

April 8 - 10, 2016

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‘Camino of hope’ for Church in Limerick

Limerick Diocese’s moment in history as it approves wide ranging new steps to reenergise Church locally

THE Church in Limerick will embark on a new era of inclusiveness and unity following a weekend Diocesan Synod described by Bishop Brendan Leahy as a “Camino of hope”.

After three days of deliberations on its future direction locally, the Church will now move forward, revitalised and reunified as it adopts the wide ranging outcomes of the Synod.

The 97 agreed proposals cross six themes that emerged as the biggest issues for the Church during a listening process that connected with over 5,000 people across the diocese. It will ultimately pave the way for significantly increased lay leadership and, within that, greater recognition and involvement of women in key roles.

The proposals at the first Irish synod for 50 years were decided on by 400 delegates, over 300 of them lay. It was also the first Synod in Ireland to have such a large lay representation. The proposals’ adoption and the journey towards the weekend Synod was described by Bishop Leahy as “an event of history in the making”.

But he also called for patience and support of the faithful, with a huge volume of work ahead in terms of implementing the proposals. “The Synod has been a gift to encourage us, offer us spiritual consolation, fresh hope. We know there are difficulties. But I have the sense that God has given an experience of light proportionate to the wounds,” he told delegates.

“We’ve come from the past and take so much of what we have from the past and want to build on it. We have lived a moment of history.

“We’re directed to the future. We’ve placed our flag on the ground and able to say, ‘this is where we’ve reached’

and now we’re moving forward from here.

“It’s been like one enormous ‘Quality Review’. Such quality reviews take place in institutions, schools and businesses. But we’ve engaged in it for a whole diocese. It will remain as a moment for us to return to for clarification and inspiration in order to go forward, remembering that if we don’t go forward, we go backwards.”

Looking ahead, Bishop Leahy explained that the Synod will only be as good as its implementation. “We have travelled an incredible journey, a Camino of hope, as it were. So many people have sacrificed so much for this over the past 18 months and I am truly grateful for that. It has been a massive affirmation from the people that they treasure their faith but they need more from their Church. “We have had our reckoning and now have true, democratic direction from all the faithful in Limerick as to what type of Church they want ahead. There were many seminal moments and much emotion at Synod but we need now to echo and amplify all of that across the diocese with action.

“From here we have to implement these proposal. We will put them into a plan and policy, formulate decrees and send them to Rome for approval. We will then embark on implementation and while this won’t happen overnight, we will have a clear plan to work to.

“We have the World meeting of the Families in Ireland in 2018 and that’s a watermark for us in terms of where we want to be then, with much of the roadmap set out for us at the weekend traveled.

“It won’t be easy, change never is. But we have listened and voted and now move forward together in a way that we have never before and I am deeply, deeply heartened and encouraged by this.”

“““

Now we have true, democratic direction from all the faithful in Limerick as to what type of Church they want ahead.



Everything named as Limerick Diocesan Synod builds for future

AFTER an intensive and soul searching three days, 400 delegates at the Limerick Diocesan Synod decided on 100 proposals that will help form the basis for a more unified, inclusive and accessible Church.

Following an 18 month listening process that engaged the responses of 5,000 people - perhaps the largest poll ever taken by an Irish diocese - delegates at Ireland’s first Synod in half a century have drawn up a road map for the future direction of their Church.

All but three of the proposals across six themes were approved, covering a wide range of topics, from dealing with hurt in the Church to enhancing its faith formation, hospitality and welcome.

The Synod’s inclusiveness was not just in the fact that it was the first Synod in Ireland to have such a large lay representation - over 75% of delegates were laity - but also had more than a dozen representatives of other faiths attend.



In addition to presiding over the proposals for positive change to the Church, a range of ‘Universal Issues’ beyond the jurisdiction of the diocese were also explored.

Facilitator Martin Kennedy said five topics had clearly emerged as key issues. ‘Lifelong Faith Formation’ - initiatives for children, young adults, parents and adults - was one.

“People want to hear the good news of the Gospel at all stages of their lives and want people to be equipped to deliver this,” he said.

“Another key issue is lay leadership and lay ecclesiastical ministries with equal roles for women. Another key issue was support for priests; that there would be team Ministry. “The idea that it won’t be possible for priests to continue for ever as lone-rangers for the parish but would have to work together in cluster formations very much came across also. Another key issue was safeguarding and this is no surprise given its importance.”

Synod votes: faith and justice group to be established for those hurt by Church

BUILDING bridges with those who have been hurt or undervalued by the church was overwhelmingly supported at the Limerick Diocesan Synod.

A proposal included in the theme of 'Community and Sense of Belonging' to establish a faith and justice group to reach out to various groups who have been hurt by the attitudes and teachings of the Church was supported by over 90% of delegates.

Those groups include women who have had abortions, members of the LGBT community, and people who have spent time in church institutions.

Some 52% of the delegates "strongly supported with priority" the proposal, with a further 38% also voted in support of the motion.

Synod Director Eamonn Fitzgibbon said he was not surprised by the result and said reaching out to those who have been hurt by the church is a "reality that must be addressed".

"We are all too well aware of people who have been hurt by church in the past. Even most recently with the Marriage Equality Referendum, a lot of people voiced hurt and concern, for example, with how the LGBT community might have felt alienated.

"We are too well aware of the scandals and what has gone on in the church in past.

"We have heard women expressing their particular pain and hurt as well, so I wasn't a bit surprised that that received such an overwhelming strong vote as a priority issue among delegates."

Delegate, Sr. Eileen Lenihan (pictured), called for the Catholic Church to apologise to women and to acknowledge the contribution they make. Sr. Eileen said the apology should come from Pope Francis.

"I believe that we need to move forward. After all this time there are still so many women who are feeling hurt or ignored or that their contribution is not recognised or that their gifts are not utilised.

"I think that has gone on for too long and we need to set a new starting block and that could be brought about by an apology, so that women could say we are into a new phase, we can move forward and we can make a contribution that is fitting and equal."

Sr. Eileen who has been a member of the St. Joseph of the Sacred Heart order for 53 years has no objection to women priests.

"I do not wish to be a priest myself but I am aware that there are many who would want to make a contribution in that way.

"I have no objection to women priests, I think it depends very much



on the willingness and the capacity of the person to serve in the community; that's the important thing, being male or female is not nearly as significant.

"Women are doing enormous roles but it is largely the domestic service role. They also have leadership gifts that they can bring to the society of ours. I think if god made us equal then it is time that we actually behaved in that way," she added.

Bishop Brendan Leahy also welcomed the fact that delegates had voted overwhelmingly in favour of reaching out to those who have been hurt by the church.

"We have to, as much as we can, make those who have been hurt hear that we really want to reach out to them.

"I accept that not everybody will want to hear it or feel they can hear it because they have been so badly hurt and I obviously repeat any apologies I can, but I also want to say there are 400 delegates here who say this is a priority for us. It's not just me saying it it's the parishes across our diocese."

Bishop Leahy also praised the role of women in the church. "We all know women are the back bone of the parishes. It's women that are primarily the ones who promote and bring the parishes forward.

"We haven't always recognised that and we haven't heard their voice efficiently and I would certainly agree and apologise to all women who feel that their voice hasn't been heard and lets now make sure that happens."

Strengthening 'Community and Sense of Belonging' critical for the Church

EVERYTHING from engaging with the power of social media and modern technology to offering a simple cup of tea after mass can be used to help strengthen 'Community and Sense of Belonging' in the church.

The first theme of the gathering, 'Community and Sense of Belonging' was also the most engaged theme during the build up to Synod after it was convoked in autumn 2014.

In all, 17 proposals were grouped under this theme, from issues as diverse as 'Our Community's Role in Caring for our Environment' to 'Hospitality After Mass'.

Almost 90% voted in favour of the former, with just short of 95% of delegates supporting calls for a 'cup of tea' after Mass - and not just on special occasions. A proposal to host annual Community Café conversations where open community based dialogue about the importance of having difficult conversations is promoted, also received overwhelming support at the Synod.

The proposal would see café conversations set up at parish level supported by staff from the Milford Care Centre's Compassionate Communities Project which seeks to encourage people to think about ill-

ness and death support those living with illness or recently bereaved.

Encouraging every parish to have a Facebook page in order to reach out to young people also received



huge support from delegates.

It was agreed that social media is an effective means to reach out to young people in a medium they already relate to, and it was proposed that the Dioce-

san office take a central role in training and helping young people and parishes to develop skills in this area.

"Engaging with young people through technology

has been listed as a significant priority.

"We have to create have to create a church that engages with young people Technology and social media will be very much part and parcel of that"

said Bishop Leahy.

Speaking about the role of the lay people in the process of the Synod, facilitator Rose O'Connor said the involvement was hugely significant.

"It's historical because no other Synod in the past had lay involvement. The whole process has been so ground up and we spoke to a wide variety of people, not just people who to go mass, to find out what are the issues and what are the concerns."

"There were 17 proposals around the theme of 'Community and Sense of Belonging' and all of these are around building community and looking at the wider sense of community and not just the church and the mass.

"They were also looking at how we support people and the challenges they are dealing with like looking after their family children, elderly parents and neighbours. How do we support and encourage that and get behind people and build communities?"

According to Ms O'Connor, who was representing Our Lady Help of Christians Parish in Milford, there was a good cohort of young people who engaged in the listening process and the biggest category of people who responded were in the 12-18 year old group.

Theme 1 - Community and Sense of Belonging - results of 17 proposals

Community and Sense of Belonging was the most popular theme across the listening process. It was mentioned across parishes and among groups such as the Polish community, the traveller community, people with disabilities, third level students and the Fair Trade Group.

