



ARCHDIOCESE OF PORT-OF-SPAIN

SYNOD 2021 - 2023 SYNTHESIS



For a synodal Church
communion | participation | mission

INTRODUCTION

On October 10th 2021, Pope Francis formally convoked the universal Church to a synodal journey. This process was called a “Synod on Synodality” under the theme: “For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, and Mission”. Pope Francis invited the whole People of God to become a synodal Church by patiently listening to the Holy Spirit and to one another. He saw this process as vital for the renewal of the Church. Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, this process involves listening, dialogue, and community discernment where every person can participate.

A week later, His Grace Archbishop Jason Gordon launched the diocesan synod process at the celebration of Holy Mass at Living Water Community Chapel which is televised live across Trinidad and Tobago. He introduced the Synod Team who had responsibility for spearheading the rolling out of the archdiocesan phase of this two-year process. The team immediately began to study the Official Handbook for Listening and Discernment in Local Churches (*Vademecum* for the Synod on Synodality) and the Preparatory Document, in order to prayerfully develop that “synodal mentality” and “we-mindset” essential for the journey. Guided by these documents and the established roadmap, the team reached out to the parishes, ecclesial communities and other groups to select coordinators (three to five persons), one of whom would be a youth representative.

On Saturday 27th November 2021, Holy Mass was celebrated at the Minor Basilica of the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception to mark the official launch. Representatives from the parishes and other ecclesial groups attended and His Grace reiterated that the period of the Synod was not the time to “shrink back and let fear dominate” but, instead, a chance to “go forward boldly and use every opportunity to hear again what the Spirit is speaking to the Church”. He challenged everyone to embark on a process of deep listening so that everything could be heard: “the good, the bad, and the ugly”. He added that this process would be a new springtime for the universal Church.

Following the official launch, members of the Synod Team, as assigned liaisons to different vicariates and groups, intensified their outreach and communication with Parish Priests and Parish Synod Coordinators. The liaisons provided support and served as an important link between the parishes and the Synod Team. On December 4th 2021, training began for coordinators with an orientation workshop. Other training interventions continued until January 15th 2022.

Despite the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic and other difficulties, Parish Synod Coordinators responded with resilience, courage, and creativity. They tapped into the country’s innate tendency to use varied forms of creative expression to communicate. This resulted in original music compositions in various genres including dramatic presentations and visual arts. The Archdiocese also launched an exposition for the youth which invited them to use multiple artforms to depict the theme “I dream of Church being ...”. Over 100 entries were received displaying youthful enthusiasm in the portrayal of dreams for the Church of the future (see Appendix H).

Parish Coordinators and their teams must be commended for their resourcefulness in seeking “to encourage maximum inclusion and participation, reaching out to involve the greatest number of people possible”, as articulated in the *Vademecum*. Generally, they succeeded in building safe spaces for participants to speak freely and courageously, share stories of their joys and sadness, pains and disappointments, and express their hopes and dreams for a synodal Church. It was noteworthy that young persons who were reticent or reluctant to speak out during online sessions, were animated and, reportedly, could not stop talking when they were eventually allowed into face-to-face sessions.

The following were some of the difficulties experienced during the process:

- The restrictions for in-person consultations
- Parish shortcomings in responding to the technologically heavy approach to consultations

- Challenges in securing pastoral leadership buy-in and willingness to allow the laity to lead in the consultations
- Questionnaires that were said by some to be difficult to respond to and not all-inclusive
- Uncertainty that the reports submitted were accurate reporting and a true reflection of what was shared
- Low levels of participation in general
- Balancing the need for the process to generate a deep and meaningful engagement, while meeting the deadlines set by the Church

There were also a few surprises:

- Willing participation of non-Catholic leaders and faithful in general
- The profound pain and woundedness experienced within the Church
- The resounding concern for the void of ministry to youth
- The consistent requests for adult catechesis

The rolling out of the Synod process has succeeded in creating new and deeper relationships, building bridges and inspiring participants to dream about the Church we are called to become. The “synthesis of syntheses” presented here encompasses a wide cross-section of the Church community, interest groups from the wider society, and individuals who embraced the invitation to participate in the synodal process. The severe restrictions on social gatherings initially reduced conversations to virtual events; however, the timely removal of these restrictions facilitated physical in-person conversations which worked well for some parishes. The management of the process across the Archdiocese augurs well for a Church called to live in ongoing synodality.

DISCERNMENT OF THE COLLECTED CONTRIBUTIONS

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all (2 Corinthians 13:14)

The celebration of Holy Mass begins with similar words but, as we journey together today, what is our experience of Church? How are we journeying together and how is the Holy Spirit guiding us to make our journeying better? In this section of our synthesis, we present the thoughts, feelings and desires of those who participated in the synodal consultations in the Archdiocese of Port-of-Spain. These are presented in a blend of reported speech and direct quotations. It is purely a distillation of the voice of the people who participated in hundreds of consultations and conversations, completed questionnaires and submitted e-mails and handwritten letters. Expressions of joy are woven throughout the synthesis, even when they are voiced as a desire to see something better. In the first section, we present a synthesis of some of the joys which were expressed and celebrated by participants. The second section presents what was said about how we are journeying together, but the sentiments expressed also point to how we can make it a better experience for all. In the third section, the focus is on what participants shared about how the Holy Spirit is guiding the Church to make our journeying better. The voice of the People of God is presented under themes which seek to capture the essence of the collective contributions.

Many Catholics expressed a deep love for the Church and a sense of belonging. Many non-Catholic and non-Christian leaders expressed a deep appreciation for the opportunity to join in the synodal consultations, as well as an admiration for many of the charitable works of the Church. Amidst the positive experiences and joys, however, many expressed pain, disappointment and disillusionment. Those who shared their feelings also saw, in these consultations, an opportunity for honesty, growth and change. The People of God spoke and our Church listened. This is what we heard.

Some of our Joys

Catholics and non-Catholics lauded the Catholic Church as an institution that has made, and continues to make, a significant contribution to the development of our society. The voice of the Church is a highly respected in the Trinidad and Tobago and recognised for its role in helping to shape national dialogue on

social and economic issues. Non-Christian leaders and persons of other faiths also expressed the view that the Church has led the way on ecumenism - always willing and open to working with others.

Other positive expressions from many voices were that:

- Catholic education provides a solid moral and spiritual foundation to all who experience it regardless of faith.
- The charitable work of the Church in society, particularly with the poor and dispossessed, is widely recognised, admired and commended.
- The widespread availability of opportunities to participate in Masses and other devotions of the Church is highly valued. 'Praise and Worship' as an experience to be shared with persons of all faiths publicly, as well as in the context of the Mass is seen as being inspirational and encouraging a sense of unity and goodwill.
- Holy Mass, sharing in the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ, provides the faithful with a spiritual enrichment that is unique to the Catholic Church.
- Catholics and non-Catholics experience Mt St Benedict as a place of spiritual fulfilment and healing.

How are we journeying together?

1. Church as an active Christian Community built on the power of Fellowship, Caring and Love.

Our church should be a space where believers and non-believers alike can journey together bringing all to conversion of heart and a life-changing experience of God. Many do not experience care, consideration, concern, respect and understanding of each other's needs. Many do not feel welcome; they feel rejected and the unity of the People of God is torn apart by segregation on the basis of skin colour, social status and wealth. Being welcoming is less about smiles and greetings at the door and more about "unconditional, non-judgmental love, where saint and sinner worship together" and "where all feel they belong and are committed to share their gifts in ministry moved by love." Many believe that they are excluded from the life of the Church because "we place too much emphasis on the development of the brain (intellect) and not on the heart (love).

2. Synodality in Church Leadership and Governance

The current system of governance is not an authentic alliance between clergy and laity. Not everyone is being heard and, in many cases, there is a disconnect between parish councils and parishioners. This deepens divisions and exacerbates the problem of cliques in ministries. There is a level of "distrust and disenchantment towards Church leadership at parish level, exacerbated or even caused by the lack of community connection and communication". There is ineffective communication by leaders, and parishioners are not encouraged to dialogue with the priest. This Synod should provide an opportunity to establish "continuous listening tools and systems".

"Dictatorship is entering the Church"; "priests are making their own rules while the hierarchy is not protecting us." There is also discomfort around a lack of transparency and sex scandals at clergy level. "Church leadership is held to a particular standard of living, and it is scandalous when they don't, and even more scandalous when they are not made to account for their shortcomings and little or no effort is observed in their striving to do and be better."

There is neglect of pastoral responsibilities and pastors are not able to discern the needs of their flock and help them grow spiritually. Social class distinction and preferences disrupt the effectiveness of pastoral care. There were voices which shared the sentiment that "we need to utilise to a far greater extent the unique strength and abilities of women towards furthering God's will in the church." A call was made for women to serve as deaconesses and priests. One person expressed the view that there is "disenchantment with the misogyny of the Church leaders – will return to church when it begins to ordain female deacons and priests."

