

LAUNCH OUT LETTERS (LOL)

Ngā Reta o Te Hao Nui– Launch Out Formation Programme
Archdiocese of Wellington, Aotearoa New Zealand

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Nau mai ki te putanga o Hepetema,

September could be said to have earned the title of the month of justice, with the day of prayer for creation (01 Sept), the season for creation (01 Sept to 04 Oct), Caritas Social Justice week (08-14 Sept) and Te Reo Maori language week (12-21 Sept).

Christine Walkerdine reflects on the gospel for the 23rd Sunday in Ordinary Time about the Jesus healing a deaf man with speech disabilities. She fittingly connects the Jesus' prayer 'Ephphatha' meaning 'be opened' with the work of justice—to listen and to give voice to.

One of the manifestations of injustice is divisiveness. It arises from our tendency to dichotomise the world into fragments, mostly into two sides---right/left, rich/poor, white/coloured, liberal/conservative. The article of **Margaret Bearsley** points to a long-held tension between theology and science. The clash even went as far as many scientists, treating atheism as a credence to their scientific integrity. As Margaret suggests, theology and science can and should sit respectfully beside each other; and if we may dare say—enrich each other.

On the ministry front, we have **Kelly Ross**, Vicar for Education, sharing some tips on how parishes can engage more effectively with parish schools. Apparently, the relationship between parish school and parish is largely under investigated. Although it seems quite natural for these two organisations to connect, however, they tend to operate in different silos, and the connection needs to be intentional and sustained.

Rutger Keijser, Launch Out Candidate, in his reflection shares how God brings our disparate selves together through prayer and contemplation.

It's going to arrive sooner than we think, the second session of the Synod in Rome this coming October.

Bridget Taumoepeau gives highlights of its working document, *Instrumentum laborum*. The church is fragmented with many issues and so the call to listen to each other as we walk together remains the overarching message.

Parker Palmer, an American educator, and activist, says that we can see change as something that is tearing us apart or an invitation to open us to be more than we can be. In our attempts to open our hearts and minds, may we yield to the prayer of Jesus for each one of us--*Ephphatha!*

Maya Bernardo, Launch Out Formator and Manager

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*When he had finished eating, he said to Simon,
“Launch out into the deep water and let down your
nets for a catch”.*

Luke 5: 4

For comments and suggestions email:

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Visit the Te Hao Nui-Launch Out webpage: [https://
www.wn.catholic.org.nz/about/church-mission/launch-out-formation
-programme/](https://www.wn.catholic.org.nz/about/church-mission/launch-out-formation-programme/)

“Ephphata! Be opened”

Mark 7:31-37, 23rd Sunday in Ordinary Time



In the early 1980's as a new teacher I picked up every nasty bug that was going around. I even lost my voice for a couple of weeks. While that was the quietest my class ever was, as I could only whisper, it was also very isolating. People quickly gave up trying to chat with me and I couldn't even telephone anyone. There were no smart-phones then. I was fortunate that with modern medicine it was only a temporary disability. The man in the gospel reading was not as lucky. He was condemned to a life of living on the edges of the community. Being deaf and unable to make yourself understood would have seriously affected his ability to find work, worship and interact with others. So much so, the afflicted man's friends brought him to Jesus and begged him to lay his hands on him. Jesus touched the man's ears and mouth, and 'looking up to heaven he said "Ephphatha! " be opened!'

While reflecting on this gospel reading I was struck by the importance of community and the need to 'be open' to listening to other voices. Not just listening to those who share our views but the voices of those who may challenge our thinking or make us feel uncomfortable. Community is at the heart of our faith today. *WE* are the body of Christ here on earth. We are called to come together regularly to pray, worship and support each other. Our parish communities are not one homogeneous group of people sharing the same viewpoints, but a diverse mix of people all trying to live out the gospel message. Having opportunities for all voices to be heard helps to build that sense of community and creates a faith community where all will feel welcomed.