For the majority of us, the quality of our relationships with other people remains the most important area of experience and the yardstick by which we measure happiness and contentment.

Therefore, experiencing good quality relationships makes sense emotionally, psychologically and socially. For us in the Christian Community, the quality of our relationships makes deep theological sense, and it is into the milieu of relationships that the theme of Community and Sense of Belonging will take shape and become expressed.

1. Engage with marginalised: as a missionary Church/Bedford Row Family Project
42.9% strongly support with priority
51.2% support proposal
5.9% reject proposal

54.1% strongly support with priority
37.4% support proposal
8.5% reject proposal

42.9% strongly support with priority
44.3% support proposal
12.8% reject proposal

2. That the city delegates and parishes are encouraged to engage with and support the City Centre Community Network
14.8% strongly support with priority
69.7% support proposal
15.4% reject proposal

8. Host annual Compassionate Communities – Café Conversations
27.1% strongly support with priority
59% support proposal
13.9% reject proposal

15. Lay parish visitation team to visit homes, hospital and nursing home
46.5% strongly support with priority
43.9% support proposal
9.6% reject proposal

3. Regeneration parishes - Caring for and inclusion of the Marginalised
31.3% strongly support with priority
58.4% support proposal
10.3% reject proposal

9. Explore how to enhance communities' role in caring for our environment
45.7% strongly support with priority
43.1% support proposal
11.2% reject proposal

16. There should be a Parish Register in each parish
17.5% strongly support with priority
38.3% support proposal
44.3% reject proposal

4. In the area of mental health and wholeness engage with the marginalised members of our community – homeless, prisoners, travellers etc., and be a missionary church'
44.4% strongly support with priority
48.2% support proposal
7.4% reject proposal

10. Learning disabilities to be included in the Diocesan plan
42.6% strongly support with priority
50.6% support proposal
6.8% reject proposal

17. Have hospitality after Mass
63.2% strongly support with priority
31.5% support proposal
5.3% reject proposal

5. Reaching out to those hurt by church
52.5% strongly support with priority
38.7% support proposal
8.8% reject proposal

11. Enhance Intra-Faith and Inter-Faith Dialogue
44.2% strongly support with priority
48.7% support proposal
7.1% reject proposal

6. That church buildings be multifunctional centred around a permanent sacred place
29% strongly support with priority
34% support proposal
37% reject proposal

12. Introduce an updated version of the Station
25.1% strongly support with priority
49.1% support proposal
25.7% reject proposal

7. Using social media especially with young people – e.g. Facebook page

13. Establish a Welcoming Group for parish newcomers
57.1% strongly support with priority
36.3% support proposal
6.5% reject proposal

14. That a network of Small Christian Community groups be established throughout the Diocese.

Synod Stats

Theme 1

Community and Sense of Belonging

4243 mentions

Topics identified

- * Inclusivity and sense of belonging
- * Building community
- * Social gatherings
- * Cultivate a caring ethos
- * Encourage volunteerism

Tea please!

The electronic voting system used at the Synod was so hot that it could even tell us how we like our tea!

With 100 proposals to be voted over the coming three days, Synod facilitator Martin Kennedy felt it best to the electronic devices before getting down to the business of the Synod.

And he chose a topic close to all our hearts to do this by getting the delegates to vote on how they like their tea.

Three options were being given with each of the official proposals – 'Yes I agree with this Proposal and Consider it a Priority'; 'Yes I Support this proposal' and 'No, I don't Support this Proposal'.

And for the tea vote, three were also given - do you like your tea poured first, your milk

poured first or your tea with no milk at all.

The gasps were great as the result instantaneously landed – nanoseconds after the buttons were pressed – and were perhaps as much about the lightening speed of the delivery of the outcome as they were in response to the outcome itself.

So here it is, the results of the first vote of the day - a poll on our tea drinking habits: 62.0% of people like to pour the tea first.

Some 17.2% like to start the tea-ritual by pouring their milk first but a very strong cohort – 19.9% - of the 400 delegates canvassed revealed that they don't use milk in their tea at all!

One delegate joked, "It's all about the cuppa! But it was funny that there was nearly more of a run on coffee at the breaks."



Martin Kennedy - Synod facilitator

Wellbeing of community depends on the wellbeing of 'the family'

'FAMILY' was the highest ranking individual topic during diocesan-wide engagement in preparation for last weekend's Synod in Limerick, the 'Pastoral Care of the Family' theme heard.

The topic of family came up across parishes and all other groups during the listening and discernment process that engaged with over 5,000 people over the past year.

The importance of family was particularly evident in primary, secondary and third level groups.

Topics that clearly emerged during the listening process, the Synod heard, were the role that parents and guardians have in passing on faith; caring for children; caring for elderly or sick; family relationships; issues around alienation from the Church for people who are separated and/or divorced; gay marriage and equality for gay people.

Opening the session, Phil Mortell urged delegates to consider that the well-being of the community depends on the wellbeing of the family.

"We need reminding that we are all members of God's family and 'members' is not confined to the great and good of Limerick city and county."

The Pastoral Care of the Family theme and its proposals looked at family as being the basic building block of society, he said.

"We make the proposals on this theme not to simply boost numbers at mass, but because we are Christians and we need to support our community and their families.

"Parents have a difficult task in passing on our faith to the children and they need support for that."

During the voting process, there was overwhelming support to establish a parenting support network to support parents (and their relationships) from the birth of their babies onwards.

Over 44 per cent of delegates said that they strongly supported this move, marking it as a top priority.

Another priority – this time supported by 79 per cent of the 400 delegates – was that a support programme should be developed for parents to provide family catechesis and facilitate them



with passing on their faith to their children.

The Synod gathering was asked to consider the social aspect to the church and what needs to be done to address inclusion for all. One such proposal saw 96 per cent of delegates agreeing that the Church needs to support those living with disability.

Widespread support (87.5%) was also given to the establishment of 'good neighbour panels', which would provide support for the sick and those living with life limiting illness.

Areas of Limerick city and county already run the Good Neighbour's initiative but it is hoped that the project will be extended.

'Time to support families' – Bishop Leahy

IT IS time to support families and that is a hugely important from the Synod, Bishop Brendan Leahy has told delegates from the 60 parishes in Limerick.

Supporting families, he stated, is a message echoed by Pope Francis in his "Amoris Laetitia," (The Joy of Love) message that was released on Friday last.

The document, formally known as an Apostolic Exhortation, followed two gatherings of Catholic bishops, or synods, that discussed family issued in 2014 and 2015.

With 10 proposals under the Pastoral Care of the Family to consider, Bishop Leahy remarked that "the Pope pays attention, in his latest paper, to what we live in the life of a family.

"Ministers need to be close to people no matter what their situation is and our arms must be open, and especially to anyone who is hurting.



"No family drops down from heaven perfectly formed, but we need the ability to mature and grow through experience."

The thrust of the proposals under the theme 'Pastoral care of the family' was to identify, as a priority, church support for family life through concrete local outreaches of pastoral care; supports for parents handing on the faith, and the developments of networks and capacity at Diocesan level.

"Let us make this journey as families and let us keep walking together and to never lose heart," Bishop Leahy urged, adding that "it is a time to support families and that is hugely important as a message from the pope echoes that". During the discussions, delegates were asked

to consider establishing a network of confident parents who can support each other in their everyday trials and joys and to provide an outreach and active help.

Bishop Leahy said that the theme of family and the Church was especially important at this Synod.

"The world gathering of families will be held in Ireland in 2018 and it is a catalyst for us to systematically explore and work on this ideal - the Popes latest message works and echoes that".

Synod facilitator, Jessie Rogers, asked and encouraged delegates "to bring to mind the families that we know when reflecting on the proposals as this will be the best way to allow the Holy Spirit into our hearts and guide us in our ways".

Synod Stats

Theme 2
Pastoral Care of the family

2497 mentions

Topics identified

- * Role of parents in passing on faith
- * Caring for children, elderly and sick
- * **Family relationships**
- * *Alienation from the church*
- * **Gay marriage and equality**

“ ”

No family drops down from heaven perfectly formed.

Pope Francis

Theme 2 - Pastoral Care of the family - 10 proposals and the voting results

'Family' was the single highest ranking individual topic in the listening and discernment process particularly in the relation to where people experience love, truth, goodness, hope and joy in their lives. The topic of Family came up across parishes and all other groups. The importance of family was particularly evident in primary, secondary and third level groups.

That the family is the basic building block or unit of society was signalled to the Jewish people by the fifth commandment; Honour they mother and they father (Exodus 20:12). Our ancestors in faith recognised that the stability of the community depended on the stability of the families that compromise it. Our response to authority and government derives from the quality of the parent-child relationship. The lessons and principles learned from honouring and respecting parents make possible a society stable enough to promote and development of the whole person.