Amid changing social norms, the Church is not sufficiently vocal in speaking out on moral codes and conduct. In this silence, members are often confused and unsettled and when the Church fails to respond to our questions, it sometimes leads to alienation and isolation. Messaging, structures and language are outdated and do not deal with real world issues.

3. The Pulpit and the People - Relationships among and between Clergy, Religious and Laity

Poor interpersonal skills and a lack of respectful communication between clergy and laity fracture relationships and inflict injury. There is mistrust, doubt, alienation and disinterest among the flock as a result of loss of confidence in the pastor. "People need affirmation, recognition, respect – they don't need being pushed over." During their "reign" some priests may not accept the ministries/groups they meet in the parish and so these become non-functional. They "shut down" the work of previous priests without consulting parishioners. They exhibit prejudice and favouritism and this engenders cliquism. There was mention of "an evil disunity eating away at the inside core of the Church."

Some experience disrespect and coldness from the priest. Homilies that do not connect with the reality of people's experiences and do not provide moral guidance on challenges being faced today, lead to the view that "the Church has become irrelevant and has no significant role in the community." There is a disconnect between the priest, parishioners and the wider community when the priest is too busy and unable to meet with parishioners or walk through the community. "The parish you get is the parish you make."

Training in interpersonal skills is critical for clergy and laity. We need "trained shepherds who will pastor the flock with love and acceptance".

4. Thirsting for Reconciliation

We are a Church in need of healing, reconciliation and rebuilding. Deeper communication is needed throughout the Church with an attitude of humility and servanthip. Feelings of hurt emanate from reports of physical abuse, callous and uncharitable behaviour towards each other, dishonesty by the clergy, hypocrisy, victimisation and perceptions of biased treatment. In the absence of a transparent process or a "space to air concerns and grievances, there will always be unreconciled pain and persons living on the fringes because the Church is not considered a safe place. "Brokenness isn't welcome in our Church" and persons do not feel free to share their painful experiences of Church life.

The Church must acknowledge past indiscretions and seek forgiveness in order for healing to occur. Praying and listening to each other are crucial to the restoration of relationships. Consideration should be given to a period of reconciliation with Masses being held for that intention and those who have been hurt can reach out to, and engage, the person or persons who have hurt them. All will be encouraged to be open to dialogue and reconciliation. This should be extended beyond the Catholic Church to embrace the human family in the national community.

5. Giving Voice to the Voiceless and Dignity for all

A view was echoed by many that "we are not journeying together, although we are on the same road". Several groups were named among the marginalised and those excluded from the Church and who felt their voices were not heard or they were living an "invisible" life. These included: persons who are divorced, separated, widowed, in common-law relationships, single mothers, members of the LGBTQ+ community, the mentally ill, persons with disabilities, migrants, refugees, the homeless, the poor, the illiterate, the older-single community, shut-ins, the elderly, drug addicts, ex-convicts and prisoners.

These groups are left on the margins without companions on the journey and are often hindered from being active in the mission of the Church, for example, persons of different sexual orientation/lifestyle are not welcome in Church life and not encouraged to participate meaningfully in pastoral care or prayer groups. Non-Catholic spouses in mixed marriages are not always treated in a manner that is welcoming and can be made to feel like "outsiders". There was also concern about them not being allowed to receive Holy Communion. There is a lack of facilities for the physically challenged, and persons with disabilities have very little opportunity to participate in the life of the Church.

There were views expressed by a few that the Church and her teachings ignore modern issues; the Church is "out of touch with humanity and their current issues and challenges and some priests are outdated and arrogant and the Church is prone to clericalism." Within the Church "everything white is portrayed as superior and black as negative" and that this is reflected even in the selection of cardinals. There was a view that "the body of bishops and cardinals needs to directly reflect the demography of the church". Some voices say that the discrimination and bias extend beyond the Church into the selection and treatment of students in Catholic schools.

The Church needs to “open its arms to everyone” and address the alienation that several persons feel. “As Catholics we have to be careful that we have not now repositioned ourselves like the Pharisees and Sadducees” in the time of Christ.

6. Uniting the Generations – Journeying beyond the Gap

Many young people feel a sense of exclusion and that their voices are not being heard. They feel as if their gifts are not respected and they are treated as labourers for tasks such as “moving furniture and fetching things” and not valued for the meaningful contribution they can make. There is reference to what is termed an “ageist” and “utilitarian” approach in which the Catholic community only desires youth participation to secure Catholic legacy or to utilise their skills (both intellectual and manual) without their being treated as worthy of inclusion or integration.

The youth experience of Church varies. The view of some is that the Church provides a warm, welcoming, safe and open space, while others point to the need for the Church to provide a safe space for all youth to be encouraged to participate in ministry and to feel a sense of inclusion.

A dichotomy appears in the views expressed by the youth and the elderly, with the youth describing older members of the Church as judgmental, treating youth as “sinners”; out of touch with reality, exclusive in their treatment of others and causing hurt. On the other hand, some of the elderly speak of being discarded, pushed aside and replaced. They feel lonely, useless and forgotten after years of committed service to the building of the Church community. The lack of youth engagement at parish level leads to low levels of participation in the life of the Church. There is a view that after Confirmation, many “disappear”. It was also expressed that infant baptism does not allow young persons to journey towards making a truly life-changing decision to be baptised in our faith and to benefit from formation, which would give them a fuller and more meaningful understanding of the magnitude of that decision in their lives as Catholic Christians. One cannot ignore the voice of the young First Communion candidate who said, “I dream of Church being a place where I can understand what the priest is saying”.

7. Our Mission of Nourishing Mind, Soul and Body

There is a “spirituality of charity” that is neglected by the Church, so that some of the good works are more like social services. Many Catholics and non-Catholics experience the “generous heart of the Church for the poor”. Non-Catholics highly commend the Church for the extent to which material assistance is given to persons in need, regardless of their faith. Leaders of other Christian Churches who accepted the invitation to join in the Synod consultations with the Archbishop, expressed the view that they are impressed with the Catholic outreach to the poor and dispossessed. There is a view among them that “Catholics serve whoever is in need”. Material support is provided to migrants; however, there is little effort to minister to their spiritual needs and nurture spiritual growth. Members of the migrant community say they would welcome the opportunity to be more fully integrated into the life of the Church.

“We feed the poor but we do not evangelise so that we can bring them into the Church, so that they can join in communion with us and feed on the true presence of Christ in the Eucharist.” There is a view that, apart from attending to physical needs, the Church needs to put more resources into providing emotional, spiritual and social support.

There is a need to reassess several issues related to the Sacraments, such as the length of the First Communion and Confirmation programmes, lack of availability of the Sacrament of Reconciliation, and the difficulty experienced by some in getting a priest for the Sacrament of Anointing of the Sick or a priest or deacon for funerals.

There are limited formation programmes. Catholics need more access to Spiritual Directors. Underpinning all of this, we need “a dynamic faith in, and dependency on the Holy Spirit, which is made possible through ongoing spiritual exercises.

8. Walking and Working Together in our Human Family

There is a desire to forge and improve relationships and build a stronger sense of community, not only within the Church, but with persons of all faiths. In some communities, people of different faiths participate in each other's social events. However, there is an "us versus them" approach to many issues in society – "Catholics versus them/society." As a multi-religious society, it is imperative that the basic tenets of all faiths are known and understood. There is a lot of misunderstanding and ignorance of many aspects of our faith, for example, persons speak of idol worship in the Catholic Church. Some non-Catholics state that they do not feel welcome in our Church and they feel uncomfortable with the focus on Mary and the saints. They believe that Catholics do not study the Bible.

There is inadequate interaction, dialogue and teaching in order for all to be accepting of the faith of others.

Music plays a unifying role. One voice asked why the Church could not create events which invites persons of all faiths to join in "just praise and worship", for example, in the centre of the city on a busy day. "Music and rhythm are intrinsic to our Caribbean identity and thus particular attention must be placed on the quality and style of music in the Archdiocese." "Members of Music ministries in the Church experience obstacles, such as lack of support, expertise, succession planning, personnel and resources."

Leaders of other Christian Churches stated that there is a need for more dialogue and cooperation among the Churches in the service of the nation. They stated that "there is congruence in our mission and so there is an opportunity for a heightened, united voice as we embrace communities. Through our common mission we can come up with one package that we can offer to communities in need". Additionally, "the Churches need to come together, examine the cultural realities and reflect from time to time on what is needed for the transformation of the society."

Many Catholics and non-Catholics believe that not enough effort is made to come together as religious bodies in responding to the needs of persons. However, a view was expressed that, "notwithstanding the undeniable need for ecumenism, moreso in a multicultural/multi-religious society such as ours, a stronger projection of Catholic identity or ethos is needed. In the absence of this, we lose some of the glue needed to bind the faithful together and to answer the quiet, often unanswered call to know what the Church's values really are in a highly dysfunctional, value-deficient social order, [which is] crying out for moral certitude."