We like the disciples are also called to evangelize others. Jesus lived out this mission of evangelization in his everyday life. He ensured those who needed to hear his word could because he walked the dusty roads with his disciples and followers. He used fishing boats for transport and as teaching platforms. He visited synagogues. He preached on mountain tops, lake edges and in market-places. He went to where the people were. Present day evangelization is not about standing on street corners quoting biblical verses. It is more about showing by our interactions with people in our workplaces, neighbourhoods and families the fruits of the Holy Spirit- love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faith, gentleness and self-control.

But Jesus didn't just speak, he demonstrated his 'openness' to listen to others by inviting questions, encouraging the disciples to share their experiences. He demonstrated his 'openness' when he challenged injustice and practices that hurt or disadvantaged those already marginalized. Let us pray to the Holy Spirit for the openness to hear /see what is happening around us and the courage to take some action.

*Christine Walkerdine
Launch Out Graduate and Current Parish Engagement Coordinator, ADW*

ONLINE RESOURCES

- Food for Faith <https://foodforfaith.org.nz/>
- Resources for Season of Creation <https://seasonofcreation.org/resources/>
- Caritas Social Justice Week Resources <https://www.caritas.org.nz/schools/social-justice-week>
- Treaty Basics from a Christian perspective <https://www.treatyandbelonging.nz/>
- Some resources from BOSTON COLLEGE on Liturgy
 - ◇ [Key principles of Liturgy \(Part 1\)](#) by James Mongelluzzo sj, STD
 - ◇ [Basic Structure of the Mass \(Part2\)](#) by James Mongelluzzo, sj STD
 - ◇ [Elements of the Catholic Mass \(Part 1-31\)](#). These are 2–3-minute videos that explains the essence and rubric of the mass. This link will lead you to Part 1 and show the rest of the videos
 - ◇ [Online Resources from Boston College](#)- a curated list of websites and online links that can be useful to ministry and our faith journey
- ◇ [Turning to the mystics](#) podcast by James Finley- A contemplative platform to learn about mystics like Thomas Merton, the Pilgrim, etc., and the way they pray.



BIRTHDAYS

SEPTEMBER

8 Vicky Raw

14 Regina Daly

14 Rutger Keijser



Towards a theology of science

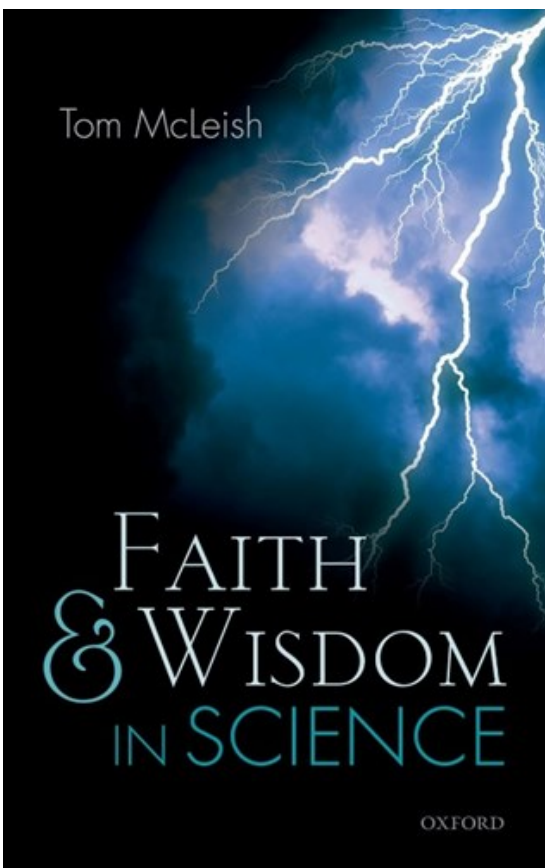
A book review of Tom McLeish's
'Faith and Wisdom in Science'

By Margaret Bearsley
Launch Out Candidate
Holy Trinity Parish

I have noticed recently an openness, even amongst people who side with atheism, to the existence of God. Pope Francis' *Laudato si'* has struck a chord with all kinds of people, religious and non-religious, who are fearful for the future of our planet, our common home.

