



**Diocese of Limerick**  
Our Catholic Community

### **Letter to be read out at Masses on weekend of 9/10 November 2024**

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

As you may know, together with Bishop Alan McGuckian from Belfast, I attended the recent month-long Synodal Assembly in Rome on behalf of the Irish Bishops Conference. I was at the first session last year and this year's session saw us reach a conclusion with the publication of a Final Document. It was a privilege to be there and meet with the 365 delegates who came from all over the world. There would be much to share about it. I want first of all, however, to say "thank you" for your contribution in various ways during the past few years of journey leading up to these past two years of Synodal Assemblies in Rome and for your prayers.

The atmosphere of the recent Synodal Assembly was positive. The issues that emerged from all over the world were heard. Pope Francis was very present. I had the good fortune to greet him on a number of occasions and convey the greetings of the People of the Diocese of Limerick.

There were many moments of prayer – seeking forgiveness for sins and failures of the Church, asking for peace in our troubled world and recalling the Second Vatican Council and the desire for unity among Christians.

After many weeks of working together, we produced the *Final Document* that Pope Francis decided immediately to publish. At other Synods, what normally happens is that the Pope takes the recommendations from the Synod but then writes up his own apostolic exhortation. In explaining why he chose this time to publish the *Final Document* right away, Pope Francis said: 'In the Document there are already very concrete indications that can be a guide for the mission of the Churches, in the different continents, in the different contexts: that is why I am making it available to everyone now, that is why I said it should be published.'

The implementation phase of the Synodal pathway begins now. We are fortunate that in Ireland there is already an Irish Synodal pathway that has done good work. It will now be able to pick up on the work done by the universal synodal pathway and move forward with renewed strength.

At the recent Synod, the contribution and role of women in the Church authority structures and governance was an important theme. In the Final Document we also hear a call for much greater participation by lay people in the overall governance and decision-making of the Church. There's a call for more regular diocesan synods. It is proposed that more women be included in the formation of future priests. There's a clear call for parish and diocesan councils involving laity to be made mandatory. The Final Document also calls for a new study group to examine how liturgical celebrations could offer a better expression of synodality. Greater accountability in the Church is also emphasised.

I should point out that, apart from the Final Document published last week, Pope Francis has established 10 working groups that are working further on issues that have emerged throughout the past three years of listening and consultation throughout the whole Church.

By way of some reporting back on the Synod, like last year, I have put together a short summary which is available for collection on your way out. I encourage you to take and read it. You'll also find excellent short video clips on the iCatholic and synod.ie websites.

In the coming months I'll be getting back again to you regarding the next steps in the Irish Synodal pathway.

Once again, thanks for your prayers. Let's go forward in faith and hope together.

Le gach dea-ghuí,

✠ Brendan Leahy,  
Bishop of Limerick.