

Update from Bishop Brendan Leahy and Bishop Alan McGuckian



16th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops



In October 2021, Pope Francis announced a Universal Synod on the theme ‘For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, and Mission.’ Following two years of preparation, listening and dialogue at diocesan, continental and universal level, 365 people gathered in Rome to participate in its first assembly, which took place from 4 - 29 October. Bishop Brendan Leahy and Bishop Alan McGuckian were the two bishop nominees of the Irish Catholic Bishops’ Conference. A brief account of their experience is offered below. Their full report can be found online at www.synod.ie/bishopsreport

Experience: The two bishops said the 16th Synodal Assembly was a positive experience marked by a prayerful and calm atmosphere, even if divergent viewpoints were expressed. Those gathered represented a great variety of cultural backgrounds and convictions. They said, “The presence of 54 women, as full members of the assembly with voting rights, was a significant milestone in the development of the Synod of Bishops. The young people present contributed in a spirit of freedom and with a passion for the Church. What emerged particularly was the realisation that synodality is not just about an ‘event’...but is a ‘process,’ a way of being Church, a style of interacting together in discerning what the Spirit is saying to the Church.” Both bishops agreed that the Synodal Assembly was a deeply intense experience, spiritually, culturally and theologically. They said, “our first word in response is ‘thanks’ – to God for this grace, and to all who contributed so generously over the past two years to the Synodal Pathway in parishes and religious congregations, dioceses, movements and organisations. We offer a special word of thanks to the many people who accompanied the 16th Synodal Assembly with prayer.

Take-Away: The bishops said that the biggest outcome from the Synodal Assembly was probably the emphasis on the ‘Conversations in the Spirit’ (a discernment methodology). They said, “The four weeks were an intense learning with the constant repetition of this method. The desire emerged that this method would now spread throughout the Church. The way the modules or sections of the assembly worked was that we were seated at roundtables with a facilitator for each group. After a period of prayer to begin each session, each person was given four minutes to put forward their perspective on the specific top, without interruptions from others. This was followed by a period of silence and prayer. In a second round, each of us got four minutes to say what had struck us listening to the others, what had resonated positively for us, and what had prompted resistance in us.”

Final Synthesis: A final synthesis report was prepared by the members of the 16th Synodal Assembly and published in English at the beginning of November. It reflects the many, many topics touched upon and provides a rich theological grounding for synodality. There are numerous “nuggets of wisdom, insight and perspectives contained in the text. It would be well worth taking even just a section or chapter of this document and studying it individually or in groups (the full synthesis report can also be found on www.synod.ie)

Questions: The bishops said, “many questions were opened up at the Synod and require further examination. It was said that the experience of the permanent diaconate needs to be evaluated. This would also impact on the question of women and the diaconate. The topic of how jurisdiction and sacrament are linked needs to be explored further. This would impact on the issue of women and decision making/taking in the Church. The topic of how collegiality and synodality relate was keenly felt by some. Is there a danger that the teaching authority of the bishops both individually and as a College could be undermined? The theme of ‘listening’ came up often with the proposal that there be a ministry of listening in the Church, and a range of other controversial questions were named and discussed.”

The full report from the bishops can be found at www.synod.ie/bishopsreport or through the QR-Code on the right.

