

Diocese of Waterford & Lismore

Report on the Listening Process



Table of Contents

| | |
|---|----|
| Introduction..... | 1 |
| The Reasons People Came to the 'Listening Process' | 3 |
| Cultural Context | 4 |
| Education and Training | 5 |
| Catechesis..... | 5 |
| Adult Education; Formation in the Faith; Training for Ministry | 6 |
| Youth..... | 7 |
| Ministry | 8 |
| The Role of the Priest | 8 |
| Laity..... | 9 |
| Women | 10 |
| Deacons..... | 10 |
| Priests from Abroad | 10 |
| Liturgy..... | 11 |
| Spirituality and Prayer | 12 |
| Church as Community | 13 |
| Focus Groups | 15 |
| Asylum Seekers and Refugees | 15 |
| Rural Community | 15 |
| The Environment | 16 |
| Community Forum | 16 |
| Trade Unions..... | 16 |
| Media..... | 17 |
| Young Married Couples..... | 17 |
| Doctrinal Questions | 17 |
| Summary | 18 |
| Directions for Pastoral Developments..... | 19 |

Introduction

The idea of the 'Listening Process' had its origins in the Assembly of Priests that took place in 2002, where planning for the future was identified as one of the key issues to be addressed by the diocese. The group of priests and lay people formed to explore this issue, under the leadership of the Bishop, recommended that an intensive consultation with the people of the diocese should be conducted. Bishop Lee in his pastoral letter "Our Parish and the Future", announced that a 'Listening Process' would take place in the diocese. The process is based on the belief that the Spirit is given to the Church as the people of God and that the Spirit is active in our dialogue with one another. The Bishop stated that as part of the process, "everybody will be invited to a meeting in their area to share and discuss their hopes and concerns for the future". He reminded us that "mapping out a plan for the future will require deep reflection and courageous planning".

A team was appointed to conduct the 'Listening Process'.

The objectives of the team were:

- To ensure that as wide a range as possible of the views, experiences, hopes and needs of all the people were shared and heard.
- To generate a sense of participation and responsibility within parish communities and the diocese.
- To lead to an agreed core vision statement and directions for mission and ministry in the future.

The team believed that a shared vision and agreed directions would help to unify and give energy and strength to the People of God in the knowledge that the diocese as a whole and each parish, according to its local situation, was working out of the same core vision.

The process was conducted at twelve centres throughout the diocese. People from neighbouring parishes assembled at each centre and were asked to sit at random tables in groups of eight to ten. Experienced facilitators and recorders were recruited from across the diocese, people who had the necessary listening, facilitation and recording skills to ensure that those seated at the same table would feel comfortable in sharing their views. Four questions were posed, questions which were chosen to glean maximum information and participation.

The questions were as follows:

Why did you come here?

What is your ideal image of Church?

What will help to realise this ideal Church?

What will hinder it?

A special night was conducted for youth of the diocese. Religious also were invited to share their views and concerns and the Priests' Conference in April centred on the 'Listening Process'. A number of 'focus' groups were also invited to dialogue with the listening team.

As a result of the 'Listening Process', large amounts of hand written material had to be typed initially and thereafter, a standard procedure for analysing textual material was undertaken. This method, known as qualitative content analysis, has, as an essential feature, the use of categorisation of the data. The data was categorised into seven major themes, chosen because of the frequency of their recurrence throughout the process. In using such a method the voices of the actual participants have been faithfully heard and transcripts of all responses have been kept. All this adds to the validity of the final report.

To further ensure the validity of the interpretation, we employed the methodology of "investigator triangulation". This method involved different members of the listening team reading and re-reading the recorded material to detect or minimise any recurring biases which may affect the validity of the final report. Thus, we critiqued each other's account of the data by constant reference to the original sources and contexts. The real test of the validity of the report can only be ascertained by those who participated in the process.