How is the Holy Spirit guiding us to make our journeying better?

In addition to what was presented above, the following themes emerged as areas of special focus for the Church of the future.

1. Improving Hospitality

In his travels, Jesus and his disciples depended on the hospitality of strangers for accommodation and sustenance. Moreover, as Christians, we are commanded to "love thy neighbour". Therefore, hospitality has been integral to the Christian way of life. In the words of parishioners, "hospitality is not a duty but a biblical way of life". Within the local Church, there is a significant need to move the practice of hospitality beyond meet, greet and seat. "Hospitality is a whole-Church experience, not just for the team."

There are several dimensions of the desired hospitality, including care for the vulnerable and the need to become a more family-oriented, welcoming Church. This was very evident in the creative expressions of our young people when they submitted paintings, drawings, poems, spoken word and videos expressing a desire for Church to be welcoming to all and a place filled with the joy of the Gospel. Both priest and laity are called to become more involved, for instance. "A very simple thing like learning each other's name" will help to build family". The support of the whole church is important in making people – parishioners and visitors- feel valued and welcomed. "Church should establish a permanent place/mechanism to share pain and hurts and get help when facing life's challenges".

Priests and religious are responsible for both spiritual and pastoral care, particularly for those experiencing isolation. The expectations of the faithful are for "our priests and deacons to be more caring and responsive and spend more time with the faithful as Jesus did." "People must see Church as a hospital for the broken and wounded to be cared for by Dr. Jesus".

2. Revitalising Governance and Leadership

There was a view that the Catholic Church is not and was not meant to be a democratic institution. However, being synodal means walking together, side by side, as one human family. This means that the Church must create channels for participation, open dialogue, feedback and listening. The embedding of these values within the governing bodies of the Church requires responsible leadership, which is too often absent. Many times, seniors are unwilling to step aside and give opportunity to youth. Meanwhile persons become reluctant to participate, to improve governance and develop leadership for the next decade. Many desires were expressed that Church should:

- i. improve governance of the ministries and sub-organisations which should include timely elections, establishing and respecting constitution and rotating leadership
- ii. host Ministry Fairs as a strategy for encouraging persons to participate
- iii. increase the number of deacons; they are men with wives and families who have in-depth knowledge of problems that arise and can advise with more confidence.
- iv. ordain women as priests and deacons
- v. take action to facilitate dialogue between the generations where older and younger persons can bond and support each other.
- vi. build relationships in which there is humility, trust and ability to appreciate differences.

There was a view that “real transformation or real change will come when all on top ...from the Pope down to the priests in the parish should be baptised in the Holy Spirit”.

3. Strengthening Youth Engagement

The world is rapidly changing in response to many secular global trends. Compared with parents and grandparents, there is a marked difference in how youth and young adults perceive Church and religion and how they want to be included in it. Perhaps the most popular observation in this Synod process is that youths are increasingly absent in our parishes. The expression that Confirmation is viewed by many children as “the sacrament of exit from the church” is a chilling reality.

Creating more disciples for Christ among the youth is imperative for the very survival of the Church. While that task may seem daunting, St Luke tells us “By your perseverance, you will secure our lives” (Luke 21:19). The voice of the Spirit calls on the Church in the following ways:

- i. “The youth and young adult membership must be engaged in new, creative and meaningful ways to grow in, and live out their faith in the midst of challenges”. Ministries should target youth involvement based on the variety of needs and interests of young people. Parents and families should be engaged in the process.
- ii. Youth engagement activity could include vacation bible camps or a prayer group on the street, parish Retreat Day or weekend retreats with featured speakers. There should be spiritual formation for young people.
- iii. The youth would like to be active participants in their religious community with a particular emphasis on strengthening the youth voice by implementing structures and systems to improve communication within the parish and at the Archdiocesan level, for example, creating a Youth Advisors Board.
- iv. Include youth in the decision-making processes and assist teams in learning how to manage intergenerational spaces.
- v. Youth desire a community life that is open, inclusive and does not revolve around Liturgy, but introduces authentic dialogue with various groups and engages their demographic with events and the use of technology.
- vi. “There is need to find a way to provide a more effective way of guiding our children through the “rites of passage”. The current system is causing alienation of both children and parents.

4. Improving Technology and Communication in Church

Jesus and his disciples preached the Word of God in temples, markets, and public spaces. The public space in today’s world is cyberspace. Today, the Church is called to use all tools at its disposal to communicate the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ - “to translate the Gospel for our media-savvy culture.” Communications technology must be leveraged to build awareness and knowledge of the faith. Greater awareness of key online information resources will be helpful in strengthening Catholics’ faith.

Specifically, the local church must seize this opportunity to build culturally relevant local content to support efforts at faith formation and reinforcement. The people of God say:

“Use the arts and modern technology to attract and increase active membership. There should be greater use of technology in parish and community life.”

“We should make use of the multiple media resources to develop material to support our faith.”

“Use technology to improve the Mass experience, evangelise and motivate parishioners to be their best selves”

“Technology provides a pathway for making all voices heard”.

5. Faith Formation and Invigoration – Rescuing the Lost Sheep

At a Synod consultation with leaders of other Christian faiths, more than 50 % of those attending, admitted to being former members of the Catholic faith. They, and a growing number of non-practicing Catholics, have become lost to the faith. Yet, what emerges, even in the questionnaires completed online by persons in general, is a deep yearning in the society to connect with God, to transcend life’s challenges and to connect on a deeper level with the community. It is evident that poorly formed Catholics are principal targets of “Full Gospel evangelical churches”. The parable of the lost sheep reminds us that we have a Christian obligation to go out and find them.

The Church is called to so train its sheep to reduce the probability of loss. This requires building a good foundation. Jesus formed his disciples by teaching them the various dimensions of the kingdom. Building and invigorating the faith involves dedicated actions, such as:

- i. Promoting knowledge of the faith through bible classes, videos, interactive tools
- ii. Teaching how to pray with Christ – focus on the path to God through his Son, Jesus Christ
- iii. Prayer groups – special masses for former and non-practising Catholics
- iv. Promoting missionary spirit among the faithful – continue and formalise community walkabouts, professing the faith and winning over others. Nationwide evangelisation
- v. Special focus on men – men’s groups to address men’s spirituality and provide support to address male issues
- vi. “Don’t wait on people to come; go out and actively engage”
- vii. Developing apologetics – believers trained to represent and defend the faith
- viii. Creating built-in systems for continual reminders of the rationale behind the liturgy and doctrine of the Catholic Church
- ix. Faith formation has a personal dimension to it as well. “We need to ‘be the change we want to see’ and not wait for someone else to do it.”

Our religious identity inspires us to follow the right path to achieve the common good. Everyone should follow the right path to achieve the common good for the individual and the community. Each member of the Church should ask of him/herself, “Am I making the extra effort in my personal faith formation?”

In our local vernacular we say “We too heavy on the clergy and religious to create the Church without understanding that we are all the Church. We, the body of Christ, must appreciate that we also must do our part, in sharing this faith with others, firstly with our lapsed brothers and sisters and then with those of other religions.”

6. Building Community, Inclusivity and Dialogue

The Church is called to be committed to dialogue and working with persons of other persuasions in the wider community. There is a general call from both Catholic and non-Catholic persons to unite as a community and engage in outreach initiatives and events that serve and embrace all, with a particular focus on youth, elderly and the marginalised (including divorcees, persons who are separated and widowed, those in common-law relationships, single mothers, members of the LGBTQ+ community, the mentally ill, migrants, refugees, homeless, differently-abled, poor, older-single community, shut-ins, elderly, illiterate, drug addicts, ex-convicts, prisoners). Other views expressed were:

- Build a communal sense of worship, eschew individuality, classism, and all forms of real or implied discrimination and exclusion.

- The church needs to move beyond the pews, to building community – programmes of activities including pilgrimages.

What was described as constantly pretending that different types of people don't exist or "not even talking about my existence" should be replaced with a willingness to at least talk about aspects of life that are not specifically religious.

7. How we Celebrate and Worship

"Don't change the Mass, change everything else". This was a single voice during the consultation responding to the widely held view that "Church (Mass) is boring" and needs to be re-examined. What emerges is that, in general, "Catholics want a faith-filled Church that is witnessing to the love of Jesus Christ in daily life". The Church is called to:

- make the Mass/Church experience "livelier" – more praise and worship, more meaningful, relevant homilies.
- more authentic guidance and leadership through homilies that deal with current "real world" dynamics.
- develop specialist ministries to target pain points, for example, women's ministry where women speak to women and girls
- post Holy Communion, have a mandatory period of quiet, contemplative reflection in reverence to the presence of the Body and Blood.