18. Establish a parenting support network to support parents (and their relationships) from the birth of their babies onwards

44.6% strongly support with priority

44.6% support proposal

10.8% reject proposal

19. Support to those living with disability

38.8% strongly support with priority

57.4% support proposal

3.8% reject proposal

20. Create volunteer led community bereavement support

52.5% strongly support with priority

42% support proposal

5.5% reject proposal

21. Develop a support programme for parents to provide family catechesis and facilitate them in passing on the faith to their children

79.7% strongly support with priority

15.9% support proposal

4.4% reject proposal

22. Continue tradition of inviting all children baptised during the year to a special Mass where they receive an individual blessing

39.2% strongly support with priority

49.6% support proposal

11.2% reject proposal

23. To foster the Family Mass

52.2% strongly support with priority

38.9% support proposal

8.9% reject proposal

24. The Diocese, as part of its pastoral care of families programme, provide support to the Children's Grief Project in its work for children/young people affected by loss through death, separation or divorce

57.1% strongly support with priority

36.9% support proposal

6% reject proposal

25. To develop 'Good Neighbour Panels' for families dealing with illness and bereavement

35.1% strongly support with priority

52.4% support proposal

12.5% reject proposal

26. Establish Family Life Centres to support community workers

22.2% strongly support with priority

39.3% support proposal

38.5% reject proposal

27. Appointment of Diocesan Promoter of Pastoral Care to the Family with an empowered and effective dedicated team for Pastoral Care of the Family

44% strongly support with priority

25.6% support proposal

30.4% reject proposal

Young mothers should deepen involvement in Church

A YOUNG mother, whose Synod journey mirrored that of the event itself, has urged other busy mums not to postpone their involvement in Church life until their children are reared.

And she said that focussing on one leadership role for women, such as women priests, risks diminishing the wider and important roles women already play.

Adare delegate Céire Flynn, whose fifth child Dominic was born during the 18month lead up to the Limerick Diocesan Synod, said people can become involved in the Church no matter what stage of life they are at.

Echoing the words of Pope Francis, who has stated how the Church needs the "feminine genius", Céire believes women can imagine even wider roles for themselves in the Church than they are already involved in.

"One of things that we have got from the Synod is that we really have to think differently and use our imaginations. We as women are amazing. Pope Francis spoke about the feminine genius. We are geniuses and we have our own way of doing things," said the 40-year-old mother.

"We don't need to go down someone else's path. We can imagine a new way for us that involves the church and involves a new way of bringing people to Jesus. That's what we need to work on. Just use our imaginations."

Speaking on the final day of the three day gathering, Synod Director Eamonn Fitzgibbon said baby Céire's one year-old son Dominic "physically embodied" the sense of journey all those involved in the Synod had experienced.

"When we see it in terms of the life of a child and the way a child has grown we see how we have all journeyed together in this Synod," said Fr Fitzgibbon. Céire, who was just five weeks pregnant with

Dominic when she signed up for the Synod, managed her responsibilities as delegate for the Adare parish with her busy role as mum to her four other children, Oliver (9), Louis (7), Iosaf (5) and Maria (3).

Among the things she feels strongly about is that mothers shouldn't feel they have to wait until their children are reared before they can do something for the Church.



"At one of the meetings somebody said that a woman had come up to a priest and said 'now that my family are reared I can do something for the Church'. That's one of the things that I feel so strongly about; that we don't have to wait. Wherever we are in life we can do something for the Church, we can do something have Jesus as a part of our everyday lives.

"And that's one thing that's so important for this Synod. We don't want Jesus just to be somewhere, where people go to on a Sunday. We want to bring him out into everybody's lives. And that's why that quote kind of struck me. It was like that woman was postponing what she wanted to do until she

thought she would have time for it."

Céire believes strongly that mothers should not be afraid to involve young children in church life as they are "the future of the church".

"Our family has experienced so much positivity from people. I think sometimes you feel the children just have to sit down quietly and not say a word, but short of running around the church screaming their heads off, people like hearing children. They like hearing babies making little gurgling noises, or children asking questions and they see a future for the Church there as well."

Céire, described her husband Liam, an equestrian vet in Adare, as a "fantastic support" during her two year involvement with the Synod.

"My husband was wonderful. And even though I knew that the Synod was going to be in April 2016 and this is a busy time of year for him, he said 'you have to do this'. Once I had his backing I knew I could do it because he has been a fantastic help to me."

Equality for women was one of the dominant themes during the Synod. However, Céire has warned that by focusing on just one leadership role for women in the Church, such as women priests, there is a risk of diminishing the important roles that women already play.

"If we focus too much on one leadership role we risk downgrading women like me who aren't in leadership roles and making our role seem less important than it is.

"I think women have so many roles in the Church and if you go down through history there have been amazing women who have not allowed themselves to be stifled by what the convention was at the time, people like mother Teresa and Mother Angelica who founded her own TV network."



Church needs creative actions to connect with young people



THE Church needs to do more than lament young people's disconnect with it but must, instead, engage in purposeful action to address this, one of the diocese's leaders in youth ministry stated. Introducing one of the six themes, 'Young People', at the Limerick Diocesan Synod, Fr. Chris O'Donnell said that "bringing young people to Christ won't happen by accident".

"It requires intentional and purposeful actions on our part. It is easy to lament the lack of young people in Church; that takes no energy. We need to do more than lament it, we need to play our part in bringing our young people to Christ, to faith, to live, to love and laughter," he said.

"The proposals set out at the Synod would ensure young people feel connected, involved and active in a multi-generational church and a church that won't wait for young people to come in but goes out to them and engages with them.

"What's important about the proposals is that we are reminded that underneath all of them is a care and concern for young people."

Fr. O'Donnell added that in as much as the Church fails to actively and wholeheartedly welcome, embrace, empower, include and celebrate young people, it fails to be the complete body of Christ.

"We need to move from solely lamenting and just asking questions of others such as 'what we are going to do about young people' to turning our concern into concrete and creative actions."

Those concrete and creative actions will now be undertaken through a range of proposals adopted at the Synod that tackle issues affecting young people.

These issues include disenfranchisement, the use of accessible language in liturgy, competing interests with mass times (e.g. sports activities), the need for youth clubs and youth friendly Masses.

Softening and making liturgy more accessible was one of the key objectives for young people.

Said Michael O'Brien (20), from Clarina, a Synod delegate with the Lourdes Pilgrimage Group, "We need to take the formality out of it (Mass). As a youth group we go away on trips from time to time and our Mass on those trips is very respectful but much more informal.

"It's like the priest just coming into our room and we just relax into the Mass. We've even stayed seated on the couch.

"You are much more comfortable in that situation. I have no problem going to the regular mass once it's engaging and I can relate to it but the Church needs to work at making it more accessible."

The Synod, he said, had given renewed confidence that the Church in Limerick really cares about young people. "The idea of a Synod and having young people as a theme straight away is alerting you that they actually care.

"We have two incredible youth officers in Fr. Chris O'Donnell and Aoife Walsh but we need more of them but the Synod and the proposals that have been voted for with respect to young people really is a step in the right direction."

Speaking on the Young People theme, Bishop Leahy said, "If we don't bring young people to Christ who will.

"I have a little fear some times and it is the age profile of our diocese. No doubt as the age profile increases, though wisdom comes with that, there is very much a risk that we will adapt our activities and structures to suit more elderly needs.

"We will do so to the detriment of the creativity and energy of young people. It is not one or the other. We have to adapt for elderly needs but not just for elderly needs. We need to work to make sure young people are connected, involved in a multi-generational church."

Mental health the biggest issue for young people engaged in Synod

THE Catholic Church must have the courage to support young people with mental health concerns – one of the biggest issues for the thousands that took part in the year-long listening process ahead of the Synod.

THE Church held gatherings with young people as part of the consultation process prior to the Synod, one of which attracted 140 young people, and one of the issues that emerged time and time again was their concerns about mental health issues.

"Young people were naming mental health as the biggest issue among young people. This includes depression and concern around suicide rates," explained Synod director Fr. Eamonn Fitzgibbon, who has previously worked in youth ministry.

Fr Fitzgibbon said that the very fact that young people now thankfully have permission to "name it" is one of the key reasons why mental health has become such a public and prevalent issue today.

"Maybe ten or fifteen years ago young people didn't feel comfortable or confident to name it as an issue then but now young people feel they have got that permission, maybe through media, to allow themselves to speak about this as an issue in their lives.

"And now that they have the courage to name it we as a Church must have the courage to respond so I think that's a big chal-

lenge for us here in the Synod, to respond to that as a clear call from our young people."

Two specific mental health related motions were on the agenda, both seeking to deepen the Church's involvement in supporting those affected and both passed unanimously.

Bishop Brendan Leahy said he was committed to offering the Church's support to young people dealing with mental health issues.

"I certainly commit myself to doing that but I also have to recognise that we are not the professionals in the field; the expertise that is there needs to be supported and we can do that through our community."

Lidia Zeglinska, a delegate from the St. Michael's Polish Community, said that there was not just a need to promote mental health among young people but also sexuality.

"We are rightly concerned about mental health but I would also like the proposal here on mental health to also take in morality. This includes the sexual theme so that we are supporting young girls and young men so that they respect themselves and respect their sexual identity," she said.



Theme 3 - Young People - 19 proposals and the voting results of Synod 2016

The engagement and empowerment of young people was of concern across all groups in the listening process where a number of topics were identified and in a culture that tends to ignore and devalue children, Jesus affirmed and welcomed them. He went out of his way to heal children and evaluated the importance of them by encouraging people to be more like them.

Pope Francis continues to emphasis the importance of our young.

By implementing the proposals accepted in the Synod, we hope to ensure that young people feel connected, involved and active in multigenerational church, whereby grandparents, parents and children minister to each other. We hope to find better ways to communicate the message of the Gospel to young people in a meaningful and relevant way that allows them to see God in their daily lives. Technology will be very much part and parcel of their connection with the church and we hope to create better ways that they can be involved. This involvement will enable young people to grow more confident in themselves and in their faith

28: To introduce interactive homilies and intergenerational faith sharing.