The themes that emerged from data analysis were Cultural Context, Education and Training, Youth, Ministry, Liturgy, Spirituality and Prayer, Community. These themes will be discussed in the report. A report on the dialogue with 'focus' groups will follow. A summary of the responses to the first question "Why did you come?" will be presented as an overture to the report. These responses give a good indication of the dispositions of those attending. Doctrinal questions which emerged in the conversations will be discussed in a separate section. The report will then be summarised and to conclude, directions for the future, which emerged from the process, will be outlined.

The Reasons People came to the 'Listening Process'

People came to the 'Listening Process' because they were concerned. They were concerned for the future of the Church in the diocese. They articulated very clearly the reasons for this concern.

They felt that the future is precarious because of the shortage of priests. They would like this issue addressed as a matter of urgency as it has serious implications for the future of parishes. They expressed fear that churches would close and wondered "how the parish will work in the future?"

“They are concerned for the future of the Church in the diocese.”

They were concerned because of the harm caused by the scandals. As well, there was anger at the way the scandals were handled by Church leaders.

Leadership in the Church is a cause of concern for many. The hierarchical structures are seen to be at odds with the contemporary mind-set and seen by many as a hindrance to pastoral development. The failure of leadership to respond adequately to change is frustrating.

“the over-riding concern was for the young”

Concern was expressed at the very sharp decline in numbers at attending Masses throughout the diocese.

People are dissatisfied by many aspects of today's culture, particularly consumerism and materialism. Concern was expressed that values are being eroded, and the spiritual dimension of life is being ignored.

However, the over-riding concern was for the young. The alienation of youth from the institutional Church and their absence from liturgical celebrations is very distressing for many. The anxiety was heightened by the fact that no clear solutions to the problem are emerging and parents are floundering. People are concerned because they love the Church. Their Christian faith is central to their lives. They want to hand on a living Church and their Christian values to the next generation. "We have got a lot from the Church and would like to make sure the Church continues to be an influence in our lives and in the lives of our young people".

People came because they wondered at what may happen in the future and they wanted to share their views and contribute to the formation of a plan to guide us forward. They were deeply appreciative of the fact that they were consulted and were afforded an opportunity to be part of the planning process. Many expressed a willingness to be supportive of their local Church and to contribute in whatever way they could to implementing any future plan. "I want to help in any way to keep the Church alive". "I feel I have to help in difficult times". "I want to lend support to a changing declining Church". Some came out of a sense of duty.

“Many expressed a willingness to be supportive of their local Church and to contribute in whatever way they could to implementing any future plan”

There was a huge expectation that there would be a response and a follow-up to the 'Listening Process'. There was a real fear that failure to follow up on the process would lead to disillusionment, disappointment and apathy.

Cultural Context

People expressed dissatisfaction with many aspects of today's culture. The success of our economy has brought many benefits but has contributed to a materialistic ethos in society, an ethos that seriously threatens our spiritual welfare. "Religion seems to be taking second place to commercial and material influences". "Money controls our lives". Many felt pressurised and stressed; they regretted that there was no time for the important things in life such as prayer, family life and playing one's role in the local community. Materialism results in an unhealthy and selfish individualism. The rapid change which is characteristic of society at present, leads to confusion regarding moral norms and values.

Many groups expressed real concern over the huge influence of television. "Television is the new tabernacle". Television controls family life and erodes our value-system. "People are no longer shocked by immorality. It is presented as the norm today".

People stated that Church and Christian values were more important than ever in this cultural context.

Education and Training

CATECHESIS

People really struggled to understand why their children are so disaffected from the Church. There is a realisation that modern culture, in many ways, counteracts the formation in faith received in schools. Again and again, there is criticism of the materialistic ethos as one of the off-shoots of a successful economy, an ethos that seriously threatens our spiritual welfare. Some parents recognise that in this culture, we cannot be over-reliant on our schools.

People appreciate the key role played by the school in the whole area of catechesis and are grateful for the effort made by teachers. There is an awareness of the struggle teachers face, particularly in secondary schools. It is very difficult for the Catholic schools when the values promoted there are often undermined in the wider society.