A view was expressed that the Church needs to foster a culture of care of the earth in parishes, for example, one person said that "we need to demonstrate love for our environment by 'living' Laudato Si."

There were also concerns expressed about the inculturation of images in our churches. As one person put it, "I would like to see the white images in the church change to reflect the real ethnicity of the peoples of that time. If the creation story started in north Africa why are there not black images in the Church. This turns me off. If the Church is teaching the truth, it must be shown by the images that adorn our churches."

This concludes the discernment of the collected contributions.

CONCLUSION

In one of the parish reports, the metaphor of a rose garden was used to describe the synodal process as follows:

"The Synod experience was like a rose garden. Roses represented the positive experiences, thorns stood for problems and obstacles faced and the buds were potentials to explore."

In the garden of the Archdiocese of Port-of-Spain, we are on the path to synodality. The image of the stepping stone, on the cover, symbolises this first step in our journey. The major fruits of the Synod process in the Archdiocese of Port-of-Spain can be outlined by the following key words and phrases: honest and open dialogue; a process for healing pain and addressing alienation; repentance and reconciliation by the Church leadership and faithful; accountability and transparency in governance; a clear movement toward greater inclusion of persons marginalised by Church teaching, or by skin colour, social class, age or disability; a resounding call for more meaningful outreach to, and engagement of, youth and for the Church to address 'real world issues and dynamics.' There is an urgent need for ongoing formation of pastors for their ministry in a synodal Church; training for parish staff and ministry leaders; and updating of structures at all levels.

Our tagline for the synodal journey has been "Together as one human family for one common good". Despite the many challenges, the consensus among those who participated is that this synodal journey provided an opportunity for the kind of dialogue that was long overdue, and which can help the Church to heal and to grow in relevance to the lives of the faithful, as well as to the human family in general. This came with a heavy dose of scepticism and disbelief that it would bring about any change. It is perhaps telling that one respondent

to the online questionnaire said: "The church is not hearing the voices of those it has chased away. If I did not happen to see this ad about Synod on Facebook, I would never have had a voice."

Synod Coordinators in our parishes, ecclesial communities, commissions and congregations who have played a pivotal role in this process have given voice to a desire to be a part of a new movement in our Church, one that begins with healing and uniting all under a banner of love. There is hopeful anticipation of the next step in this synodal journey.

There is one sentiment which underlies the positive and negative experiences, the joys and pains, the successes and failures – it is hope. As we end on this note of hope, it is perhaps fitting to refer to this statement from one of the online questionnaires:

"I encourage us to develop a new psychology. A type that allows for difference and not just black and white. A type of radical, intolerable loving that jolts the psyche of the nation and the world. A kind of leading that is not caught up in the lights and cameras of our divine offices but, instead, willing to let the cassock get dirty with human stories splattered all over it.

I call us into a place that looks and feels like a newborn baby all over again – a new Nativity. A church born again, so to speak, Leaders, do your self-work. The world needs less politicians and more Mother Teresas and Saint John Pauls. Get it together, quick!"

A WORD OF THANKS

Bless Yahweh, my soul,

Bless his holy name, all that is in me!

Psalms 103: 1

The people of the Archdiocese of Port-of-Spain give thanks to those who made their voices heard and to those who listened.

APPENDICES

Appendix A: An overview of the local Archdiocesan context



Fig 1 Archdiocese of Port of Spain seal

Description of the Archdiocese of Port of Spain

"We are the people of God united by Word and Sacrament, building Christ-Centred communities that form Catholics to discern their vocation as missionary disciples of Jesus who work for the development of each person, every dimension of the human person, and all peoples with a preferential option for the youth and poor." – (excerpted from an Archdiocesan campaign in July 2021)

Background

Introduction of the Catholic Church - 1498

The Catholic Church was introduced to Trinidad with the coming of Columbus in 1498 and the subsequent Spanish settlement and establishment of the Parish and Church of St. Joseph by Antonio de Berrio in 1592. The Church was further assured of its continuity after the island was lost to the British as Article Eleven of the Capitulation of 1797 guaranteed the inhabitants, most of whom were Catholic, freedom to practice their religion. Trinidad was then under the jurisdiction of the Diocese of Guyana based at San Tome de Angostura (Venezuela) which was erected in 1790. The island was previously part of the Diocese of Puerto Rico, founded in 1532.

[CLICK HERE FOR MORE HISTORICAL INFORMATION](#)

[CatholicTT](#) is a brand concept of the Archdiocese which was developed in Jan 2020 by current Archbishop Charles Jason Gordon. The vision for the CatholicTT brand was to become a "hub for all things Catholic", where persons can easily access any info about the Catholic Church in Trinidad and Tobago (the Archdiocese of Port of Spain). CatholicTT should inspire interest that would move Catholics "from the pew to the home". (excerpted from an Archdiocesan campaign in July 2021)