Thankfully, the influence of anti-Christian talk, by people like Richard Dawkins and Christopher Hitchens in the early 2000s, appears to be reducing. Populist 'scientism', which is based on the idea that only scientifically provable data are real (a statement that cannot be verified by science), also seems to be reducing. See Bishop Barron on this: [The Rise and Fall of the New Atheism](#), The Word on Fire Show, 24 October 2023.

I must have been talking about this with my Spiritual Director during 2023, as he loaned me *Faith & Wisdom in Science* by Tom McLeish (2014, Oxford University Press (F&WS)). McLeish was Professor of Physics at Durham University, UK, at the time he wrote the book.



Copied from <https://www.amazon.co.uk/Faith-Wisdom-Science-Tom-McLeish/dp/0198702612>

F&WS proves that those who claim that religious belief is a backward looking, pre-scientific crutch for simple people, are just wrong. F&WS points out that science needs to rediscover its roots as Natural Philosophy, literally, the love of wisdom of natural things. The book shows that the art of science, to observe and question the natural world, has existed since very ancient times.

The problems of science are overcome in the book, through exploring the history around the older name for science, referred to above: Natural Philosophy.

This investigation heads backwards through time, giving examples of people 'loving wisdom about nature', with modern, medieval, and patristic examples of doing science—observing and questioning the evidence in the natural world. By going back into the times of these ancient scientists, F&WS moves into the biblical material with which these lovers of wisdom about nature would have been familiar.

This takes the reader into the Wisdom literature of the Old Testament and looks at creation statements within that literature. Those creation statements have common patterns and structures including that God, in and through wisdom, makes order and allows chaos. There is a full chapter on the Book of Job and its magnificent speech of God, whom Job has 'put on trial'. God responds to Job's demand for justice (Job 38):

*Where were you when I founded the Earth?
Tell me, if you have insight.
Who fixed its dimensions? Surely you know!
Who stretched the measuring cord across it?
Into what were its bases sunk,
or who set its capstone, when the stars of the morning rejoiced together,
and all the sons of God shouted for joy?
... Where is the realm of the dwelling of light, and as for darkness, where is its place?
... Have you entered the storehouses of the snow?
... Who cuts a channel for the torrent of rain, a path for the thunderbolt?
... Can you bind the cluster of the Pleiades, or loose Orion's belt?
... Do you determine the laws of the heaven?
Can you establish its rule upon Earth?...*

Wow!

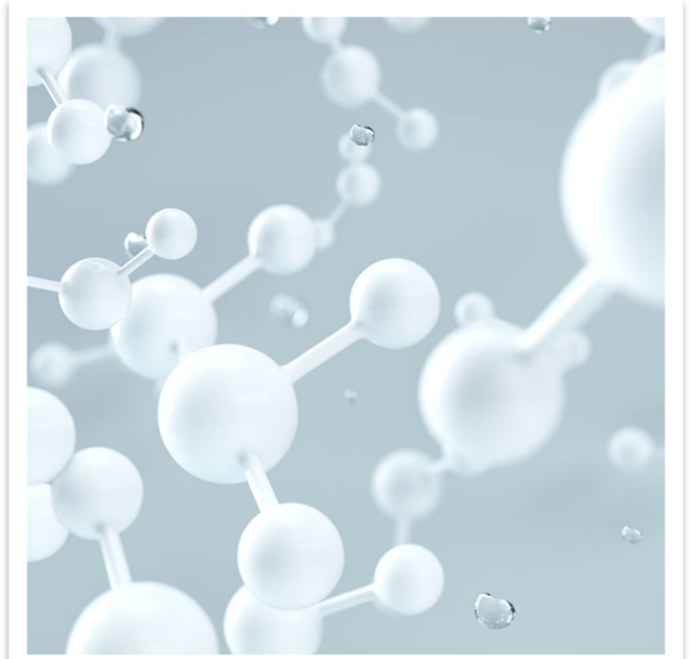
Continue to page 5

The book then briefly looks at creation statements in the New Testament, especially in the epistles of St Paul (Rom 8: creation groaning for renewal, and 1 Cor 15: hope in the resurrection and victory over death) and in the Johannine texts (Jn 1: In the beginning was the Word, through whom all things were made, and Rev 21: an end to all pain and tears).