But there was also a realisation that some "parents are leaving everything to the schools" and push all responsibility onto the teachers. Parents were criticised for not taking a more active role in the faith formation of their children by encouraging prayer in the home and discussing issues of faith with them. "Children are not getting religion at home"; "parents are no longer bringing their children to Mass". There was consistent criticism of parents who do not practice and yet present their children for First Communion and Confirmation. "If there is nobody practising in the home, is there any point in Confirmation?"... "Occasions such as First Communion and Confirmation should focus primarily on the religious significance of the sacrament"... "...money is the main emphasis of the sacrament (of Confirmation)". Teachers themselves said that they are unhappy with the present practice of sacramental preparation and celebration. They are feeling dejected because the effort they put into sacramental preparation yields no tangible results in terms of regular Mass attendance. They think "(they) have fallen into the trap of making First Holy Communion and Confirmation more interesting and hence a show".

The responsibility of the wider faith community or parish is recognised. "Church, home and school should work together. There should be shared responsibility for

“Church, home and school should work together. There should be shared responsibility for instructing children...the laity should be involved in this”.

instructing children...the laity should be involved in this”. One concrete suggestion to facilitate this was the possible introduction of ‘Sunday school’. It was also pointed out that it is difficult to bring young children to Mass because of the lack of facilities in our churches.

There was a strong recommendation that children should not be confirmed before transition year in secondary school, when they would be in a position to freely choose to commit to their faith.

ADULT EDUCATION: FORMATION IN THE FAITH; TRAINING FOR MINISTRY

Many adults acknowledge that they need on-going formation in the faith themselves. “There is nothing to help us understand our faith, to grow in maturity of faith”... “(There is) no ‘in-service’ for people as they move on in life”. “We need to be more educated to answer the (faith) questions of our children”. There was a plea to provide opportunities for on-going adult education and formation in faith and doctrine. The fact that there were repeated calls for a stronger emphasis on the ten commandments in preaching and catechetical programmes is indicative of the confusion concerning moral principles experienced by many. There is an urgent need to provide high-quality training and formation for ministries (such as membership of parish pastoral councils).



Youth

This was by far the dominant theme emerging from the 'Listening Process'. Nearly all (over 99% of reports from the tables) expressed serious concern about the absence of youth from liturgical services and about the alienation of youth from the institutional Church. (There was no clear definition of the age bracket people were referring to, but occasional references indicated that people had older teenagers and young adults in mind. Young parents were also mentioned.)

People are concerned because:

- Youth are of vital importance to the future of the Church: "The Church of the future will be dependant on the youth of today".
- The Church of today is impoverished because of the absence of youth: "The participation of youth would contribute to a more interesting and lively Church".
- Young people are perceived as spiritually impoverished by being cut-off from the Church and may not have the spiritual resources to cope with difficulties.

The vast majority of respondents were very well disposed towards youth. They expressed great sympathy for them because of the pressures to which they are subjected in today's culture pressures, such as drugs, alcohol, peer pressure, self-harm. "The young are spiritual and prayerful but do not see themselves as belonging to the institutional Church." "Belief is still there". "Just because they do not attend church does not mean they are not spiritual". Many thought that the scandals impacted very negatively on young people and that it was much more difficult for them to interact with priests today.

The following recommendations were voiced repeatedly :

- We need to listen to youth. "We are ignoring the missing generation at present". We need to create fora at parish level to enable this listening to happen.
- We need to encourage them to become involved by inviting them to exercise a ministry at Mass or to join a folk choir, or by giving them responsibility for preparation of some liturgies.
- We need to give them a voice in pastoral development in parishes through representation on pastoral councils or through a separate youth council.