17% strongly support with priority
46.9% support proposal
36% reject proposal

29: The formation of Junior Pastoral Councils

41.4% strongly support with priority
39.3% support proposal
19.3% reject proposal

30: To use music as a means of engaging young people in their local church and liturgy

66.2% strongly support with priority
30.5% support proposal
3.4% reject proposal

31: To develop ties between Church and local youth groups e.g. sport/culture

38.7% strongly support with priority
49.2% support proposal
12.1% reject proposal

32: To develop a programme of pilgrimages, local, national and international

58.3% strongly support with priority
38% support proposal
3.7% reject proposal

33: To set up a Youth Cafe

29% strongly support with priority
44.1% support proposal
26.9% reject proposal

34: To provide more retreat possibilities for young people in primary and secondary schools, college and young adults.

60.8% strongly support with priority
34.3% support proposal
4.9% reject proposal

35: To create links to other faith groups (e.g. Focolare and Youth 2000)

30.7% strongly support with priority



A cardboard cut out of Pope Francis proved popular

58.1% support proposal
11.2% reject proposal

36: To introduce the Pope John Paul II Awards to the Diocese

49.8% strongly support with priority
41% support proposal
9.2% reject proposal

37: Raise awareness of the mental health issues affecting young people

58.9% strongly support with priority
34.2% support proposal
6.9% reject proposal

38: Programme of on-going faith formation for altar servers

45% strongly support with priority
40.7% support proposal
14.3% reject proposal

39: Encourage and support Youth Leadership by means of a Youth Forum

38.2% strongly support with priority
48.3% support proposal
13.5% reject proposal

40: Expand on existing Diocesan Youth Ministry events and activities

59.3% strongly support with priority
35.9% support proposal
4.9% reject proposal

41: To introduce Pastoral Area Youth Ministry Workers to each Pastoral Area

43.8% strongly support with priority
43.2% support proposal
13.1% reject proposal

42: To form committee / working group to evaluate existing catechesis and religious education of young people and look at ways of introducing a Parish / Pastoral Area based evangelisation of youth.

51.5% strongly support with priority
35.7% support proposal
12.8% reject proposal

43: To create a Diocesan Residential Retreat Centre

24.4% strongly support with priority
24.7% support proposal
50.9% reject proposal

44: To develop a youth ministry training programme

67.4% strongly support with priority
30.2% support proposal
2.5% reject proposal

45: Child safeguarding

78.6% strongly support with priority
17.1% support proposal
4.3% reject proposal

46: To more fully embrace the world of Media and Technology

65.5% strongly support with priority
29.6% support proposal
4.9% reject proposal

Synod Stats

Theme 3
Young people

922 mentions

Topics identified

* Disenfranchisement of young

* The use of accessible language for young

* Competing interests for young and clash of mass times

* Develop youth ministry

* Involvement in parish life

* Youth friendly masses

* Faith development

* Connecting with church

* Youth cafe

What the Synod Delegates said

Fr Derek Leonard – Parish Priest of St Nicholas's Parish, Westbury

Q: What was your biggest impression of the Synod

A: My biggest impression is that it is something hopeful. I'm happy that it's planning to create and build a better Church here in Limerick.

Q: Are you more hopeful for the Church in Limerick following the Synod and if so/not why

A: I definitely am, as one of the youngest priests. Having this involvement and so many lay people involved does give me hope. It gives me hope to see the amount of people willing to invest in Limerick and the amount of talent and energy that's there as well.

Q: If you had a wish for 10 years from now for the Church, what would that be

A: My wish is that in parishes people would be working as teams, that the priest would be just one other member of the team running a parish.

Q: What proposal were you most exercised about

A: I suppose the last one yesterday [Saturday] about more involvement of women. And there are a few we are discussing today [Sunday] that would be great as well, such as married priests and women priests.



The Synod 2016 journey reaches every corner of Limerick

THE Limerick Diocesan Synod at the weekend was the culmination of a journey that has amounted to perhaps one of the biggest listening and discovery exercises ever taken on by a diocese in Ireland. It all started as far back as September 2014 when Bishop Brendan Leahy announced the Synod, for a weekend 'in early 2016'. This announcement came with a pledge to embark on an unprecedented process of discernment and listening to build up to the Synod.

But the lengths the diocese would go to in order to hear what was exercising and exciting the faithful could hardly have been envisaged.

The first gathering was within a month of the Synod being convoked in Bishop Leahy's pastoral letter and was appropriately at Mary Immaculate College, where it culminated at the weekend just gone when over 400 delegates, over 300 of them lay, gathered to decide on 100 proposals.

Since then, the people-led process, from grass roots up, reached 5,000 people across questionnaires, a further 1,500 in meetings, brought together over 400 delegates that attended some, if not all, of 23 different events, from official 'Synod delegate' meetings to other gatherings and events.

At that first gathering, Bishop Leahy predicted that the Synod would have some mighty challenges ahead of it and this included naming many wounds inflicted by the Church. Prophetically, he stated, "We can say that it (Synod) will pose a series of questions that will shape not only the ministry of the diocese, but the life and witness of its people."

An astute appointment of Fr Eamonn Fitzgibbon as Synod Director, with Karen Kiely as his more than able administrator, and the organisation of this mammoth process and event started to take

shape.

What has unfolded has been a remarkable process that has been lay-led, from every corner of every parish and all demographics, from those of strong faith to little faith and from the young to the old, having their say.

The Listening process across the diocese began in earnest in the spring of last year, with delegates going out into the parishes and engaging in a variety of methods of listening in their own communities.

The 5,000 questionnaires reached parishes, schools, hospitals, universities and many other groups. There were also focus groups, informal listening and various other means used to gather the views of people throughout the diocese.

The questionnaire amounted to perhaps the largest poll of the faithful in relation to issues facing the Church in Ireland in the modern era. There were also meetings attended by over 1,500 individual people.

All 60 parishes engaged in the process, as well as 25 other groups, including primary, secondary and third level education, healthcare workers, members of the travelling community, the migrant community and people with disabilities. All socio demographics and ethnicities across the Diocese, essentially, were connected with.

The vast bulk of the heavy lifting took place last year, reaching a high point in October when a short-list of 12 themes compiled over the 'Listening Process' were whittled down to the six that delegates



voted on at the weekend.

The process didn't just concentrate on strict Church topics but branched into other areas of society, to look at what other good practice and example could be picked up along the way.

For example, in October there was a conference with world renowned architect Niall McLaughlin to talk about his work in designing suitable spaces for social regeneration and religious worship. Similarly 'Limerick: What is our Mission?' was a seminar with key city and county stakeholders to understand the Limerick that is now emerging so that the Synod could work in that context.

There was also 'Limerick and its People' – a truly excellent series of presentations to Synod delegates and friends by national and international experts on social change and impacts.

Three further night sessions for all parish and group delegates in November under the People of Limerick theme gave further detail on the demographic make-up of the relevant parishes and outlining relevant diocesan statistics. Two other nights focused on the People of God dimension and on The Meaning of our Baptism and The Church as People of God.

The tempo was maintained this year with a call made to the wider public in January for ideas of action proposals to create a 'second round' of listening. Three separate gatherings were also held to widen the experience – a Synod Sports Conference with Tyrone manager Mickey Harte and physical therapist Gerard Hartmann; a Culture Event in Templeglantine and a Young People's Event. There were other delegate meetings, leading up to a gathering in the weeks prior to the Synod itself at which the proposals were finalised and the ground laid for the remarkable three days just gone.



Church needs to plan for liturgy without priests

The Church must prepare the ground for its prayer life not being totally dependent on and led by priests, the presenter of the Liturgy and Life theme stated.



Fr. Eugene Duffy, a lecturer in theology and religious studies at Mary Immaculate College, recommended that occasional lay-led liturgies without priests should be introduced on weekdays as a way of preparing for the reality of priests not being available to every parish in the years ahead.

“If we can get used to having lay-led liturgy on week days first then people will begin to appreciate it, understand it, grow in their own acceptance of it and see the value of it,” he said. “In the absence of a priest that’s what they will have to do

on a Sunday. We have to start by doing it on a week day and then people become familiar with it. The foundational thing that people have to do is to gather on a Sunday to worship, however we do it.

“We are by tradition familiar with having a mass available for us when we gather on a Sunday. But probably the greatest part of the Catholic world, for example across Africa, does not have a mass on a Sunday. That’s a reality.”

Fr. Duffy also said that the Catholic Church can learn from

the Church of Ireland in this regard. “The Church of Ireland has readers who look after the liturgy on a Sunday if an ordained Minister cannot be present. We are going to have to get used to this situation and have no option to prepare for it. Otherwise there is going to be a trauma some Sunday.

“It will require a level of expertise, preparation or formation for lay people to lead this but this expertise more than likely exists in every parish today. Perhaps it is someone who has done theology for their degree or even a very good primary teacher would be well capable.

Fr. Duffy said that there needs to be new thinking around how to celebrate the liturgy. “We need to celebrate the liturgy in a much more vibrant and enthusiastic fashion. For example, we need to create space for children where there is age appropriate readings and prayers and engagement, where they can feel they have a contribution to make

“Another thing that comes up there is a more creative and imaginative approach as to how we celebrate the liturgies. We should perhaps consider the use of power point and video clips.

“When I am working here with students and I put up a two minute Youtube clip, students are glued to it. But if I said the same thing myself to them, they would be looking out the window. So I would suggest embrace new technology for sure.”

With regard to the drop in vocations and lack of priests, Fr. Duffy said, “We have to face up to it. We have to be a lot more creative, imaginative while still being more prayerful.

“As one young person said here, the changes don’t necessarily have to be huge, they need to be incremental.