McLeish then sets out his proposal for a 'theology of science'. He dislikes both sides of the split—that science and theology are mutually exclusive, or, that it is possible for them to sit respectfully side by side. Instead, F&WS suggests that: *"The theological story that starts with a creating person needs to be able to speak about everything, if it is to speak about anything"* (p. 170).

The discussion on a theology of science is more about the reasons for it than what it *is* exactly; it's about the need for science to be wise:

... the form of experimental science developed since the early seventeenth century ... to the explosion of scientific understanding since then, ... is in palpable continuity with much earlier scientific writing [e.g., Gregory of Nyssa in the 4th century, Grosseteste in the 13th century]. ... It is also in continuity with the notion of value accorded by people ancient and modern who have contemplated nature with a view to understanding it. ... Scientists know that the value of what they do wells up from far deeper sources than the instrumental or economic, but they find it challenging to explain where this overwhelming intrinsic worth of science comes from (p. 176).



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One of the amazing things I noticed in the book was the scientific discovery of the unpredictability of molecules and the necessity to the created 'order' of unpredictability, of a little chaos. This is discussed on pages 180-181 with a brief explanation of quantum mechanics: *"a particle can be in a super-position of states at any one time ... 'in several places at once' ...Furthermore, identical experiments on individual electrons have an uncertain outcome however carefully they are carried out"*. This explanation is topped off, on page 190 with this incredible statement:

We might rail against the chaotic and complex elements of nature that threaten our well-being or escape our understanding [such as the inability to predict an earthquake], but, when we respond to the invitation to peer into the beautiful structures of the natural world we are so interested in protecting, we see them built upon a microscopic world of disorder which is the substrate of life itself.

It seems that order needs a certain amount of chaos to keep it going. Who'd have thought?!

F&WS suggests that a theology of science could bring the theological and scientific communities into a 'participation in reconciliation'. The idea is for reconciling relationships between the natural world and humans in a way that protects and heals both: *"A theology of science, consistent with the stories we have told up to this point ... becomes ... the grounded outworking of the 'ministry of reconciliation' between humankind and the world"* (page 209).

Funny (not funny) how so very often, we hear, see, or read something that then springs up in other surprising areas of life. I had no sooner finished reading F&WS than a colleague, a self-professed atheist, but one respectful of Christians, asked me to review a book he had bought called *God According to God: A Scientist Discovers We've been Wrong About God all Along*, by Gerald Schroeder (2010, Harper Collins). My colleague found himself becoming increasingly interested in Christianity and wanted to do some self-learning and found the book. But I think he wanted to know from a practising Christian with a theological background whether it would be worth his while to read *God According to God*.

Like Tom McLeish, Schroeder walks the reader through the amazing predictability and startling chaos of the creation, from the vast mass of the universe down to the tiniest particle of imaginable matter theorised over in quantum physics. But unlike McLeish, Schroeder's work is not Christian, but Jewish. It relies on the rabbinic tradition in the Talmud. Schroeder also draws on kabalistic Jewish thought such as the *tzimzum* of God, that is, that in the creation, the God who is infinite, withdrew, or contracted Himself, in order to open up the space for what is not God—the created order. Schroeder gets quite mystical for a scientist and takes a surprisingly fundamentalistic approach to the Hebrew Scriptures.

Schroeder's *God According to God* is an interesting read. But F&WS gives a Christian perspective that does not have to use non-biblical traditions to support the central claim that science and religion are not only not mutually exclusive, but instead should be, and are, mutually enlightening.