At the special 'Listening' evening for youth, the teenagers present spoke about issues that are a source of anxiety and concern for them, issues such as "exams

and getting the points needed”, “pressure to get part-time jobs”, “bullying”, “worry about future careers”. The responses also indicated that questions of faith and spirituality were not ignored by young people. However, the youth were critical of liturgical celebrations in their parishes. “Mass is dull, we need more singing and activity”. But some emphasised that they “were not just looking for entertainment”. Many of those present felt that there was little opportunity for them to become involved in parishes. As well as that, they would welcome opportunities to meet socially outside of Mass. They recommended that a Youth Advisory Committee be set up in the diocese.

““The participation of youth would contribute to a more interesting and lively Church.””

Ministry

Almost every table expressed great concern for the future of the local Church. People showed a clear awareness of the shortage of priests, of the fall off in vocations, and an obvious consciousness that this had serious implications for everybody, priests and people. There was concern at the age profile of priests.

THE ROLE OF THE PRIEST

This expression of alarm at the shortage of priests is indicative of how highly people respect and value the role of the priest in the faith community. Indeed, this was stated explicitly and repeated many times in recorded statements. People expressed deep appreciation of the great work that priests do in serving and building up the Christian community. People want their priests to get to know them and to interact with them.

““People expressed deep appreciation of the great work that priests do in serving and building up the Christian community.””

There was much awareness of the recent scandals and of their negative impact. There was serious criticism of the way in which these scandals were dealt with. There were also many expressions of concern and support for the vast majority of priests who have been unjustly placed under a cloud of criticism and suspicion. There was great sympathy for the unfair way in which all were targeted by the media when the scandals broke.

The huge increase in workload experienced by priests, occasioned by the shortages, elicited very sympathetic responses. There was an urgent plea that priests should not be expected to have responsibility for all administrative duties in parishes. These duties could be delegated to lay people who would be paid if necessary. Priests themselves said that they feared people's demands and wondered if these demands would be realistic or if "they would be run off their feet trying to provide services for people".

“The huge increase in workload experienced by priests, occasioned by the shortages, elicited very sympathetic responses.”

There is a strong desire that leadership would be exercised in a non-authoritarian fashion. People said that they welcome a close working relationship between priest and people. But it was stated clearly and unequivocally that an authoritarian style leadership that is controlling and dismissive of people's views is not acceptable today. There was criticism of priests who "shout and ignore the lay person's point of view". They do not want "a dictatorial Church with everything coming down from the hierarchy". Priests who are not open to change or who resist change necessitated by today's culture were also criticised.

Priests are expected to be approachable and not to be threatened by an empowered laity. People are very upset by priests, who, when newly appointed to parishes, undermined pastoral development that had happened prior to their arrival.*

LAITY

There was a strong call for a leadership style that would foster collaboration between priests and lay people. There was a clear recognition that the ministry of the priest can only be understood in the wider context of ministry to which all the baptised are called. The Church is the People of God working in a spirit of collaboration and partnership. There was a real sense of the equality of all - priest, religious and laity - in the Church. "We are the Church, priests and people – because of our baptism we have a mission". In light of that, there was a universal call for lay participation in parish life. "Motivate laity to participate"; "laity should be encouraged"; "laity should play a greater role". People recognised that today more than ever, it is crucial to involve laity, to the fullest possible extent, at all levels of ecclesial life. Many stated that they would like to be invited to contribute to their parish. The parish pastoral council was identified as a key structure to enable a sharing of pastoral responsibility.

Ministries that could be exercised by lay people were identified, ministries which are needed to respond to today's pastoral demands. Among those listed were ministry to the elderly and the sick, bereavement support and counselling, ministry of visitation, Liturgy co-ordination and planning, membership of pastoral councils, leadership in prayer (e.g. prayer at funeral homes and in churches). The full potential of ministers of the eucharist should be encouraged, particularly in relation to the sick and housebound. Membership of pastoral councils was emphasised, as lay representatives should be involved in all processes of decision-making on behalf of the community. There was some comment on the good work done by baptismal preparation teams. Those with charisms for these ministries should be encouraged and given training and formation. Some religious, who have a high level of training and pastoral experience on the missions, felt that they were not welcome when they presented themselves for ministry in parishes.