“There needs to be a lot more education for all those going to be involved in liturgy, liturgy groups, leaders of liturgy and so on.

“People do need help, input and support if they are going to do this and with the clustering of parishes that’s becoming a lot more realisable.

“Individual parishes can’t do it on their own but in groups of four or five parishes, it is much more manageable.

“We can exchange gifts between parishes - borrow the choir, train cantors, train choirs together.”

More ‘people friendly’ Church needs to emerge

CREATING a more accessible Church across prayer life and environment was unanimously supported as delegates took on the Liturgy and Life theme with gusto at Synod.

The need for meaningful, joyful liturgy was of concern across all groups in the listening process - with music in liturgy ranking as the highest individual topic, particularly among young people - and was very much again the case at the weekend gathering.

The Church environment itself was an important topic, particularly for people with disabilities and the traveller community.

These and other matters were reflected across all 18 motions that were tabled and carried in the theme.

The importance of good homilies, creativity in planning liturgies and rituals to

mark key moments in people’s lives were all issues that featured prominently.

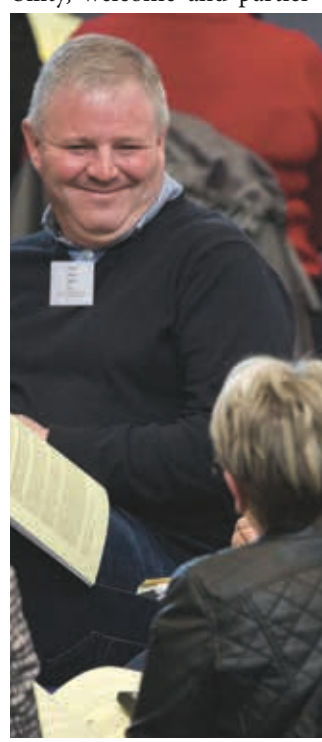
In keeping with the listening process, the motion in the Liturgy and Life theme with the largest vote of approval (97.4%) was for developing congregational singing, with a recommendation that a parish council would nominate a person who would take this musical ministry on board and see it through each Sunday.

It was also suggested that this would be done by developing a common hymnal for all parishes in the diocese.

Another popular motion was to develop and support lay leadership in liturgies and the celebration of sacraments, with 94.3% in total favouring this either as a priority action or generally.

Addressing the delegates at the outset of the theme, Bishop Leahy said that here

were very positive proposals aimed at improving accessibility, welcome and partici-



pation in liturgy. And in a light moment with

regard to use of Church space, he recalled asking as a child in the ‘60s why



his family always sat in the bench at the back of the

Church at his parents’ parish in Kerry. The answer was simple, he quipped, ‘because your grandfather always sat here and contributed to paying for it!’

In the open-forum section as delegates articulated their support or concern for proposals, there was much comment about adopting technology to enhance the Church experience, with one delegate going as far as to suggest big screens be installed to carry words of hymns and the liturgy.

There were also much support for creating a child friendly space in churches and also to facilitate ‘play and pray’ during Masses.

Much support also was given to developing a common Coeliac Policy throughout the diocese, with delegate Cathy O’Riordan recommending that gluten free hosts be made available.

Speaking on the proposal to create quiet time during Mass to allow for personal reflections on the Word of God, delegate Miriam O’Kelly said that we have lost the idea of silence in Mass.

“Years ago when I was very young and mass was in Latin we had lots of time for reflection as we didn’t know what was going on,” she quipped. An earlier motion on reintroducing the old Celtic tradition of ‘the blessing’ also got strong support.

Said Áineid Ní Mhuirthile, “Irish language is so important and was the long time the vessel through which faith was held and handed down. The Irish language is long the beannachtaí, the blessing. We need that sense of blessing again - the Dia dhuit, Di is Muire dhuit, Dia leat, Dial inn.”

The motion was passed with a 92.7% majority.

Theme 4 - Liturgy and Life - 20 proposals and the voting results of Synod

The need for meaningful, joyful liturgy was of concern across all groups in the listening process.

Music in liturgy was the highest ranking topic, this was particularly evident in young people.

Language in liturgy was named as a concern by the Irish community. The Church environment itself was an important topic particularly for people with disabilities and the Traveller community.

The earliest Christians were always insistent that their community assemble for prayer, especially on Sunday, even if there was no priest to lead them. The assembly of the community had a value in itself as it reminded those who gathered of their common identity, it renewed the bonds of friendship and when they listened to the scriptures being read and prayed together they were strengthened for service and mission for the rest of the week. The gathering of the Christian Community in friendship and for prayer remains foundational in all our liturgical actions. The Synod has allowed an opportunity to explore and advance the development of liturgical ministries in the Diocese.

47: Have liturgies outside the church building
 40.5% strongly support with priority
 52.4% support proposal
 7.1% reject proposal

48: Reintroduce the practice of blessing into our lives
 45% strongly support with priority
 46.7% support proposal
 8.3% reject proposal

49: Develop & Support Congregational Singing
 70% strongly support with priority
 27.5% support proposal
 2.6% reject proposal

50: Reflection times during Mass
 41.9% strongly support with priority
 46.8% support proposal
 11.3% reject proposal

51: Emphasis on preparation for Baptism & its celebration during Sunday Mass
 28.7% strongly support with priority
 44.6% support proposal
 26.7% reject proposal

52: Coeliac Policy - Common policies throughout the diocese, especially regarding those in Eucharistic Ministry, with a view to making the church a more welcoming place for all.
 28.5% strongly support with priority
 56.2% support proposal
 15.3% reject proposal

53: Better recognition be given to hymns, prayers & blessings as gaeilge which may be incorporated into the Eucharist
 28.2% strongly support with priority
 49.2% support proposal
 22.6% reject proposal

54: Church Environment- Create a Welcoming Space
 49.7% strongly support with priority
 41.9% support proposal
 8.4% reject proposal

55: Create a child friendly space in churches and also to fa-

cilitate 'play & pray' etc. during Masses
 42.6% strongly support with priority
 45.7% support proposal
 11.7% reject proposal

56: Use of Modern Technology in church and for church
 51.4% strongly support with priority
 39.9% support proposal
 8.6% reject proposal

57: Formation training for clergy & laity who lead liturgy
 52.8% strongly support with priority
 40.2% support proposal
 7% reject proposal

58: Lay led Liturgy templates
 56.9% strongly support with priority
 37.1% support proposal
 6% reject proposal

59: Laity & Liturgies/Sacraments: develop and support lay leadership in liturgies and the celebration of sacraments (e.g. lay led liturgies of the Word with Holy Communion, homilies, baptisms, funerals, 'occasion' liturgies, etc.)
 63.2% strongly support with priority
 29% support proposal
 7.8% reject proposal

60: Teach people the meaning and source of all parts of the Mass and sacraments
 59.6% strongly support with priority
 34.7% support proposal
 5.7% reject proposal

61: Assist in improving the standard of and quality in delivering homilies
 46.4% strongly support with priority
 39.3% support proposal
 14.3% reject proposal

62: The Diocesan Liturgical Commission to establish policies and procedures around different liturgy practices
 30.2% strongly support with priority
 41% support proposal
 28.8% reject proposal



"Time up" - Jim Carroll the bell ringer

63: New Diocesan Hymnals
 26% strongly support with priority
 33.3% support proposal
 40.7% reject proposal

64: Liturgical Music - Develop & Support Cantors in local communities
 44.7% strongly support with priority
 47.2% support proposal
 8.2% reject proposal

65: Liturgical Music and resources for Family/Children's Masses and Young People's Masses - Separate session for children, prepare for Christmas, Kids Clubs, Easter concert,
 43.7% strongly support with priority
 47.4% support proposal
 8.9% reject proposal

65A: Adopt an approach to the Sacrament of Reconciliation
 61.6% strongly support with priority
 27% support proposal
 11.4% reject proposal



Synod Stats

Theme 4
 Liturgy and
 Life

3172 mentions

Topics identified

- * Joyful and life giving liturgies
- * The importance of music
- * Child-friendly liturgies
- * Need for creativity

- * Support people in breaking open the word
- * Good homilies to link with life
- * Liturgy is a celebration

Catholic schooling highly valued by parents but has cultural challenges

THE ethos and work of catholic schools remains highly valued by many, many parents, the presenter of the Faith Formation and Education theme told the Limerick Diocesan Synod. Speaking at the outset of the theme, which looked at a range of methods for supporting faith formation amongst all people of the Church and in the area of education, Diocesan Advisor Fiona Dineen also said that faith formation of young people is increasingly challenging in the contemporary context.

But, she said, that Catholic schooling remains and will continue to be part of the broader mission of the Church.

“Within the broader context of Catholic education, the Catholic school has a ‘special importance,’” she said.

“But we need to increase our support to school communities, particularly to teachers and one delegate, a school principal, said there was a critical need for ongoing formation for school leaders.

“In Ireland, our Catholic schools play a pivotal role in the faith formation of children and young people. It is not an easy task, however, given the increasingly complex cultural context.

“In looking to the future, we need to consider how all members of the Christian community can encourage and support those in our school communities.

“Some parents may be disconnected from their faith yet it is evident that they still value the ethos and mission of the Catholic school and many still want their children to be prepared to celebrate the sacraments and appreciate the work that is done by the school in this regard.



However, faith formation is not just something for schools but rather a life-long process, she added.

To that end, a motion – ‘Mission with a Difference’ – was concentrated on seeking creative ways to engage with people, especially those who no longer go to Church. One suggestion for this was a ‘festival of faith’ with open air events.