The awful debates between atheism and belief that still go these days can be loud and mean. They become worse when their supporters have a need to win and lack respect for the other. It seems that one of the greatest mistakes in these shouting matches is the lie that science and religion are an either/or choice. You believe in one, or you believe in the other.

The reverse is true. They both have something to say about everything; they are both universal. And they each need the other, because science has no ultimate end-goal, and Christianity cannot explain the physical properties of the created order and chaos.

Together, science and religion can reconcile the broken relationships between humankind and the Earth.

Laudato si' ... Praise be to you, my Lord, through our Sister, Mother Earth, who sustains and governs us...

“Together, science and religion can reconcile the broken relationships between humankind and the earth”.



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'Be still and know that I am God'

(Psalm 46:10)

By Rutger Keijser
Launch Out Candidate
St Mary's of the Angels

The Czech Catholic priest, philosopher, and theologian Tomáš Halík recently wrote that the task awaiting Christianity at present is the development of spirituality.

Halík invites us to put more emphasis on categorial pastoral care (he calls this the 'ministry of spiritual accompaniment') such as the ministry of chaplains in hospitals, in prisons, aged care centres and in education. To be able to be an effective chaplain, he argues, one needs to develop their spiritual life.

When I read Halík's book in March 2024, it felt like the pieces of a huge jigsaw puzzle I had been wrestling with for years suddenly fell into place. Like so many Christians, I had drifted away from the Church as an adolescent and focused on job, family, and hobbies. In the early 2000s I learned to meditate in a Buddhist retreat centre in the UK, and while I loved the tranquillity this brought me, I could not find a heartfelt connection with my (Christian) roots. That all changed when I came across Christian contemplative prayer. So, what is that?



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Contemplative Prayer

'Contemplation' is a way of listening with the heart while not relying entirely on the head. It is a prayerful letting go of our sense of control and choosing to cooperate with God and God's work in the world. According to James Martin SJ all prayer is contemplative, but the term 'contemplative prayer' itself is a bit narrower. In his very accessible book 'The Jesuit Guide to (Almost) Everything,' he describes two types of contemplative prayer: (1) 'content rich' prayer, where you experience God in creation, and (2) a form of prayer that moves away from any images, words, or symbols.

Lectio Divina, or sacred reading, is an example of the first, 'content rich' contemplative prayer. Centering prayer is an example of the second form. As centering prayer is less well-known than its more content-rich counterparts I will provide a brief overview.

Centering Prayer is a form of prayer to God that moves away from images, words, concepts, and symbols. This form of prayer was re-introduced to us in the 1970s by John Main, Basil Pennington, and Thomas Keating. They chose the term 'centering prayer' as the 'centre' is where the human spirit and the divine spirit meet. Centering Prayer takes us away from our thoughts and imagination. Centering Prayer is generally done in four steps:

1. Choose a sacred word as the symbol of your willingness to consent to God's presence and action within ('Maranatha,' or 'Come, Lord Jesus' is an often used sacred word).
2. Sitting comfortably and with eyes closed, settle briefly and silently introduce the sacred word as the symbol of God's presence and action within.
3. When engaged with your thoughts, return gently to the sacred word.
4. At the end of the prayer period remain in silence with eyes closed for a few minutes.

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Initially, as most people who are new to this form of prayer, I got myself tangled up in trying to find a suitable 'sacred word,' only to realise that during my prayer I was constantly asking myself whether this was the 'right' sacred word. One's mind can be immensely powerful!

The instructions state that when you realise during prayer that you are engaged in thoughts, simply acknowledge that, and gently return to your sacred word. The practice is less straightforward, however. My judging mind immediately kicks in, wondering why I was engaged in thoughts in the first place. Why can I not simply follow four clear instructions? Of course, eventually I realise that I am – again – engaged in thoughts, and I nudge myself back to my sacred word and to the silent presence of the spirit of Jesus. Thankfully, our Lord is patient and gives us time to grow.