Fig 1.2 CatholicTT brand

Appendix B: An organogram depicting the Archdiocesan structure

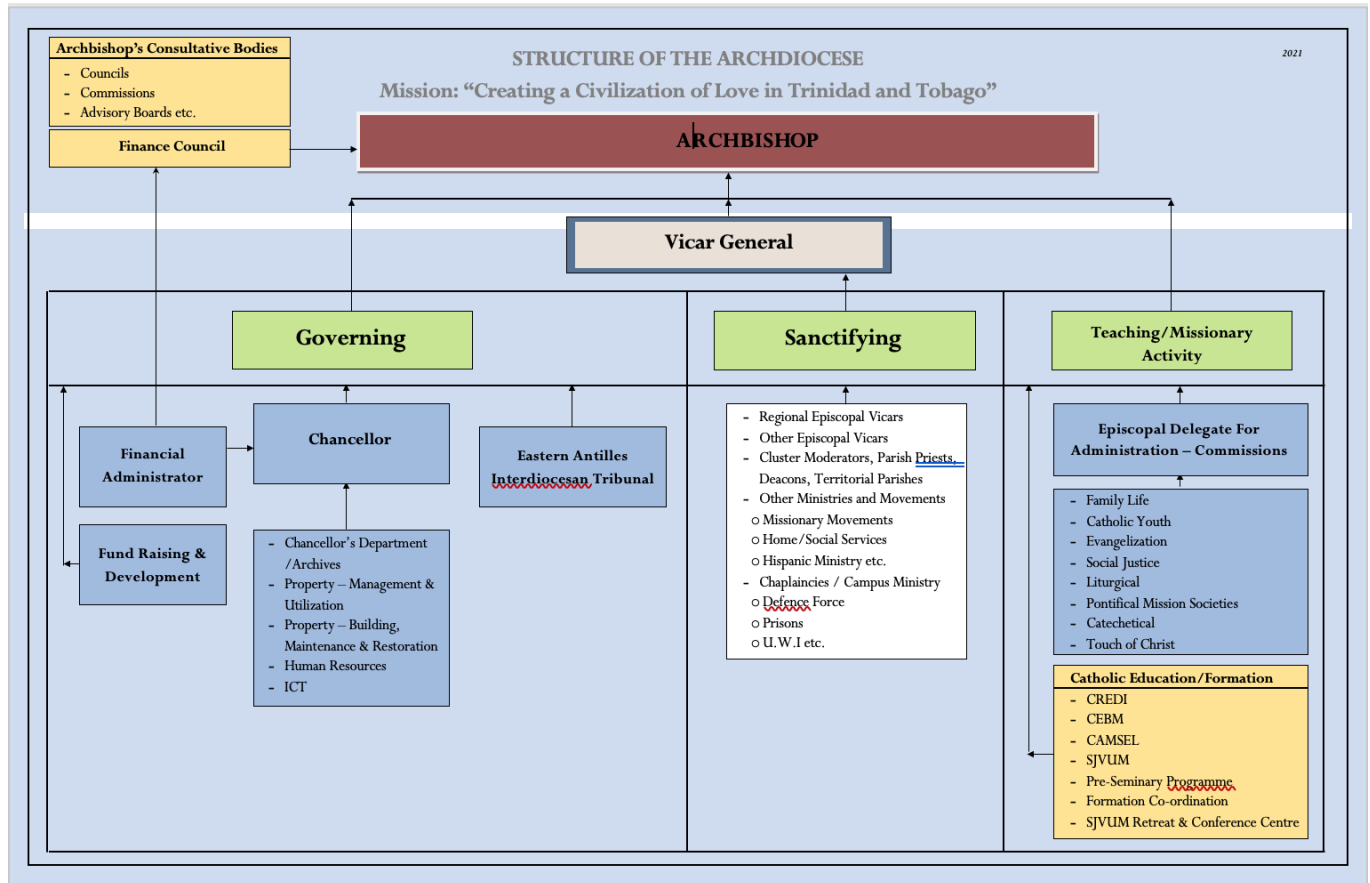


Fig 2

Appendix C: Population of Catholics & other Demographics

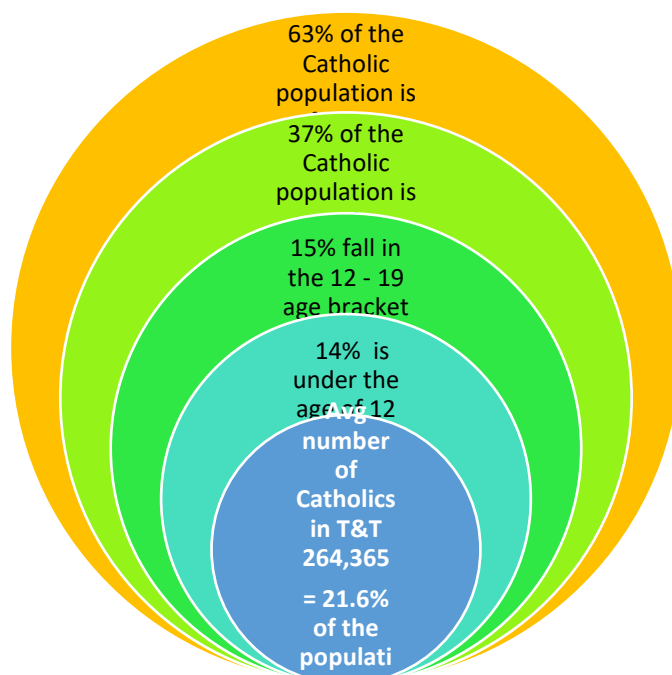


Fig 3 is based on a 2011 consensus. Statistics for same fall under the purview of the Archdiocesan Office of Pastoral Planning and Development (OPPD)

Appendix D: Catholics who regularly attend Mass

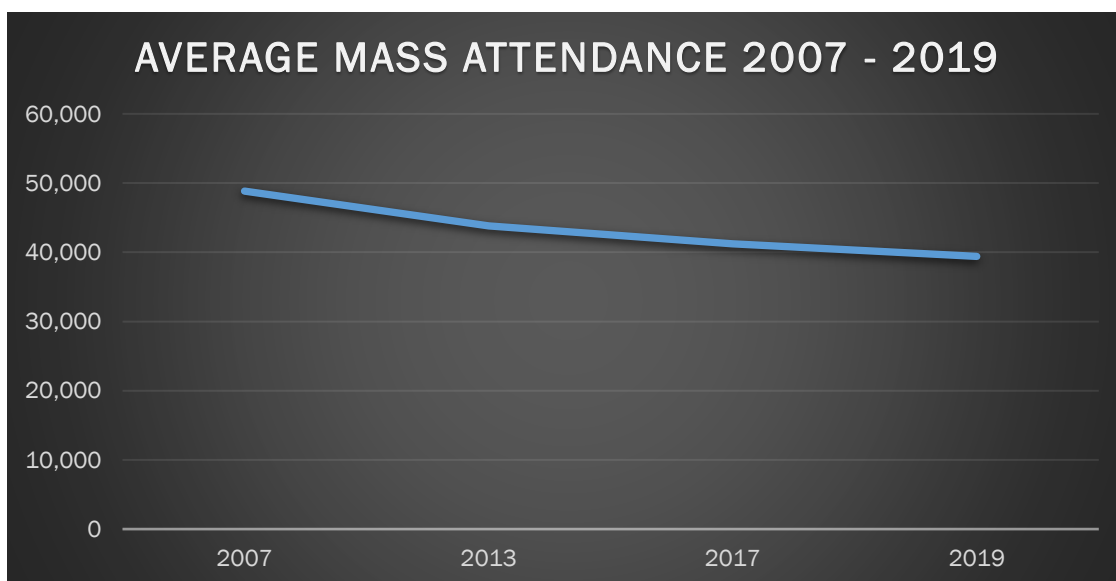


Fig 3 depicts the Average Mass Attendance (2007-2019) provided by the OPPD

2007	2013	2017	2019
48,834	43,828	41,240	39,404

Fig 3.1 Avg Mass attendance figures

	2007	2019	%CHANGE
No. of clergy	60	84	40%
Average age clergy	56	56	
Clergy over 60 years old	24	35	45.8%
No. of Catholics	289,460	285,671	-1.3%
Ratio of Catholics/clergy	4,824	3,401	-29.5%
Mass Attendance	48,834	39,404	-19.3%

Fig 3.2 highlights ratio of clergy to laity as of 2019 in the Archdiocese of Port of Spain (OPPD)

Appendix E: Archdiocesan Employees

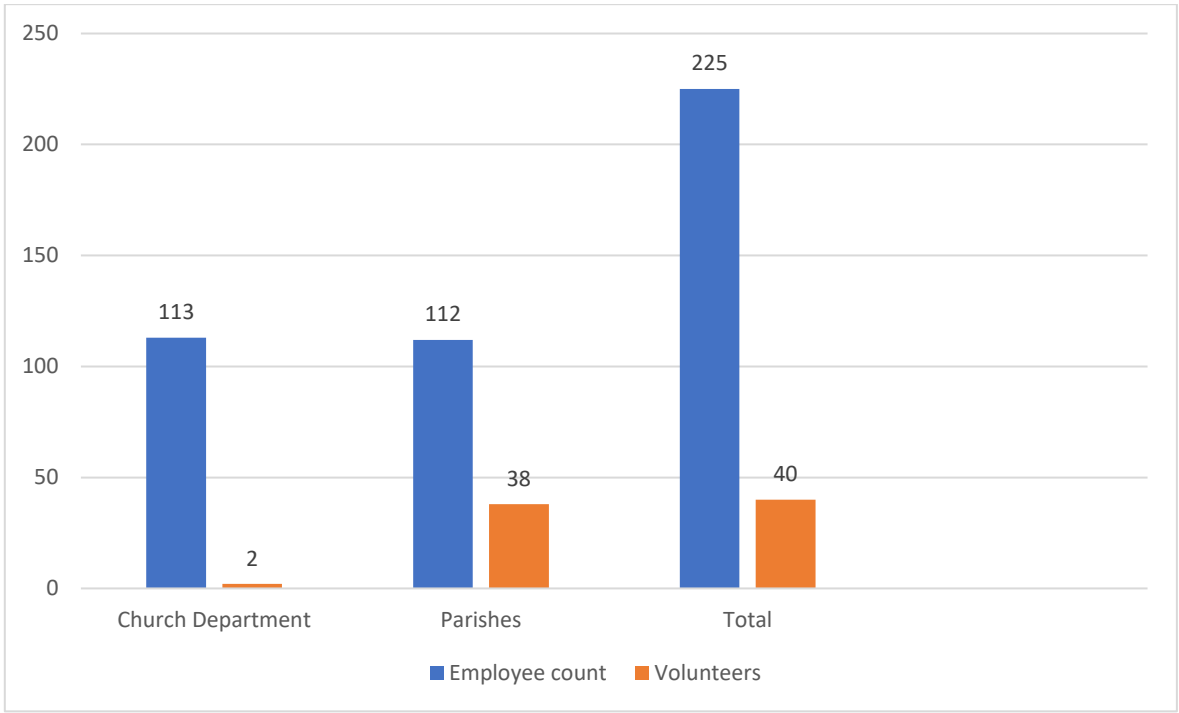


Fig 4 shows Archdiocesan employees and documented volunteers as of 2021

Appendix F: Testimonies

Audio/Visual testimonies from Youth, Clergy and Religious

Young Male:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=or4qPKjAV6U&list=PLJDufHdCIC4MX5d0q3cdkvq8HF0KtFHq>

Young Female: <https://www.facebook.com/catholicctt/videos/1122091621959297>

Priest:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gF9aR8iBYSs&list=PLJDufHdCIC4MX5d0q3cdkvq8HF0KtFHq&index=4>

Religious Sister/Nun:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8NFhnGvHdIY&list=PLJDufHdCIC4MX5d0q3cdkvq8HF0KtFHq&index=3>

Other testimonies

"I have so much to say, it feels like a lot. I was raised Roman Catholic by a very dedicated grandmother, so I wanted my children to be Roman Catholic and to go to school at Roman Catholic institutions. My trauma began when I wanted my daughter to get into a Roman Catholic school in South. The acting principal was rude and condescending. Imagine, myself and my husband both practicing Roman Catholics, born and raised, had to fight to get our child into what we considered our church. My challenges didn't end there. No! When my second daughter attended the school and displayed learning challenges, she was treated like a second-class child in the school. My church and our school turned its back on my child. My attempts to see the principal were futile when I went for a transfer to the school she demanded I take my child out of her school and send her back because she wanted a certain standard for her school."

