



Moving Forward Together on the Synodal Journey

A Pastoral Message from Archbishop Eamon Martin,

Bishop Michael Router and the Synodal Core Group

for the Archdiocese of Armagh

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

Just over a year ago Pope Francis launched the first stage of a worldwide listening process in the Church, known as the Synodal Process. This time of reflection and discussion will lead to Synod gatherings of the Church in Rome in October 2023 and October 2024. Millions of Catholics around the world have already taken part in the consultation including nearly 2000 people from this Archdiocese - a quarter of whom were young people. We would like to thank all those who took part and those who helped to facilitate the Synodal process locally.

On Thursday 27th October a working document for the next stage of the Synodal process was launched. It is entitled "*Enlarge the Space of Your Tent*". It brings together the feedback from all over the world and provides the foundation for further discernment and discussion at five continental assemblies in the new year. The European Assembly will take place in Prague from the 5th - 12th of February. Archbishop Eamon will be joining the delegation from Ireland.

The title of the working document "*Enlarge the Space of your Tent*" is a quotation from the prophet Isaiah, and it uses the image of a tent to describe the Church. The vision is of the Church as an expansive dwelling which can offer shelter for all. A tent is secured by its pegs. In relation to the Church the pegs symbolise the fundamentals of faith which do not change but can be moved and planted in new ground. Hospitality and welcome are essential in enlarging the tent, the outreach, of the Church. Enlarging the tent also means a change of attitudes, being open to including everyone and making more room for diversity.

The working document “*Enlarge the Space of Your Tent*” is available to read on our Armagh Diocesan Website. Our diocesan submission, and the National Synthesis document summarising the response from all over Ireland are also available there. We encourage everyone to read these documents and send your comments to your parish Pastoral Council or to the Diocesan Pastoral Office in Dundalk. The email address, milanda@parishandfamily.ie, can be found on our Diocesan Website.

The Diocesan Synodal Core Group is also organising a gathering of parish delegates, and delegates from religious orders within the diocese, on 1st December, to further discern the contents of the continental working document, “*Enlarge the Space of Your Tent.*” We hope to send feedback to the steering committee which is helping to prepare the Irish delegation for the European Continental Assembly in February.

The freshness and novelty of synodality has been mentioned by many participants who remark that it was the first time that they had been officially asked for their opinion. Theologians, however, have pointed out that the synodal process in the Church is deeply rooted in scripture and tradition. It has simply been renewed and revived for the benefit of the living Church today. As the report says, “*if the Church is not synodal, no one can really feel fully at home*”.

The extensive consultation that has taken place over the past year is just the first step on the synodal path. Hopefully our ongoing reflections and consultation over the coming years, in this diocese and beyond, will help everyone to find a home in the Church community. We therefore encourage you to engage and to help to renew the mission of the Church as we continue to face together the challenges of today and tomorrow.

With blessing to you all,



Archbishop Eamon Martin



Bishop Michael Router

With Members of the Synodal Core Group of the Archdiocese of Armagh

14 November 2022