How Contemplative Prayer helps me

In my daily life I tend to be a bit of a perfectionist (for those familiar with the [Enneagram](#): I am a type ONE 'Reformer'). Without the help of contemplative prayer, ONEs can become rather annoying faultfinders. This is true, I know... When I started with centering prayer I experimented with a wide variety of sacred words, in the naïve and somewhat arrogant supposition that 'maranatha' was not good enough for me. It took me many months to realise that if only I switched off my opiniated mind, the right sacred word would find me. Guess what? It did – it is Maranatha.

Contemplative prayer forms an integral part of my spiritual life. As a lay Cistercian, I practice Lectio Divina on most mornings, loving how its slow pace allows me to access the wisdom and experience of the authors of what I am reading. I sometimes practice Lectio during a hectic day at work as well, when I am pulled in all directions and struggle to find my feet. I lock myself in a meeting room at my office, choose a small part of the reading of the day, and ask myself what God is telling me through the text today, and what I want to say to Him in response. It is a short and remarkably rewarding way to re-centre myself in God and silence my inner critic.

But I always look forward to my half-hour of centering prayer at the end of the day. Centering prayer – purely and simply be in God's presence – is a way to accept myself and others. It is an invitation to inner stillness. Centering Prayer slows me down by creating a sacred pause, reminding me of that short, powerful phrase in the Psalms: 'be still and know that I am God.'

Be still and know that I am God
Be still and know that I am
Be still and know
Be still
Be



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Prayer of Being by
Richard Rohr

As leaders within Catholic parishes in New Zealand, fostering strong relationships with parish schools is crucial for nurturing a vibrant faith community and ensuring the holistic development of our young people. The principal is the point of contact and plays a central role in communication and collaboration between the parish and school – think of the school as an extension of the parish.

Here are key pieces of advice for lay leaders and ministers seeking to build stronger collaborations with parish schools:

- **Initiate Communication:** Establish lines of communication between the parish and the principal. Regular meetings where both can discuss goals, priorities, challenges, and opportunities for collaboration are essential.
- **Understand the Mission and Values of the School:** Familiarise yourself with the mission, values, and strategic plan of the school. These can usually be found on the school webpage, if not ask the principal for a copy. This understanding will enable you to better support the school's initiatives and possible alignment with parish activities and its mission.
- **Offer Pastoral Support:** Schools do provide excellent pastoral support for their families; however parish leaders can offer to support the school community pastorally as well or even in collaboration with. This could include spiritual guidance and a presence at key events such as school Masses, sacramental celebrations, and prayer services.
- **Collaborate on Faith Formation:** Work with the school to reinforce faith formation efforts both in the classroom and within the parish community. Joint retreats, service projects, or catechetical programs that engage students, parents, and parishioners can deepen their relationship with God and the Church.

- **Promote Volunteers and Engagement:** Work with the principal in identifying opportunities for parishioners to volunteer their time and talents to support the school. Whether assisting with extracurricular activities, supporting Young Vinnies, serving as guest speakers, singing practices for Masses, or offering tutoring services, parishioner involvement strengthens the community bond between parish and school.
- **Respect Boundaries:** While collaboration is important, it's crucial to respect the school's autonomy. Work collaboratively in a spirit of mutual respect and understanding.
- **Celebrate Achievements Together:** Celebrate the achievements of the school community, recognising the dedication of teachers, staff, and students. Highlight the ways in which the parish and school have worked together to nurture faith.
- **Stay Committed for the Long Term:** Building strong relationships between the parish and school requires time, patience, and ongoing commitment. Invest in long-term partnerships that foster a sense of belonging and shared mission for the greater good of the Catholic community.

