

Introducing a Synod for young people in 2018, Pope Francis said, “let us spend some time with the future”. Preparing ourselves to imagine and plan a future for our own archdiocese, we spent four years in prayer, listening and discerning. But nothing could have prepared us for the circumstances in which our diocesan Synod 2020 finally took place. Thanks to the pandemic, an assembly whose traditions stretched back to the first century in the end relied on technologies and restrictions that were new to most of us but with which we were all rapidly becoming familiar.

The future does not wait for us to prepare.

A crisis can be a revelation, shining unavoidable light on our strengths and weakness. We can take heart from the way we rose to the challenges of the pandemic - embracing technology, accepting restrictions, finding new ways to connect with and care for each other. We must now take that courage, creativity and assurance of grace and use them to turn the prophetic moment of the Synod into a truly prophetic outward-looking Church.





Christ is the centre and heart of our Pastoral Plan. The months of isolation and distancing have surely renewed our sense of the strength and grace we gain from Christ and each other. Christ is there in our midst always. This has led us to the pastoral plan's two great themes - accompaniment and synodality.

God meets us where we are. **Accompaniment** calls us to walk with each other into the fullness of life offered by Christ.

Not tickets to the match but a place on the team.

Synodality is the expectation that everyone will be heard, that the Spirit speaks to us through all parts of the Church's body - the laity, and the clergy, the lost, the seeking and the found. A listening heart will strengthen the bonds that bind us together and to Christ.

The task before us is to build those ideals into the nitty gritty of daily life.



For instance, to help us become a Church that accompanies people we will have to initiate everyone – priests, religious and laity – into this “art of accompaniment” which teaches us to remove our sandals before the sacred ground of the other. The pace of this accompaniment must be steady and reassuring, reflecting our closeness and our compassionate gaze which also heals, liberates and encourages growth in the Christian life.



To help us become a truly synodal church we will create a synodal council that will continue the work of the Synod and monitor the implementation of the pastoral plan. To hear the lay voice, especially the voice of women at the heart of decision making in the archdiocese, is a key commitment. There will be a new advisory body for the archbishop that will include lay women and men as well as the clergy.

In the spirit of synodality we resolve to grow in understanding that all the baptised share in the one priesthood of Christ. This invites us to support the fact that most people live out their vocation in their family and working life. We will also try to find new ways in which priests, deacons and lay people can be formed for ministry together.

It is beyond question that we need to renew our structures and find ways to use our properties more effectively without losing sight of what is good and precious. The parish has turned out to be a resilient structure in time of crisis. Its very familiarity is its spiritual strength. We cannot promise people that if they knock the door will be opened, if they don't know where the door is! However synodality gives us the opportunity to reimagine what a parish could be. Families of parishes could share resources - while being led in bold and courageous new ways. And so strengthen the bonds of the extended family of the archdiocese.

This in turn will give us the opportunity to find new ways to support our priests and create a space for them to grow and flourish. Caring for our priests is not only important in the short term but is in the long term surely essential in encouraging vocations.

From the beginning of his ministry Pope Francis has called for an “ecological conversion”. If we are to be a truly prophetic Church we must confront our own contribution to global warming and climate justice. We must learn to live more simply.

When the Holy Father asked us to “spend time with the future”, the future he was referring to was our young people. The work of rebuilding and renewing will be meaningless if we do not pass it on. During the pandemic - in an inversion of the natural order - young people were asked to sacrifice their freedom and even their education in order to protect the elderly and sick. To ensure that the voices of young people and young adults are heard we will develop - under the guidance of a full-time youth advisor - a model of accompaniment that reaches out to them - through chaplaincies and renewed support for teachers and governors. We will reinvigorate the link between church and school to evangelise our young people. At the Vatican Synod in 2018, Pope Francis went on to say that it is “through the holiness of our young people that the Church will renew the ardour and vigour of our faith.”

Faith is a journey. It does not stand still. It will either grow greater or grow less. We must ensure that the faith of our fathers becomes the faith of our children.

The challenge is enormous but we know that while a cold wind puts out a small fire, it only fans the flames of a great one, making it into a blazing beacon.

For further information, visit liverpoolpastoralplan.org.uk