"I grew up very close and connected to everything concerning church. I was a teacher of First Communion, Confirmation, cleaned the church, a lector, a member of Legion of Mary and more. Now I am an outcast. I've been told that there's no difference between myself and a prostitute when financial circumstances change and I was not having sex but staying with my boyfriend and his family. I was told I could not have communion because I'm married and divorced but cannot get it to null. I have cried bitterly and been in immense pain because of not being able to partake in the Blessed Sacrament. I stopped going to mass. However I was able to feel God's love through the virtual mass since COVID and the Archbishop recently said that once a divorced person is not sexually active, I can receive communion. The attitude of some priests towards us is so shaming and painful."

"In the past great joy, living in a parish that was alive. We came out with social gatherings once a month. It was community coming together to meet each other and participate in events like musical chairs, spin the bottle etc. This got people talking and listening to one another. Then they started to address issues like forming choirs for everyone visiting those in need. That gave rise to parishioners sharing part of their Sunday lunch with young people, guiding drivers where to collect and deliver hot meals. You helped those who were challenged with learning, eventually forming a cooperative in the parish."

"For me, joining together as part of the church has been a fulfilling one. I have made a genuine connection with my parish community. I am an active member and my children are involved in ministry. It has brought many learning experiences. Good and bad, but through it all I have grown to embrace all those as growth experiences. At first, some personalities of priests, laity and other elders were intimidating and unwelcoming, but those were fewer in number to consider... the voices of the shut ins and marginalized are barely heard".

Appendix G: Presentations & digital media content

1. **Presentations:** The Archdiocesan Synod team held workshops and shared instructive videos to parishes, church departments and ministries during 2021 & 2022

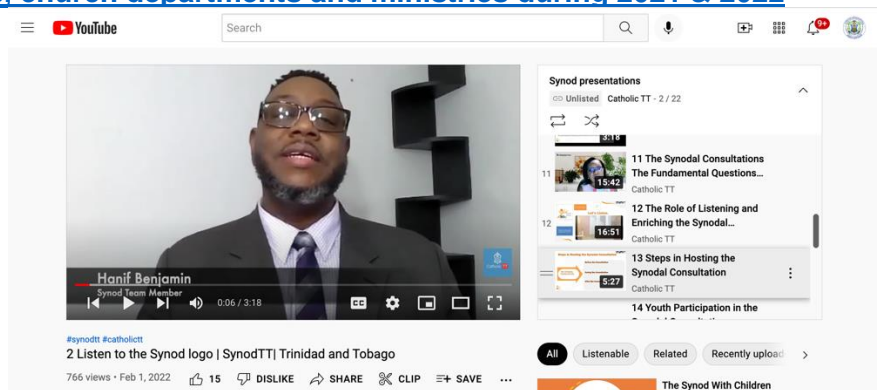


Fig 5

2. **Website:** catholictt.org/synod/

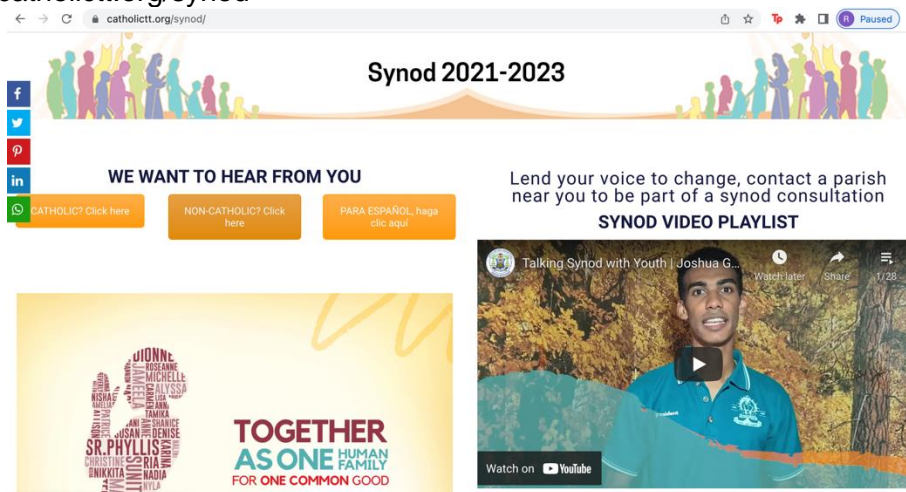


Fig 5.1

3. **Videos:** <https://youtube.com/playlist?list=PLJDuFhHdCIC4MX5d0q3cdkvq8HF0KtFHq>

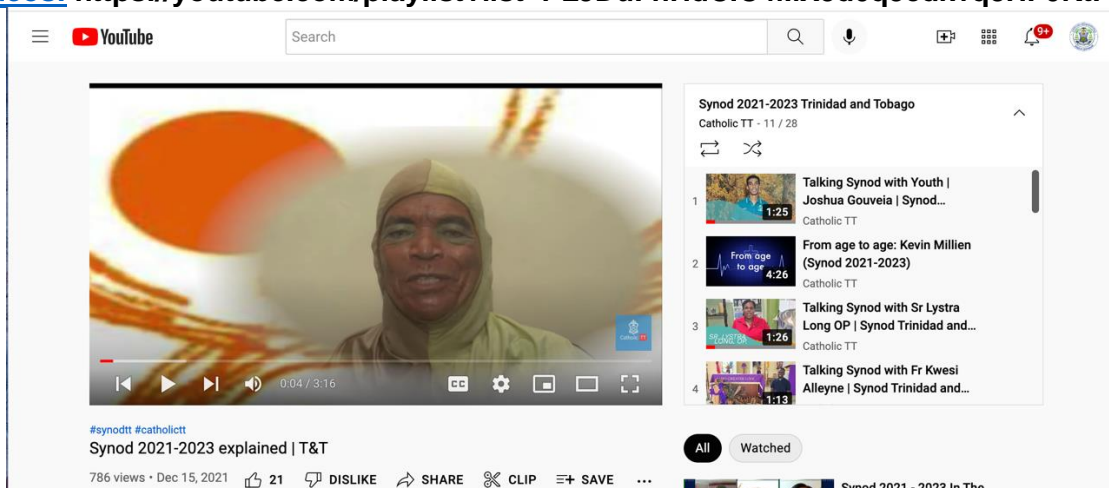


Fig 5.2

4. **Articles:** Articles published in The Catholic News online and print newspaper

5. **Other resources on the Synod process:** Provided by Archdiocesan Synod Team and local ministries/departments
6. **Questionnaires:** Synod questionnaires were administered through varying channels including catholicct.org, WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram and Twitter. They targeted Catholics (practicing and non practicing), non-Catholics & Youth. *Please see below the number of responses that were collected online.*
 - Synod Questionnaire (Catholics): 192 (administered through catholicct platforms)
 - Synod Questionnaire (Non-Catholics): 73 (administered through catholicct platforms)
 - Sínodo Español: 2 (administered through catholicct platforms)
 - Youth : 82 (administered by Youth Commission)

Total online responses received which were overseen by CAMSEL/Archdiocesan Synod Team: 349

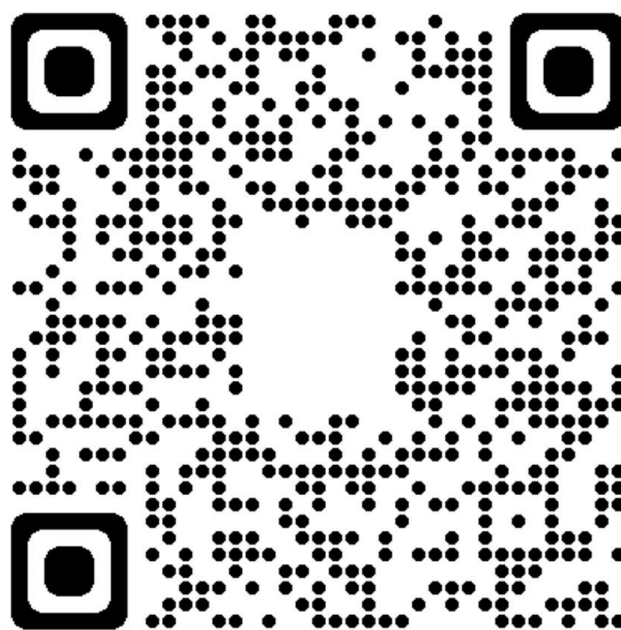


Fig 5.3 Scan QR code to access questionnaires

Appendix H: Youth creativity (Archdiocesan art exhibition)