The motion was carried with 90% support, with 43% of delegates going as far as to vote it as a ‘priority’ for the Church locally.

Other motions supported, included Prioritising a multi-layered approach to adult faith formation; Lay Catechists; Establishing Scripture & Bible Study Groups; Developing a Programme to explore the Bible and discover who we are; and, for education, design a formation programme for 2nd level teachers so that religious education teachers will bring the Catholic faith alive.

Reflecting on the session, Ms Dineen added, “It was evident that Faith Formation and Education was a key theme for the delegates. There was significant engagement with the issues and proposals for this theme, particularly reflected in the number of comments shared by the delegates during the Open Forum,” said Fiona.

“Faith Formation and Education connect with all aspects of life, it is not just limited to schooling. There was very good engagement and definitive voting in terms of what delegates prioritised for each proposal in this theme. The need for a multi-layered approach to adult faith formation in the diocese and lay catechists got were strongly endorsed by the delegates.”

Commenting on the theme, Bishop Leahy said, “I have a soft spot for this theme. I come from a family of teachers. The mission statement puts it well; faith formation is a life-long process.”

Sunday School suggested to bring bible to life with fun for children

FOUR out of five delegates at the Synod voted in favour of developing a Sunday School for children to bring the bible to life in a fun way.

Benefitting children aged 6-14, the pilot project was overwhelmingly supported as a positive measure for the formation of children’s faith.

The Sunday school model, which would typically happen around Mass time, is seen as a means of offering support at parish level to the current models of religious education.

The biggest topic that emerged under the theme of Faith Formation and Education in the listening process in the run up to Synod was reconciling Church teaching versus the lived reality; this was particularly evident among groups of young people.

“Teaching adults about the biblical word and Sunday school is absolutely imperative for the formation of children’s faith,” delegate Adrienne D’arcy St Nicholas parish Corbally told the Synod.

“Sunday school is fun and it brings life and spirit into things. Some children think mass is boring and others are left in the crying room.

“All children should be encouraged with their parents to come to the front of the church. So what if they make noise? Jesus said ‘Let the children come onto me’. He didn’t say let the children stay in the crying room,” she added.

The listening process for the Synod identified a critical need for ongoing ‘faith formation’ in order to create a vibrant informed and confident Church going forward.

This was reflected in the overwhelming support for the proposal to develop a diocesan wide adult faith formation programme, which would not preclude anyone from attendance due to

geography, finance or literary levels.

Delegates rejected a proposal to delay the age of Confirmation to Transition year.

“I feel that it’s very important that the child receives confirmation in primary school,” said mother of four Mary Moore, representing Our Lady or the Rosary Parish.

“I think the onus is on the parish to nurture those children who have received Confirmation. “I have spoken to some parents who have huge concerns that our children are not attending mass. Perhaps the parish and diocesan centre could do something to support secondary school children in their faith,” she added.

Concern over moving the age of Confirmation to transition year was also expressed by another delegate who expressed concerns about the Holy Spirit being heart by people of that age.

“When you think about the effectiveness of the sacrament of Confirmation for our children at the end of sixth class and if you were to delay it for four years they would have all of the confusion and temptation of peer pressure,” said Martina O’Sullivan, Abbeyfeale.

Synod acknowledges Ireland’s emerging religious landscape

THE historic nature of Limerick’s first Diocesan Synod in 80 years was not only reflected in the unprecedented involvement of lay people, but also in how it embraced communities of different faiths.

The first Muslim theologian to ever participate in an Irish Synod, Shaykh Umar Al-Qadri, described the weekend gathering as an important example of how the Catholic Church is acknowledging the new religious landscape in Ireland.

After the Christian community, Muslims are the largest religious denomination in Ireland.

“There are 65,000 Muslims living in Ireland, so to represent them is very important because it tells us how times have changed, how there are different communities’ part of the new Ireland and that the church finds it important to reach out to these communities.

“I am perhaps the first Muslim theologian who is participating in this Synod in the history of Ireland,” explained the Chair of the Irish Muslim Peace and Integration Council and Imam of the Islamic Centre Ireland

“Religions are going through many challenges that are very common and for that it is important that these religious communities come together in a united and collective way, to tackle the challenges they are facing.

“One of these challenges is the challenge of extremism and the challenge of violence in the name of religion. Therefore it is important for people like myself to be here to reach

out to the larger community of the Christian faith and tell them that interfaith dialogue is the essence of this time.”

Some 15 interfaith leaders attended the Synod, representing over a dozen different faith communities including Jews, Muslims, Sikhs, Hindus, Baha’is, the Religious Society of Friends, as well as The Methodist Presbyterian and Church of Ireland.

Stressing the importance of inter faith dialogue – which was among the 100 Synod proposals – Shayk, Umar Al-Qadri said building bridges between communities of different religious persuasions is the only way forward to a peaceful co-existing society.

In his opening remarks at the Synod Church of Ireland Bishop Kenneth Kearon said, “The Synod is not just another conference with clergy it is a purposeful conversation of church people coming together to imagine a real future.”

In her role as an interfaith delegate Lonán Ni Dhubháin said she was passionate about getting as many faith communities as possible involved in Limerick’s first Catholic Synod in 80 years.

“This was too good an opportunity not to invite all the other partners in the human project.

“They have been very positive about the chance they got to engage. I feel through this process we have opened up all sorts of wonderful possibilities for a multicultural city and a multicultural world.”



Theme 5 - Faith Formation and Education - 16 proposals and voting results

The biggest topic emerging under the theme of Faith Formation and Education was reconciling Church teaching versus lived reality; this was particularly evident among groups of young people. Adult Faith Formation and Religious education are also key topics across parishes and young people.

Catholic education and faith formation are broad terms that cover the many ways, contexts and approaches in which people are helped to grow and mature in faith and in relationship with Jesus Christ as part of their ongoing faith journey. Faith formation is a life long process that can take place in a variety of formal settings. It is more than schooling. It begins in the home, continues in the school and matures through involvement with the Christian Community in the parish.

<p>66: 'Review of Life' program for faith formation rolled out across diocese 25.3% strongly support with priority 60.2% support proposal 14.5% reject proposal</p>	<p>12% reject proposal</p> <p>72: Support the links between home, school and parish 62.1% strongly support with priority 30.9% support proposal 7.1% reject proposal</p>	<p>18% reject proposal</p> <p>77: As an outcome of the Synod that we would invite and encourage the staff of our Catholic schools to be more engaged in the life of the local parish 21.5% strongly support with priority 45.8% support proposal 32.7% reject proposal</p>
<p>67: An Adult Faith Formation Programme 74.7% strongly support with priority 22.6% support proposal 2.8% reject proposal</p>	<p>73: Parish support programme for children preparing to receive sacraments 62.8% strongly support with priority 30.4% support proposal 6.8% reject proposal</p>	<p>78: Review the Age of Confirmation and delay to later e.g. Transition Year 29.4% strongly support with priority 18.4% support proposal 52.2% reject proposal</p>
<p>68: Establish Scripture & Bible Study Groups 47.6% strongly support with priority 46.8% support proposal 5.6% reject proposal</p>	<p>74: Develop a strategic approach to supporting Religious Education and the characteristic spirit of Catholic Primary Schools – annual formation day for school leaders 54.2% strongly support with priority 38.2% support proposal 7.6% reject proposal</p>	<p>79: Lay Catechists 78.3% strongly support with priority 18.3% support proposal 3.4% reject proposal</p>
<p>69: Revisit the story of who we are 29.1% strongly support with priority 54.3% support proposal 16.6% reject proposal</p>	<p>75: Design a formation programme for 2nd level teachers 57.7% strongly support with priority 32.4% support proposal 9.9% reject proposal</p>	<p>80: Training Programme for Evangelisation 56.6% strongly support with priority 35.5% support proposal 7.9% reject proposal</p>
<p>70: Mission with a Difference 43.1% strongly support with priority 47% support proposal 9.9% reject proposal</p>	<p>76: The parish to take responsibility for the evangelisation of children by means of a Sunday School Model 55% strongly support with priority 27% support proposal</p>	<p>81: Establish various locations to host prayerful guided reflections 16.2% strongly support with priority 34.4% support proposal 49.4% reject proposal</p>
<p>71: Diocesan response to Laudato Si 48.9% strongly support with priority 39.1% support proposal</p>		

Synod puts building blocks in place for future – priest perspective

By Fr Tony Mullins

It's fair to state that when Bishop Brendan convoked a Synod in September 2014, few of us could have foreseen just how inclusive it would be.

The Church had come through its most turbulent period of the modern era, perhaps ever, and a period of introspection was more than timely. But if there was any doubt as to just how deep the Church in Limerick would be willing to look, the answer became quickly apparent.

In short, this has been a historic 18 month journey along which we have had the most forensic examination of the Church imaginable.

Under Fr. Eamonn Fitzgibbon's direction, every issue was probed, no question left unasked. Concerns were addressed with incredible honesty. We learned from the bad, brought the good with us and earnestly planned for the future so that our Church in Limerick could move on, laity and clergy side by side, with purpose and vigour.

It all crystalized at the weekend when 100 proposals across six themes were considered and voted on, putting in place building bricks for a new era for the Church in Limerick.

Each and every proposal had its own merits, though each of us as delegates had our own particular preferences.

One of the most important proposals for me was that we must reach out to those who feel excluded from the Church, because of the attitudes and teachings of the Church and those whose trust has been betrayed. We must do whatever is necessary to rebuild trust and attempt to heal the hurts and stay trying until we do.