There are many resources available to you in support of enhancing religious education and fostering Catholic character within your school. Catholic Schools Education Services (CSES) is always ready to assist in guiding you to the specific resources that best meet your needs. The CSES team work collaboratively with Principals, Directors of Religious Studies, teachers, and Boards to ensure the Religious Education curriculum is effectively implemented, Catholic Character is strengthened and safeguarded, and governance practices align with the values of the Catholic tradition.

In addition to the CSES, the National Centre of Religious Studies (NCRS) also offers a wealth of resources designed to support religious education. Whether you are seeking teaching materials, curriculum guides, or faith formation resources, the NCRS provides valuable tools to help educators cultivate a deep and meaningful understanding of the Catholic faith in their students. Both CSES and NCRS are committed to supporting educators in their mission to nurture the spiritual and academic growth of students within a Catholic framework.

In essence, fostering collaboration between Catholic parishes and schools in New Zealand requires a concerted effort to build trust, communication, and mutual support. By working together in harmony, we can create a vibrant community of faith that enriches the lives of our young people and strengthens the bonds of our Catholic identity.



UPDATES



EVENTS IN THE ARCHDIOCESE

<https://www.wn.catholic.org.nz/events/>



Learning Day with Fr James Lyons on Preaching and Reflection writing.

We are honoured to have Fr James Lyons to give a seminar workshop on preaching and writing reflections at Marcelle Room, Home of Compassion, from 9:30am to 3:30 p.m.

Fr James Lyons hails from Dannevirke. He is a retired priest with over 50 years experience in parish and church-based communications. He wrote 10 books on spirituality and prayer and for 12 years was in charge of the NZCBC's communications. He finished a cadetship in

broadcasting and a degree in theology of communications from St Paul's university in Ottawa, Canada. Prior to his retirement he worked with Lay Pastoral Leaders as parish priest of the Metropolitan Cathedral of the Sacred Heart. He is currently priest-in-residence at the Home of Compassion, Island Bay. He

Get to know Fr James vocation story <https://www.wellingtonpriests.org/priesthood-archdiocese-of-wellington/reflections-on-priesthood/fr-james-lyons/>

The Synod on synodality – the next steps

By Bridget Taumoepeau
Pastoral Mentor

Recently the *Instrumentum laborum* (IL) for the next session of the Synod in October 2024 has been published. It reminds us that we have been “Three years on the road” and describes itself as “A working tool for the Second Session.”

I have to admit that I did not find it an easy read. It is far from succinct and, not surprisingly I suppose, the language is very ‘theological’ in style and may suffer from having been translated from the original Italian. Understandably it reiterates the definition of synodality, which has been a difficult concept to truly understand, including the call to mission by nature of our baptism. It expands our idea of synodality as being “the expression of the Church’s nature”, while putting great emphasis on the importance of being a listening Church. This, in itself, is a major change of direction in the way the traditionally hierarchical Church functions.

The Catholic News Agency (CNA) is very helpful in summarising the document and, in particular, contrasting it with the IL for the First Session. The 2023 Session raised various topics to be discussed, including ‘hot button’ issues such as women deacons; priestly celibacy; and LGBTQ outreach, whereas the 2024 Session sets aside these issues and will address the implementation of changes and the importance of consensus. It specifies concrete proposals for instituting a listening and accompaniment ministry, greater lay involvement in parish economics and finances, and more powerful parish councils.

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It stresses the importance of participation of all in decision-making, as a way to promote a Synodal Church. This involves deep listening and dialogue; how to be co-responsible and how to transform structures. The IL is written in the context of 10 study groups having been set up to address the following issues that were raised in 2023:

1. Some aspects of the relationship between the Eastern Catholic Churches and the Latin Church.
2. Listening to the cry of the poor.
3. The mission in the digital environment.
4. The revision of the *Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis* in a missionary synodal perspective.
5. Some theological and canonical matters regarding specific ministerial forms.
6. The revision, in a synodal missionary perspective, of the documents touching on the relationship between bishops, consecrated life, and ecclesial associations.
7. Some aspects of the person and ministry of the bishop (criteria for selecting candidates to episcopacy, judicial function of the bishops, nature and course of ad limina apostolorum visits) from a missionary synodal perspective.
8. The role of papal representatives in a missionary synodal perspective.
9. Theological criteria and synodal methodologies for shared discernment of controversial doctrinal, pastoral, and ethical issues.
10. The reception of the fruits of the ecumenical journey in ecclesial practices.