Fig 6



Fig 6.1



Fig 6.2



Fig 6.3

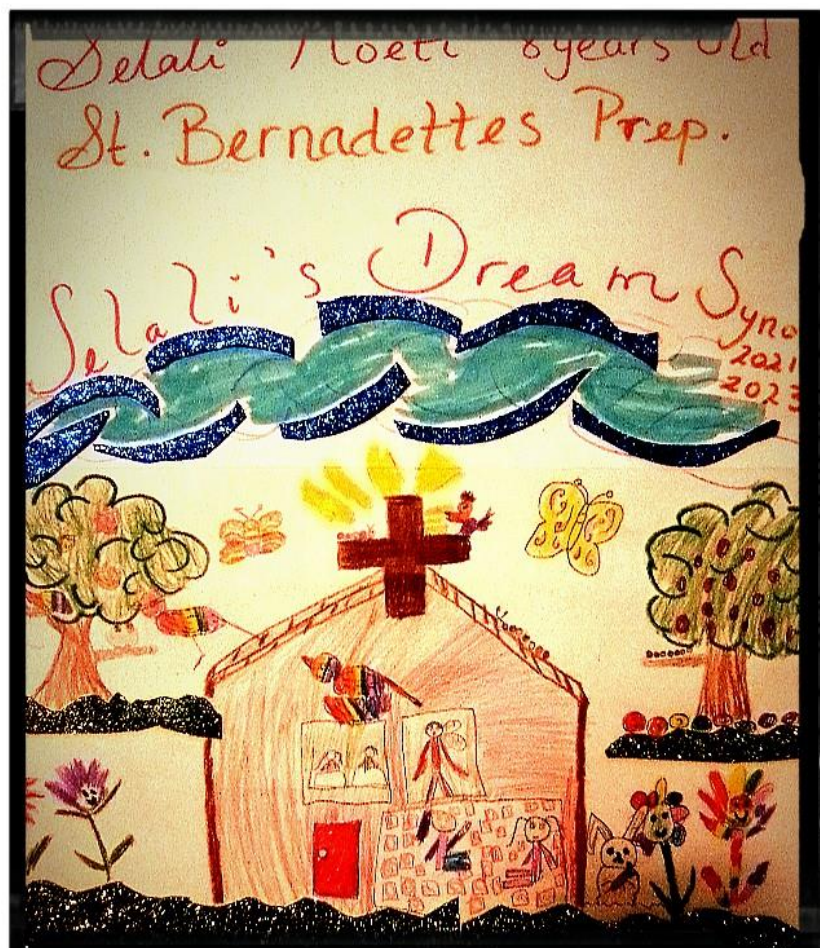


Fig 6.4

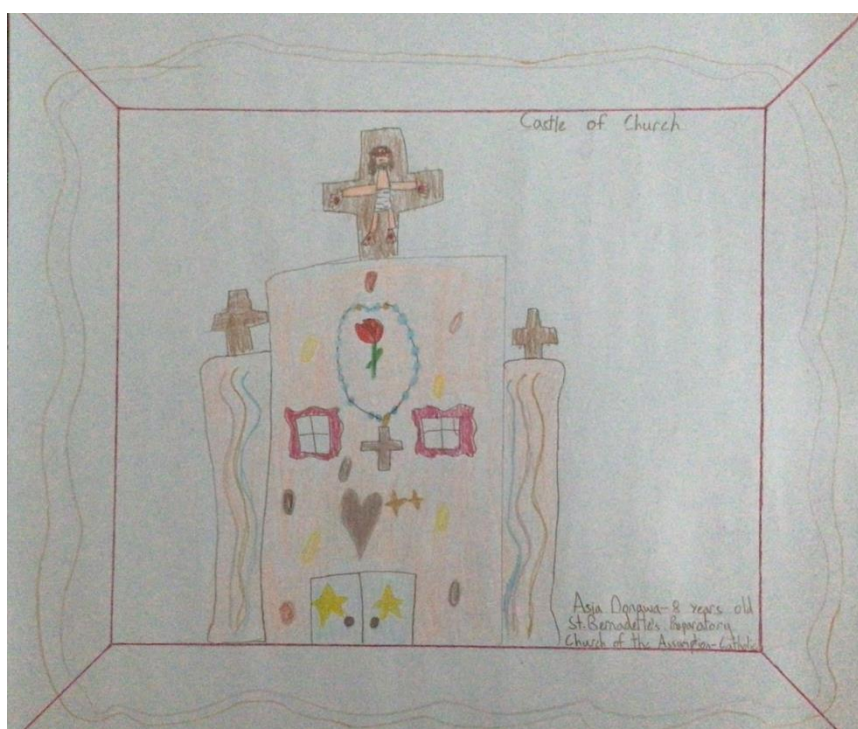


Fig 6.5



Fig 6.6

Appendix I: Church's involvement in education and social outreach

EDUCATION

Overview: Catholic Education in T&T

Catholic Education Board of Management

34B Belmont Circular Road, Belmont

Tel: 1-868-623-2302: Fax: 1-868-624-8940: Email: cebm@cebm.org.tt



Fig 7

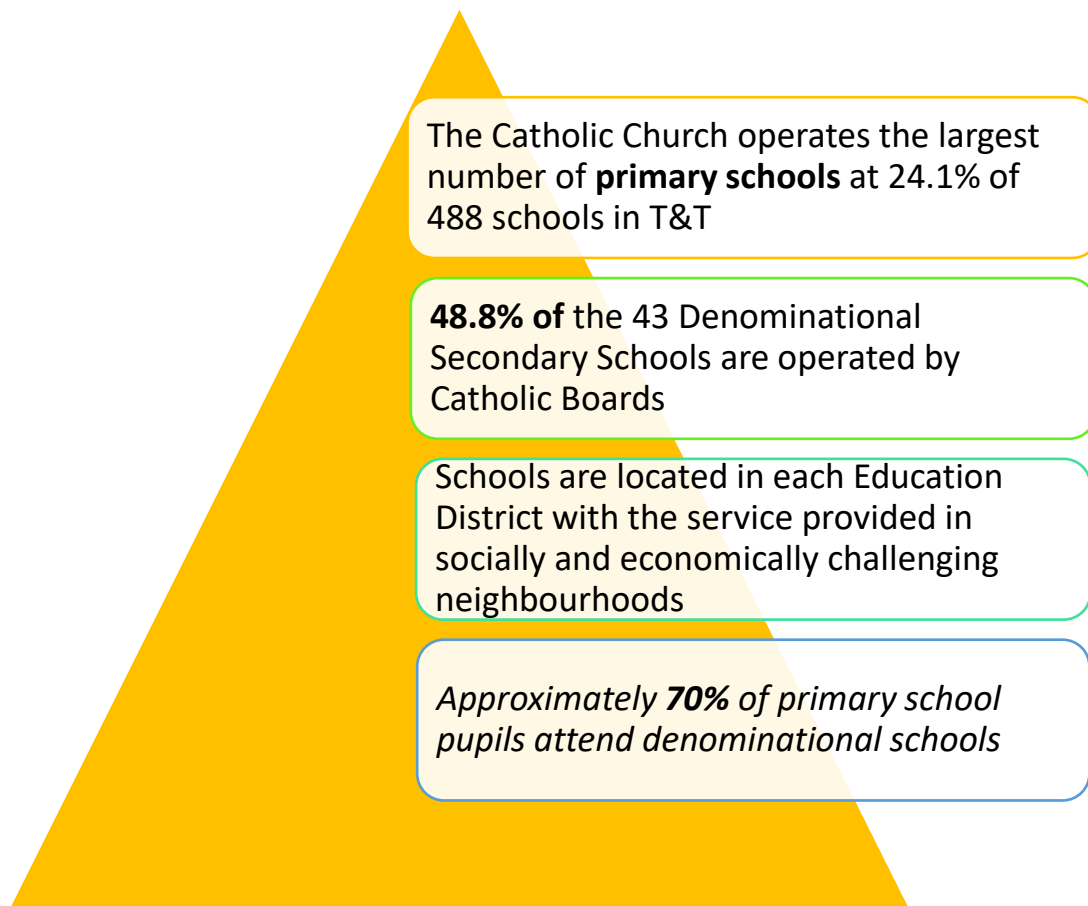


Fig 7.1: QUICK FACTS

Catholic schools are open to all students, Catholic and non-Catholic alike. In 2014 a total of 29,707 students attended Catholic Primary schools (including Private), of which 13,146 were Catholic.

Overview

After the abolition of slavery, the Catholic Church was in the foreground of providing for formal education by establishing schools at both primary and secondary levels. The Church initially bore the entire cost of erecting and expanding schools. Until 1849, in the absence of government schools, some public funds were provided to denominational schools to aid in their operations. Individual Parish Priests raised money to cover additional expenses.

Recognizing the rights of citizens and taxpayers to public funds to support their schools, the dual system of education was introduced in which government funding for a portion of teachers' salaries was provided to denominational schools that met stipulated conditions. Later, with the abolition of school fees, the government paid the full cost of teachers' salaries. In 1960, with the movement toward political independence and the increased demand for greater access to education, the Roman Catholic Church and State agreed to be partners in education. As a consequence, many Catholic secondary schools became Government-assisted schools.