WOMEN

Many felt frustrated and angry that women are excluded from positions of influence in the Church, and that the Christian community is impoverished because for centuries, the female charisms have been minimised or excluded. There was a strong exhortation to do all that is possible to redress this imbalance and to ensure that women are involved in decision-making at all levels in parish and diocese. There should be a gender balance on all pastoral councils and finance committees. In particular, there was a call to clarify the role of the parish sister and put in place a proper salary structure. The possibility that a person not in religious life would exercise a similar type ministry (e.g. pastoral assistant), in the future, adds urgency to this task. *

DEACONS

Not alone did people express an awareness of the diaconate, but there was recognition of the pastoral potential of this order, and a strong plea for the immediate restoration of this ancient ministry. People could not understand why it has not been introduced already.

PRIESTS FROM ABROAD

One suggested solution regarding the shortage of priests was to invite priests from the developing countries and Eastern Europe to minister in the diocese. There is a perception that vocations are plentiful in these areas.

LITURGY

The frequency of references to the Liturgy (almost 100% of tables) is a strong indicator of how important the Liturgy is to the faith lives of those who attended. It indicated a profound awareness of the Liturgy as the summit to which the activity of the Church is directed and the source from which it gets its strength.

“There was a strong desire that Liturgy would connect with the lives of people and a feeling that it fails to do so.”

However, there was significant dissatisfaction with the experience of Liturgy in our parishes. There was a strong desire that Liturgy would connect with the lives of people and a feeling that it fails to do so. In particular, the fact that youth considered the Mass as irrelevant to their lives was very worrying for many groups. There was a plea for Liturgies that are meaningful and relevant and for Liturgies that are participative and creative of community. " There is a need to focus more on the community element". There was appreciation of attempts to present Liturgy in a creative and thoughtful way. To that end, there was a definite acceptance of the need to reduce the number of Masses in areas, particularly where congregations are small, as a multiplicity of Masses was experienced as fragmenting the community. The importance of creating an atmosphere of welcome was stressed.

There were many recommendations as to how Liturgy could be enhanced. The majority thought that music was vitally important to the quality of Liturgy and that every support should be given to choirs. Many thought that folk groups and gospel choirs appealed to people today, particularly to the young, and that every encouragement should be given to such groups. Community singing was thought to be the best way to facilitate participation in the Liturgy, but great effort is needed to promote this.

Other suggestions for more meaningful Liturgies included the introduction of Family Masses, Youth Masses and Children's Masses and the involvement of youth and adults in the preparation and celebration of the Liturgy.

There were many comments on the readings at Mass, particularly the readings from the Old Testament. People questioned their relevance as they find them

difficult to comprehend. Some felt that a dramatisation of the readings would help occasionally. A special Liturgy of the Word for children was recommended.

“people really appreciated well-prepared sermons that touch their lives.”

There were many references to homilies. People are not satisfied with the quality of preaching. Reports suggested that a greater effort could be made in preparation and delivery of homilies. “Talk about something we can relate to”. “Speak on more up to date issues”. On the positive side, the frequency of references to homilies suggested that people really appreciated well-prepared sermons that touch their lives. They looked forward to homilies that are relevant and to the point. One group observed that, “there is still a huge proportion of the congregation who want to listen to what the priest has to say”.

There were many calls for a renewed emphasis on Confession and Reconciliation, at a personal and communal level. The value of reconciliation services was frequently mentioned.

There was much support for the idea of Liturgy planning groups in parishes. The importance of training for these groups was emphasised.

SPIRITUALITY AND PRAYER

A recurring theme of the meetings was the need and desire for a deep spirituality in our lives. The sense here was that faith had to be personally owned and lived. Faith had to be experienced, above all, as a personal relationship with God, with Jesus and the Holy Spirit, a relationship which was significant and personally sustaining. Evident also in the responses was the desire that this faith should be shared and lived in group and communal settings.