I was pleased to see that the Synod delegates acknowledged the dedicated work of teachers and chaplains in the evangelisation of children and young people in our catholic schools both primary and secondary. Strengthening the links between home, school and parish is also a hugely important issue for me. Bridging the disconnect here will strengthen family, community and Church.

Another aspect of the Synod that heartened me greatly and strengthened the sense of inclusiveness, not just for

the Synod itself but for the future, was the presence of other Church leaders and the other faith communities.

I found that incredibly affirming and moving. Their genuine messages of goodwill and prayer were deeply uplifting and we look forward to deepening relationships ahead.

There was also a very strong acknowledgement that there are a lot of positives to build on. In the diocese we already have support services to families and individuals provided by the Limerick Social Service Centre, Henry Street, which is an agency of the diocese set up by the late Bishop Henry Murphy. There is also the work of the Diocesan Youth Ministry Team operating from the Diocesan Pastoral Centre under the leadership of Fr Chris O'Donnell. These diocesan services provide us with very strong foundations on which we can hope to build on, ensuring that many of the initiatives envisaged by the delegates at the Synod will become a reality. We are also blessed to have in our diocese such resources as the theology department of Mary Immaculate College, the venue for the Synod and the wisdom and ministry of so many religious congregations.

The proposal for appointing administrators to pastoral areas is another really positive development and will take the burden off priests and allow them to concentrate on sacramental life.

The Synod delegates also agreed that priests will work more closely together in Pastoral Area Teams and this will become the norm into the future.

For a lot of delegates, the final motion of the Synod, on establishing a working group to explore where women can play a leadership role in the governance of the Church was a high point. It was an absolute affirmation of the role of women in the Church and was a necessary acknowledgement of the contribution they are making.

Working with so many people throughout this process has been a privilege and that's a privilege that has begun at home in my own parish, Dromin Athlaccra. My fellow delegates from this parish have been so enthusiastic, so committed to the process and that, too, has been enriching. And now we continue this journey. This is the beginning



of something new, something great. No doubt there are going to be challenges along the way but I cannot see anything except this bearing fruit.

We have a huge bank of positivity built up after this Synod but make no mistake about it, there's much work to do. We now need to distil all that happened over the three days – and that's a huge amount – into a practical plan. It needs to be well thought out and reflected on and there has to be a strategic review built into it.

There also needs to be patience with the workload ahead. It will not happen overnight but it will happen.

Finally, I feel incredibly affirmed as a priest by the whole process but particularly the Synod itself. It has told me as a priest that I am not alone, that there are many, many people out there willing and wanting to share in the work of building up the community of faith, sharing in our baptismal calling to bring the Good News of the Gospel to the people of our diocese.

This has been extremely reassuring for me and for all of us priests.

Synod Stats

Theme 5
Liturgy and Life

1823 mentions

Topics identified

* Adult Faith formation

* Scripture and bible study

* How to Live the Gospel

* Reconciling church teaching versus lived reality

* Strengthen home, school and parish links

* Facilitating sacramental preparation

* Enhance religious education in schools

‘New Models of Leadership’ set to emerge for Limerick Diocese

PRIESTS, women and parishioners with particular expertise are the way forward for the leadership of the Church across the Diocese, the Diocesan Synod heard.

Delegates were told that new leadership models must be looked at because the concept of leadership at the moment, which depends almost exclusively on the priest, cannot continue.

They were also reassured by Bishop Leahy, however, that parish identity will not be challenged by clustering.

The Synod heard that, as it stands, people cannot expect a resident priest in every parish in the diocese.

In his opening remarks on the ‘New Models of Leadership’ theme, Bishop Emeritus of Limerick Donal Murray asked delegates to remember the words of St. Pope John Paul II, who addressed hundreds of thousands of people, in Limerick

in 1979, not far from the Synod location.

“He said the great forces that shape our world – politics, the mass media, science, technology, culture and education – are precisely the areas where lay people are especially competent to exercise their ministry. People who work in these areas, they are ones who can transform.”

Bishop Murray added, “And then he said Ireland is at a point of decision, Ireland must decide, must choose her way forward and that I think is where we are today.”

Despite the fall off in vocations, delegates rejected the motion of bringing priests from abroad, with only 15.8 per cent agreeing that it was a priority.

Bishop Leahy said it was very much a case of having to deal with our own challenges and not import a solution.

“I have some reservations about bringing

priests in from abroad,” he said. “I agree with bringing some priests in, a few priests in, because that gives witness to the universality of the Church. That’s a good thing, I’ve no problem with that.

“And it’s good to see some young priests around. But I don’t see it as a solution, we have to face our challenges...few enough dioceses around the world think they have a surplus [of priests].”

Delegate Tony Sadlier urged delegates to support priests in their work. “Priests are probably one of our most scarce resources. The demands on priests, including pastoral work, is enormous.

“They’re meant to be accountants, lawyers, teachers, builders, counsellors and experts on everything, which they are not.”

Father Seán Ó Longaigh, Parish Priest of Askeaton-Ballysteen focused on the future role of the

priest. He said, “I’ve said it so many times, what is the role of the priest... it is the priesthood of the baptised, but what about the ministry role?”

“The other main roles – are we celebrators of sacraments? Is that our main role? Is it building up a Christian community, reaching out to the marginalised or with all the new groups to be set up, is it to be an animator?”

A proposal for the establishment of a Team Ministry Structure in each Pastoral Area was supported, with two thirds of the delegates saying it was a priority.

Bishop Leahy emphasised that any changes to parishes in the clustering process will not decrease each individual parish’s unique identity:

“I think it’s important to say that no matter what happens, one way or the other about a parish or this or that area, a parish remains a parish. It is a

Christian community in a particular territory or area...that must remain”.

Some 80% of delegates supported exploring the proposal on forming Hub Communities, while there was also a majority in favour of employing lay people to fulfil liturgical and administrative roles.

The proposal of introducing a male permanent diaconate into the diocese

was also supported, with 80 per cent in favour.

The spotlight was also shone on the current financing of parishes. With falling vocations and falling attendance at regular masses, weekly giving is decreasing, the Synod heard. Overall it means shortfalls in priests’ salaries.

Approval was given to a proposal for a review of the funding models and

sources of income for clergy and parish personnel salaries.

The majority of delegates also believed that more supports should be given to foster and encourage more lay people, either individually or in pastoral councils, to come forward and show leadership, while 90 per cent felt an annual conference for Parish Pastoral Councils would be a good idea.

What they said of the Synod Martin Kennedy - Synod Facilitator

Q: What is your role in the Synod

A: Supporting the planning and facilitation of Synod process.

Q: What’s impressed you most about the Synod

A The courage of the diocesan leadership to go down that route. The commitment of the delegates throughout the process. The capacity and imagination of the Synod coordination.

Q: Do you see real change emerging from the Synod

A: yes – in the sense that the aspirations and practice of many priests and laity over the years in the diocese are now being brought centre stage – becoming the norm.

Q: What should the priority be following the Synod

A: Putting in place a pastoral plan that will deliver the main aspirations of the Synod over the next few years, and identifying a number of ‘early winners’ that will demonstrate in a visible, popular manner the commitment of the diocese to ‘walk the talk’ will do that.



Women to play a leadership role in governance of Church

A WORKING group is to be established to explore and scope out how and where women can play a leadership role in the governance of the Church at diocesan and local level. The final motion of 100 tabled at the three-day Synod saw 81.1% of delegates vote for it as a priority for the Synod – the highest single ‘priority’ vote at the gathering.



The motion fell into the sixth and final Synod theme, ‘New Models of Leadership’. In his opening remarks on the theme, Bishop Leahy said, “Here we are talking about some-

thing that is very profound. We are talking about exploring how women can play a leadership role in the governance of the church here in our own diocesan structure and that certainly is a must for us.”

Bishop Leahy went on to say that it is a much wider issue than gender equality, “It’s certainly about women. It’s also, however, about the nature of the Church and the identity of the Church today and what I would call the lay Marian profile of the Church.”

Kilmallock delegate Seamus Moloney said women have a vital role to play in the Church, “We need women involved, because if you look at the Church, 70 per cent of the faithful in churches at the moment are women so I think it’s very important we get women involved at the highest level of the Diocese. I think there should be women deacons. They are the future of our Church.” Another delegate Margaret Reilly pointed out that at the moment only men are allowed to be ordained a deacon. “When we are looking into the reintroduction of the male permanent diaconate, we have to be very aware that we could be intro-

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Here we are talking about something that is very profound

ducing another layer of male clericalism.”

When passed, the motion received the largest cheer over the two days of Synod business that preceded it. A working group is now expected to be formed in the short term to look at the current and future roles of women.

It will define terms of reference to clearly identify a policy that will allow women have a leadership role in the Diocese and which is compatible with Canon Law.

What they said of the Synod Karen Kiely - Synod Administrator

Q: What is your role in the Synod

A: Administrator

Q: What’s impressed you most about the Synod

A: Commitment of Delegates – they have given a huge amount of time and energy to the Synod since September 2014 and have engaged wholeheartedly with every stage.

Q: Do you see real change emerging from the Synod

A Yes – I do believe that there will be significant change in our Diocese as a result of the Synod

Q: What should the priority be following the Synod

A: Lay people to fill administrative roles in parishes, enabling declining numbers of clergy to focus on ministry.



What they said of the Synod Jessie Rogers - Synod Facilitator

Q: What is your role in the Synod

A: I facilitate the discernment process to help people make decisions prayerfully.

Q: What’s impressed you most about the Synod

A: The quality and sincerity of the delegates’ engagement, and a strong sense of the Holy Spirit accompanying us on the journey. And the organisation! So many people have done so much and given so generously of their time, expertise and wisdom.