These groups will give updates before the 2024 Session, but will not complete their work until June 2025.

It is opportune to reflect, at this stage, on the process of the Synodal journey that we have been on, over the three years. It has been characterised by a back-and-forth movement (referred to in the document as 'circularity') to and from the centre (Rome) and the periphery (us). There have been changes made along the way – the extension of time to include two Sessions in Rome; the establishment of study groups; the late inclusion of a special session for parish priests; the decisions about what to include or exclude in the discussions.

Many Church members – the baptised as mentioned in the Synod texts - have not yet been engaged in the process. Some may have drifted away from the practice of their faith; some may not have realised the importance of this change of direction within the Church and others may not have been kept informed or encouraged to participate. Like all things in the Church, it will take time.

Perhaps the most consequential effect to date has been the introduction of the process of Spiritual Conversation. It has been a powerful tool in the way we meet together; listen to each other; afford everyone a chance to contribute; accept differing views and learn about how to discern together. Despite us not yet knowing the outcome of the Sessions in Rome, we – all of us - have had the opportunity to contribute to a new, very constructive, way to participate in the Church. This is not a task, or a commitment, that we should ignore.

This has particular relevance for the way that we respond to the devastation of sexual abuse within the Church, which is again front and centre with the release of the Report of the Royal Commission. One ongoing criticism is that we are still not listening to survivors, or that processes to address abuse have not sufficiently changed or improved. Spiritual Conversation should assist us by providing a process whereby all opinions can be expressed; that we have an obligation to listen, non-judgmentally, even to those things that upset us. We need to accept criticism and acknowledge our shortcomings. Only then can we move forward to repair the unspeakable damage that has been done. Hopefully there will emerge a more cooperative way to achieve a Church where all people feel safe.

As with many aspects of Francis' pontificate, there has been an extraordinary change of atmosphere, exemplified by the way the sessions are constructed – sitting at round tables in a huge hall. While still officially a Synod of Bishops, the participants have been markedly inclusive – lay and clergy, including bishops and cardinals and the pope himself; men and women – all of whom have full voting rights. As well as being an innovation for this Synod, there is the feeling that there cannot be a return to the old format. That, in itself, is evidence of a huge change and an acknowledgement of the importance of laity.

From the Launch Out point of view, it is heartening that laity and, in particular their formation, are prominent points for discussion in the Second Session. Specifically, the document says that there is “a call for adequately trained lay men and women to contribute to preaching the Word of God, including during the celebration of the Eucharist.” This is accompanied by addressing the role of women in the Church and the changes required in the education of priests – it is encouraging to see the acknowledgment of the fact that these topics are closely linked and that much formation can be shared.

Inevitably there have been dissatisfactions – the issue of women deacons seems to have dragged on for some time, despite two specific commissions to examine their history in the early Church; there is concern that some discussions and documents are kept secret, which has been a common practice in the Church up until now; some feel the process of change is too slow and others are very opposed to any kind of change. It is unfortunate that some dioceses have not promoted synodal discussions and spiritual conversations, and there are marked cultural difficulties that need to be overcome.

However, in its brief conclusion, the text sums up for us the next step in this important process in the Church:

“The questions that the *Instrumentum Laboris* asks are: how to be a synodal Church in mission; how to engage in deep listening and dialogue; how to be co-responsible in the light of the dynamism of our personal and communal baptismal vocation; how to transform structures and processes so that all may participate and share the charisms that the Spirit pours out on each for the common good; how to exercise power and authority as service. Each of these questions is a service to the Church and, through its action, to the possibility of healing the deepest wounds of our time.”



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