There was a strong sense that any plan for the future should pay particular attention to this keenly felt hunger for a life-giving Christian spirituality. The elements of this spirituality could be old and new. There were calls for a reinstatement of family prayer, encouragement for personal private prayer, greater

“Overall, the need for a new emphasis on spirituality as fundamental to the life of people, was very clear.”

use of the Prayer of the Church and more frequent celebration of Benediction. The development of various types of prayer groups (charismatic, parish cells, Lectio Divina and Scripture-based prayer) was recommended. The format for novenas and devotions should be updated.

There was strong support for prayer and contemplation before the Blessed Sacrament. The need for training in prayer and meditation was emphasised. People said they valued opportunities for retreats. There were appeals also for the development of prayer rituals that connect with key life events and special occasions.

Overall, the need for a new emphasis on spirituality as fundamental to the life of people, was very clear. This also raised the need for resources – materials, personnel and training – to assist in promoting developments along these lines.

CHURCH AS COMMUNITY

People repeatedly stressed how urgent it is to create a real community spirit in parishes and to build parishes that are true communities. The competitiveness of today's society and the materialistic ethos promote an individualism that often leaves people isolated and disconnected. The need 'for a sense of belonging' was mentioned many times. Community is central to the Christian life. Liturgy expresses and celebrates the communion of life shared with each another and with the Lord. People understand how essential are ministries such as leadership, care and service in building community.

To foster a spirit of community, it is imperative to have some facility where people can assemble. It was recommended that parishes should have meeting rooms or halls and that events should be organised occasionally that would provide opportunities for people to meet. "It is important that we have time to be with and to know each other". Some suggested that small Christian communities should be initiated in the diocese.

For effective functioning of the community, people were adamant that there needed to be an ethos of openness and transparency, and a level of accountability in leadership, i.e. priests and pastoral councils. Communication is essential to promote this kind of ethos and all decisions should be communicated clearly to people. “(We need) more democracy, greater openness and transparency about how decisions are made and money spent”. “There needs to be good communication between priest and people”. Consequently, a parish newsletter is a vital medium in any parish. There was a call for regular consultation at parish level and a recommendation that a ‘listening style’ process be conducted occasionally in parishes. Again it was stressed that the role of leadership in the building of community is crucial. An authoritarian style stifles community development.

“People repeatedly stressed how urgent it is to create a real community spirit in parishes and to build parishes that are true communities.”

However, people are very concerned that the future of their parishes is uncertain because of the shortage of priests. Many fear that their local church may be closed. There was a realisation that neighbouring parishes will have to support each other and work together by sharing resources in terms of personnel, ministry, training and planning for the future. There was a call for some plan to be developed to suggest ways forward.

The faith community should be a caring community. There should be an outreach to those in need.

‘Inclusion’ was identified as one of the key marks of the ecclesial community. There were many appeals for an inclusive, welcoming Church where the gifts of all people would be recognised and encouraged. There was an exhortation to make every effort to reach out to those who are no longer attending church. In particular, the separated and divorced should be encouraged to continue to come to church. Those who are re-married should be made welcome. The same spirit of welcome should be afforded to single parents.

There were occasional references to the need for an ecumenical outreach to other Churches and for dialogue with other faiths.

Focus Groups

The Church is a community in the world in the service of the Kingdom. It can never be a narrow exclusive body, cut-off from society. Dialogue with a number of 'focus' groups helped to identify dimensions of the service to which, in the immediate future, the local Church is called. The focus groups that participated in the 'Listening Process' were: asylum seekers and refugees, members of the rural community, representatives of environmental groups, members of county and city community fora, local media personnel, young married couples. A group of teachers was also present; the views of this group are included in the section under "Education and Training". Some of the issues that emerged in the dialogue with these focus groups are discussed below.

