

Summary statement from Assembly

Listening survey

We identify strongly with the thrust of the listening survey. We believe in and are committed to a future for our church, a church that can communicate the good news to all, and is open to whatever internal change is needed in order to do that. A church that honours the place of the priest (married and celibate) but is not clerical – a church where there is genuine shared responsibility with trained laity. Here we see the need for a programme and culture of care for priests as they get older and fewer. Also we see that opportunities for lay involvement should not be restricted to a selected few - we don't want to replace one elite with another.

We look for a church that is closer to the lives of the people, including those who are not regular mass goers, more understanding of the challenges and complexities of their lives, better able to speak to and reflect on those issues in our sacraments, liturgies and pastoral outreaches. We wish our priests to have more time for pastoral issues and to delegate administration responsibilities. We feel strongly about a place for women. We want a church where women play key roles and are involved in decision making at all levels.

We resonate strongly with concerns for the stress in people's lives coming through in the listening survey. We believe the church can be a place of healing, and this should be a priority pastoral concern – in terms of networking with relevant agencies, how we do our liturgies, and how we do the sacraments, especially the sacrament of reconciliation.

Sacramental practice

We believe that sacraments are there to support all of us in our struggles and brokenness. Therefore we desire a pastoral approach to the sacraments that is inclusive and non-judgemental - focussed on sharing the core of the good news that touches people's lives where they are hurting and wounded. While we wish to engage with people as they are, to take them as we find them, we do not wish to leave them there – we see the need for a sustained sacramental catechesis for adults, especially parents. We need to develop our liturgies in a more pastorally sensitive way, one that speaks the language of the people, one that is more creative and flexible, one that is capable of working in a variety of contexts, including outside of church buildings. We believe we need to work towards fewer, better-prepared liturgies, and key to this will be the development of trained pastoral liturgy teams in our parishes. We see the need for a review of the number of masses in the diocese and the use of church buildings. We recognise that this is a sensitive issue that needs both leadership at diocesan level and consultation on the ground.

Youth

Here we feel most strongly that 'no action' is not an option. We call for a major investment in the development of a comprehensive youth ministry in the diocese, one with a developed vision and policies, and with effective communications. This will need to include full-time youth ministry staff with the following work priorities - training of volunteers; creating a shared ownership of the ministry with committed youth; networking with youth agencies, especially schools and the GAA; and outreach to unattached youth.

A sense of urgency needed

We don't need to panic. But we do need to root all that we do in prayer and to act with urgency. There needs to be a follow-up to this Assembly that is focussed and action-oriented. Immediately there should be a communication with the people of the diocese on what we have explored here and the direction we are seeking to follow, one that is cognisant of the realities we have to address but is not despondent. We are on a faith journey, confident that God's Spirit is with us.