whom faith in Christ and belonging to the Christian Community gives meaning and hope to their lives. They are also acutely aware of those who no longer walk with us in the Christian Community and of those who feel the pain of exclusion.

Many of the issues named in Sections 1 & 2 of the Feedback concern systemic issues in the institutional Church about which there are strong calls for a change of attitudes, culture, structures and pastoral practices, issues which impact negatively on the Church at a local level and lead to withdrawal from Church participation.













Re-energizing our outreach to young people, taking initiatives to help people connect and reconnect with faith, opening up possibilities for more participation, and making our Church communities more welcoming to those who feel excluded or no longer participate are but some of the areas that require our response at a local level. It is encouraging that there is energy for engagement and involvement among the respondents. This needs to be harnessed.

The Diocese will take forward reflection and planning in these areas in the coming months led by the Diocesan Pastoral Council.

“Hope opens new horizons, making us capable of dreaming what is not even imaginable”

Pope Francis

# Appendices

 <p>20220126 - Stages And Phases.pdf</p>	 <p>Synodal Process Questions Prompts t</p>	 <p>Diocese of Killaloe - Three Questions V3.</p>	 <p>How can we, as a parish, work and do</p>
 <p>Killaloe Diocese Online Survey.docx</p>	 <p>Liturgy to mark beginning of the sy</p>	 <p>Note for parish newsletters.docx</p>	 <p>What is Synodality.pptx</p>
 <p>The Synodal Youth-Young Adult-</p>	 <p>Synodal Pathway Facilitator's Guide.p</p>	 <p>Synodal Pathway Note Taker's Guide.1</p>	 <p>Synodal Process Leaflet for Parishes.1</p>