ASYLUM SEEKERS AND REFUGEES

Asylum Seekers reported that current government policy is discriminatory and oppressive and has serious implications for their emotional and psychological health. Because they are not allowed to work or to enrol in educational or training programmes, boredom is a serious problem and some get very depressed. They want to contribute and to participate in their host community. They experience over-crowding and lack of privacy in the accommodation provided for them. "It is worse than being in prison". They made a very strong plea for the Church to advocate a change in government policy on their behalf. They would like to be invited to participate in the local parish. Some are highly skilled and, with the different perspectives they bring, would enrich the local community. They really want to belong. They would welcome pastoral initiatives which would address some of their needs.

RURAL COMMUNITY

Representatives of the rural community alerted us to a possible impending crisis in agriculture. Farmers will be forced to sell off farms that have been worked by their families for generations. Their children have no interest in farming and do not wish to inherit the land as the average family farm today is economically non-viable. People felt that "farming will not be for the agricultural community but for the rich" and that "the large co-ops have removed the farmer from the marketing process".

The pain of having to dispose of land owned by the family for generations is causing great stress to farmers. Many commented on the huge exodus of young adults from rural communities. They thought that this will seriously impact on the stability of rural parishes in the future.

THE ENVIRONMENT

Environmentalists reminded us that care of the earth is a religious and moral issue. Creation is a central theme in the Bible. The world was created by God who gave us responsibility for it. "We have to make sure progress is sustainable – to make sure there is a world and future for the generations to come". "The Church needs to be progressive and active in promoting care of the earth as a moral issue." "Our world is controlled by major institutions, industrial, economic, etc., and the Church has the opportunity to dialogue and input into the shaping of our world". People's understanding of environmental issues is "woefully inadequate". Sermons could be directed at educating and raising the awareness of people concerning the ecological crisis we are facing.

COMMUNITY FORUM

The local Church was encouraged to contribute to county and city development plans through dialogue with Community Fora and Development Boards. There are issues such as vandalism, alcohol and drug-abuse among young people and lack of health-care facilities in rural areas that are of concern to the faith community and the community fora. In particular, the Church could support efforts to overcome social exclusion and to challenge policy changes in the 'Community Employment' programme. The cut-backs in this programme have impacted negatively in many areas.

TRADE UNIONS

There was a suggestion that the Church as institution could offer greater support to trade unions and that dialogue between the two bodies should be initiated. There is a perception that "while the Church could not be categorised as anti-union, it is certainly not pro-union.....the Church's attitude is similar to the attitude of employers to unions". There are issues such as globalisation, the dignity of the worker, and family friendly work arrangements which are of concern to both bodies.

MEDIA

There was a strong recommendation from local media representatives that the Church should be more pro-active in relation to the media. Members of this group felt that the Church was under-utilising the potential of mass media to communicate the Christian message. At present, the smartest people making use of the local media are the most conservative, even fundamentalist, religious groups. The local media are definitely not anti-Church, even though hard questions may be asked at times.

YOUNG MARRIED COUPLES

The couples present talked about how stressful married life can be in today's culture. High mortgages impose serious financial pressures. Lack of family-friendly work schedules often cause stress, particularly when both partners are working.*

Doctrinal Questions

It was decided to report, in a separate section, on doctrinal issues that were discussed in the various gatherings. The issues of compulsory celibacy and the ordination of women were raised frequently and the teaching on artificial birth control was discussed by young married couples.

There is widespread support for the abolition of compulsory celibacy for priests. The vast majority of responses felt that the introduction of optional celibacy would help in solving the problem of the shortage of priests; priesthood would be more attractive to people. People also felt that the imposition of celibacy contributes to an unnecessary burden of loneliness in the life of the priest. Married priests would have a better understanding of the reality of family life. Priests who have married would be free to resume their priestly duties in the parish. Some thought that the idea of part-time priests should be explored.

The question of the ordination of women was raised frequently. Most people thought that gender should not be an obstacle to ordination and that the present policy of excluding women from priesthood would need to be re-examined. The arguments used to justify the ban on women's ordination are not convincing.