Currently, RC schools assist the Minister of Education in providing a sufficient number of school places for children of school age, in return for which a substantial portion of operational costs is met by the Ministry.

The Catholic Education System is managed by the CEBM and a number of religious orders and congregations. The Cluny Sisters operate four assisted secondary and two private primary schools; the Holy Ghost Fathers, three assisted secondary schools; and the Dominican Fathers, one assisted secondary school. The Dominican Sisters run two assisted secondary schools, two private primary schools and one private vocational school. The Holy Faith Sisters are in charge of two assisted secondary and two private primary schools. The Corpus Christi Carmelites operate three private secondary schools and one private primary school. The Eternal Light Community is responsible for one private vocational school.

The Current Catholic Education Board of Management

The Catholic Education Board of Education (CEBM) established in 1934 is now a non-profit limited liability company incorporated in 1992. CEBM is the legal and official body, representing the Archbishop and/or Archdiocese in the management of the diocesan schools. It has evolved over the years to meet the needs of Catholic education. The current Board of Management was re-organised by Archbishop, the Most Reverend Joseph Harris, in 2012. It comprises both governing and operational arms. The members of the Board of Directors represent a variety of professional sectors and bring a wide range of relevant and useful skill sets. The Operational Arm is headed by a Chief Executive Officer. The staff include experienced educators who held senior positions in the Ministry of Education before attaining the age of mandatory retirement from the Teaching Service. Eight Vicariate Managers service the Archdiocese's six Vicariates with a ratio of one Manager to approximately 15 schools.

There are 118 Primary, one Private and six Assisted Secondary Schools managed by the CEBM.

The CEBM works closely with the Teaching Service Commission, the Ministry of Education and the Association of Denominational Boards of Education.

Our Aspiration for Catholic Education

Our Catholic schools are led by principals and teachers who are missionary disciples, steeped in the philosophy of Catholic education who work with parents/guardians to ensure each child achieves his/her full potential as a child of God and citizen of Trinidad and Tobago and the world community through excellence in faith, academic, physical, emotional and character formation within excellent facilities

Catholic educators should model collaboration, love of the faith, communion with the Church and concern for the poor and marginalized¹

The Quality Assurance System for Catholic Schools

In support of the mission, Quality Assurance Standards for Catholic Education have been developed and initial implementation almost completed.

The major goal of the Quality Assurance System is to achieve improved student learning and development through effective teaching, leadership and management, maintenance of resources, stakeholder engagement utilizing the School Based Management/School Development Planning and Implementation model as the vehicle to achieve this end. This intervention uses research, good practice, training, mentoring and on-site support to equip principals to perform their role as instructional leaders.

¹ Congregation for Catholic Education, *Lay Catholics in School: Witness to the Faith*, 1982, n. 37.

The implementation process is as follows:

- Schools examine and adopt the standards envisioned in the former phase
- Schools conduct self-assessments and produce reports highlighting areas for improvement
- Schools produce a development plan and implement improvement projects targeting specific outcomes
- Peer Review Team conducts external review; produces report with recommendations for improvement and categorises each school as either: Developing, Improving or High Performing
- Schools implement recommendations for improvement and prepare for the next review cycle

The Roman Catholic Archdiocese

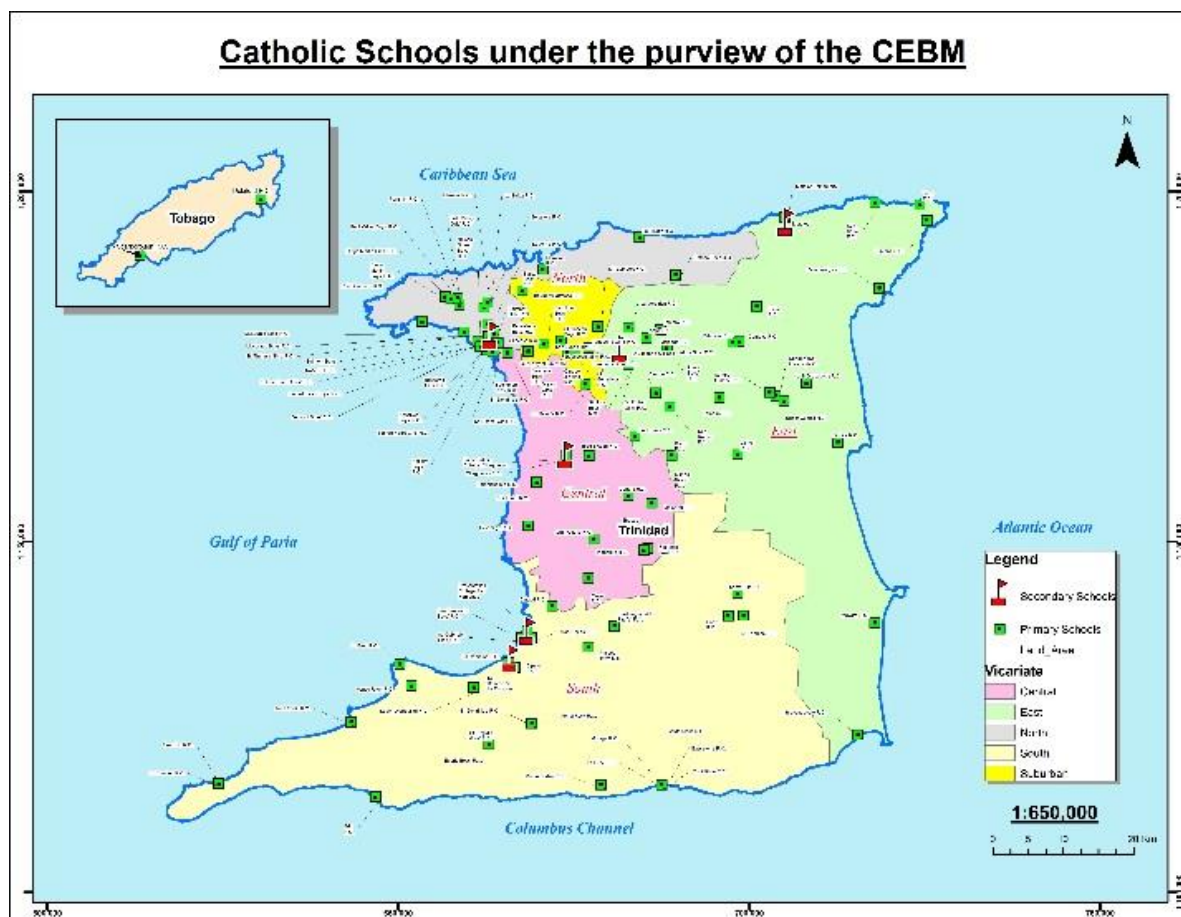


Fig 7.3

SOCIAL OUTREACH

The Catholic Church in the Archdiocese of Port of Spain has a number of homes that provide a range of services to vulnerable persons in the country. Many of these homes are operated by religious and ecclesial bodies.

The Society of St Vincent de Paul (Ecclesial Body) operates 16 institutions throughout Trinidad and Tobago, consisting of : six homes for the aged (Santa Cruz Tritscher Home, Arima Santa Rosa Home, Nazareth House for ladies, Belmont St. Andrew's Home, Tobago Mason Hall, San Fernando SVP Home); one geriatric home (Finbar Ryan Home) ; two Halfway Houses ; two hostels (Ozanam Youth Social Centre, and W. V. Clerk Hostel for working women in San Fernando) ; one children's home (Tunapuna Cyril Ross Nursery) ;

three night shelters (P.O.S., Arima and Tunapuna) to provide night accommodation for men and women and one rehabilitative Centre for Socially Displaced Persons. (The History of St Vincent de Paul in Trinidad and Tobago).

Additionally, the following Religious Orders operate homes:

RELIGIOUS ORDER	HOMES
Corpus Christi Carmelites	Christ Child Convalescent Home
	Corpus Chirsti L'Hospice
	Lady Hochoy Home, Cocorite
	Lady Hochoy Centre (Handicapped Centre)
	St Jude's Home for Girls
Dominican Sisters	Plainview, Arima
	Sunny Hill, Barataria
	St Dominic's Children's Home
Holy Faith Sisters	Aylward House
	Credo 'Drop In' & Development Centre
	Sophia House Empowerment Centre for Girls
Eternal Light Community	Amica House for Girls
	Casa de Luz Home for the Aged
	Goshen Home
	Joshua Home for Boys
	May Care centre
	Vision of Hope
Living Water Community	Ave Maria House caring Centre
	Hospice (Cancer) Centre
	Home for the Elderly
	Marian House
	Mercy Home Aides Hospice
	New Life Ministries
	Our Lady of the Wayside Halfway Home for At Risk Babies and children
	St Peter Canisus Home for the Aged

Fig 7.4 social outreach through homes run by organs of the Church.