Young married couples questioned the Church's teaching on family planning.

Summary

There was a high level of awareness of the rapid change in society. It is clear to people that this has a major influence on the mission of the Church at this time. People expect the Church to be in touch with the 'joys and hopes, fears and anxieties' of our time.

It is essential that the Church as the bearer of the good news of Jesus Christ, finds varied and suitable ways to understand and hand on that good news; therefore parishes as well as schools have important roles in catechesis. It is important to develop closer links between the two bodies. Programmes for on-going education and formation in the faith need to be made available at parish level.

“there is growing awareness of the call to lay people to share their gifts through serving and co-operating in the ministries of the Church.”

The specific giftedness and vibrancy of youth can enrich the Church in the present and contribute to the building up of the faith community. However, there is an urgent need for ministry to youth.

Though we live in a time of serious decline in the number of priests and religious and in vocations to the priesthood and the religious life, there is growing awareness of the call to lay people to share their gifts through serving and co-operating in the ministries of the Church. The exercise of diverse ministries at the service of the local Church and their co-ordination will need to be supported by a collaborative style of leadership. It is essential to have structures that will enable the exercise of such leadership.

There is clearly a need for expanded programmes of training and formation for those who are called to ministry today.

People recognise the Liturgy as central to the life of the Christian community and want to enhance liturgical celebrations in parishes. Parish groups dedicated to the ongoing work of planning and preparing the Liturgy are needed.

Hunger for meaning and purpose call the faith community to new ways of experiencing the spiritual dimension of life.

The desire to belong in a community of faith is very strong. The need for good communication, inclusion in planning and openness in matters affecting parish community are essential. Again it is clear that the effective functioning of pastoral councils is vital. The need for parishes to support one another will become more evident in the near future because of the shortage of priests.

The call for the Church to be actively involved in areas of social concern such as exclusion and racism, environmental protection and the future of rural communities was articulated clearly. Institutions like the trade union movement and community fora expressed a desire to engage in on-going dialogue with the Church.

People's expectations were raised by the 'Listening Process' and the importance of a response was repeatedly stressed.

Directions for Pastoral Development

The purpose of the 'Listening Process', as stated in the introduction was:

- To ensure that as wide a range as possible of the views, experiences, hopes and needs of all the people are shared and heard.
- To generate a sense of participation and responsibility within parish communities and the diocese.
- To lead to an agreed core vision statement and directions for mission and ministry in the future.

The views and concerns of over 3,000 people were heard.

People indicated that they are willing to take responsibility for ministry in their parishes and to participate in pastoral development.

There were repeated calls from people and priests for a diocesan pastoral plan. Some priests stated that "We hope the way forward is the emergence of a pastoral plan that reflects the aspirations of the 'Listening Process'.

“We hope the way forward is the emergence of a pastoral plan that reflects the aspirations of the 'Listening Process’”

While recognising the sense of urgency that people expressed, the 'Listening' team feel it is important that, throughout the parishes of the diocese, people are invited to read and reflect on this report and respond to it. These responses will contribute to the development of an evolving vision and plan. The vision and plan will come out of ongoing reflection and conversation. We will learn together through these processes.

At the same time, specific actions are being initiated at diocesan level as an immediate response to the process:

- (i) Bishop Lee has appointed a Director of Pastoral Development. His duties will include the co-ordination of training and formation for ministries. Bishop Lee will establish, as soon as possible, a team to support the Director in aspects of the work of planning for and co-ordinating pastoral development in the diocese.
- (ii) A survey to ascertain the support needed by parishes for the formation of pastoral councils will be conducted in the immediate future by the Director of Pastoral Development. A specially trained group to assist with the formation, training and on-going support of pastoral councils is to be established by the Director in collaboration with the Bishop.
- (iii) A team to resource and support the planning and the preparation of parish Liturgies will be formed by Bishop Lee.
- (iv) Ministry to youth is being discussed as a matter of urgency at diocesan level.