Q: Do you see real change emerging from the Synod?

A: I am very confident of that, not just because of this or that decision, though the details are important, but because of the synodal process itself. I really do believe that the Holy Spirit is at work in and through the people.

Q: What should the priority be following the Synod?

A: Keeping the momentum going. We have to see what emerges as the voice of the people in terms of priorities and these will then need to be shaped into a pastoral plan. What matters is that the Diocese acts on the wisdom and insight it has been given.



Theme 6 - New Models of Leadership - voting results from the 19 proposals

The need for new skilled leadership models was particularly evident across parishes and among third level students. The personal skills of pastoral leaders, the shortage of vocations, married clergy and the role of women in leadership were the highest ranking issues under the theme of leadership.

The meaning of Christian leadership was made clear by Jesus himself. We are meant to be a community made up of people who serve the Lord, serve one another and serve all of humanity. According to Vatican II, "The Church exists in order to be a sign and instrument...of communion with God and of the entire human race."

We need to look at new models of leadership for two reasons. Firstly, because we are living in a a very different world from the one most of us grew up in. St John Paul pointed out during his visit to Ireland: "Every generation, with its own mentality and characteristics, is like a new continent to be won for Christ. The Church must constantly look for new ways that will enable her to carry out, with renewed vigour the mission received from her Founder."

82: Establishment of a Team Ministry Structure in each Pastoral Area

67.2% strongly support with priority

26.9% support proposal

5.9% reject proposal

83: To provide and grow a model of leadership to enrich the life of individual parishes maintaining parish identity

46.8% strongly support with priority

43.5% support proposal

9.7% reject proposal

84: Forming Hub Communities

43.7% strongly support with priority

43.4% support proposal

12.8% reject proposal

85: To develop a diocesan strategy for enabling communities to become vibrant parishes, so that these parishes can be safeguarded and not suppressed

57.7% strongly support with priority

33.7% support proposal

8.6% reject proposal

86: Review of the funding models / sources for Parish Income - clergy income and parish personnel salaries

54.2% strongly support with priority

40.5% support proposal

5.3% reject proposal

87: To move towards the employment of Lay People to fulfil both liturgical and administrative roles in parishes, in clusters and/or in pastoral areas.

55% strongly support with priority

27.9% support proposal

17.1% reject proposal

88: Appointment of Parish/Cluster Administrative Assistants

75.9% strongly support with priority

19.2% support proposal

4.9% reject proposal

89: Bring Priests from Abroad

15.8% strongly support with priority

31.9% support proposal

52.3% reject proposal

90: Explore the introduction of the permanent diaconate into the diocese

49.1% strongly support with priority

31.6% support proposal

19.3% reject proposal

91: Vocations to the Priesthood and my role

65.1% strongly support with priority

26.5% support proposal

8.4% reject proposal

92: To establish a diocesan strategic leadership group; to include non-ordained people, that would be gender balanced and inclusive of all aspects of Diocesan life

60.2% strongly support with priority

32.2% support proposal

7.6% reject proposal

93: To establish a diocesan pastoral council including clergy and laity, representative of all, offering real leadership, and good communication with parishes

52.4% strongly support with priority

41.9% support proposal

5.7% reject proposal

94: Parish Leadership: develop the role of parish pastoral councils regarding parish leadership

71.4% strongly support with priority

24% support proposal

4.6% reject proposal

95: An annual conference for Parish Pastoral Councils

55.5% strongly support with priority

34.5% support proposal

10% reject proposal

96: Strengthening and enabling Volunteerism in the Diocese

57.2% strongly support with priority

36.4% support proposal

6.4% reject proposal

97: Discernment of the Gifts of Lay People

55.7% strongly support with priority

38% support proposal

6.1% reject proposal

98: Establish a working group to examine the current communications structure in this diocese

52.6% strongly support with priority

40.4% support proposal

7% reject proposal

99: A handbook for Pastoral Leadership in Limerick Diocese

30.7% strongly support with priority

48.3% support proposal

21% reject proposal

100: To establish a working group to explore and scope out how and where women can play a leadership role in the governance of the Church at Diocesan and local level

81.1% strongly support with priority

9.3% support proposal

9.6% reject proposal

Synod Stats

Theme 6

New models of leadership

2905 mentions

Topics identified

- * Role of laity in leadership
- * **Leading roles for women**
- * **The role of clergy as leaders**
 - * *Priest shortage*
 - * **Lack of vocations**
- * Effective Governance
- * *Accountability in finance*
- * **Clear communication**

Hopeful Limerick Synod mirrors Second Vatican Council

A SYNOD delegate has told of how she felt the same emotions of hope at the weekend gathering as she did at the Second Vatican Council in 1961. As a 20-year-old Maura Costello was in St Peter's Square in Rome to witness the Second Vatican Council.

Today, nearly 40 years on, Maura Hayes says the feelings and emotions she experienced in Rome have come flooding back at the Synod.

"I came here on Friday morning nervous and tense and the day just opened up into something wonderful.

"I had the same feeling 60 years ago when I happened to be in Rome at the Vatican Council. I was in St Peter's when the Pope was there. He just opened his hands, welcoming us to the new Church, a future Church and this is what the start of the Synod did for me, it was like a new beginning." Maura's love of the Church has been constant all those years since but has a real belief that the weekend Synod will herald better days ahead.

"I would like to see a people's church...We have to forget the idea that the church belongs to the clergy, a Sunday church. It's actually the people who own the church," she declared.

The 72-year-old says the Synod has opened her eyes to the possibilities that lie ahead for the Church in Limerick.

"At the Second Vatican Council it was something new, we were in the old Latin era, the old church. Religion was only Church orientated. When Pope John XXIII opened his arms, he gave us a loving Church, but that had been forgotten. The welcoming and forgiving church was lost. But that's returned with this Synod for me. It's opened my eyes to what can be done, what needs to be done."



Is this the stuff that was dreamed of?

By Jim O'Brien

I MET him at the Synod and my mind went back decades to winter nights spent at his fire in Croom. Nights we talked into the depths of darkness about what was, what is and what might be.

We were just an earshot from the spot where the poets of the Maigue drank, ranted and rhymed in the twilight of a language soon to shatter into fragments decorating the words of another civilisation. I met him at the Synod and we looked at one another through decades that had whitened us and I wondered is this it? Is this the stuff we dreamed of? Or is this another twilight and will all this too disappear leaving but a few shining jewels to adorn a different reality.

I joined the queue shuffling towards the hall, heart-warmed by faces from places and times that had consumed so much of a young life. Hands, smiles and fond embraces. A fellow traveller from long ago took me by the arm and, in clipped Scots, she talked of great excitement.

At the door gadgets like ancient mobile phones were being handed out. "Voting machines," I'm told, Better than the yokes designed for Planet Bertie, I hoped.

As the women and men, young and old, idir cléir agus tuatha took the gadgets in their hands I remembered the South African friend I met the day before. It was twenty-two years to the day since he and his folk queued in the sun to vote for the very first time.

Is this it? Is this the stuff that was dreamed of?

I joined a small group and sat with them. An old bell with a solid clang signalled a beginning and we watched as elegant women danced the place into prayer while others chanted in solemn Gregorian, "Sicut erat in principio et nunc et semper – as it was in the beginning is now and ever..." or maybe not.

The ancient cadences were taken up softly around the hall. Somewhere behind me an old friend from the flower of youth enriched the rising sound with a voice crafted in a place where the rarest of things are made.

"Veni Sancte Spiritus," and the strains of Taizé wafted high into the steel rafters as it came time for words.

"Good morning,"

"Good morning, Father."

The guide on the journey and the architect of the gathering, Eamonn, stood ready to throw in the ball. No better man, a histo-

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something
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transformation
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ry of determination where ash meets slither stood behind him - he never failed to leave an impression, on friend or foe.

A year of listening, cajoling, planning remodelling and re-imagining had brought them all to this: 60 parishes, 5,000 participants, 450 delegates and 100 proposals to be voted on.

The bishop, whose spark of inspiration all of 18 months ago started it all, gave a blessing. A Sikh holy man – historically, the first of over a dozen of other invited - stood to bring good wishes and the other bishop from across the river said it all when he spoke of "this purposeful conversation."

It was time for observers to retreat to the balcony while those with the gadgets got on with their work. As I looked down from above the poet from Banogue, the latest of the Maigue wordsmiths, was in the middle of a ciorcal mór.

I thought of the miles of road he had travelled and the decades of passion he had packed into this.

Is this it? Is this the stuff that was dreamed of?"

A woman's voice from the southern hemisphere stilled and calmed the place before a man from Garryowen led the journey through the hundred proposals. Each one

was read aloud and listened to and then man and woman spoke his and her own truth and it was listened to.

And then they voted - three options: 'a big yes, a simple yes and a no'. All things were considered from tea after mass to turning the whole ship around to face the sun and warm what is a cold place for women.

'Yes' and 'big yes' abounded.

Is this it? Is this the stuff that was dreamed of?

For three days they met, listened, talked, prayed, sang and voted. It is all written and recorded and sent to the See of Peter to be read and registered; these words of Limerick men and Limerick women from Ardpatrick to Athea, from Mountcollins to Monaleen from the Feale to the Mulcair.

And my mind went back again to winter nights spent at the fire in Croom talking of what was, what is and what might be.

Is this is it? Is this the stuff that was dreamed of?

As women and men stood and spoke and took those gadgets and made their mark, something with a trace of transformation seemed to seep across the decades bringing hints of healing and the beginnings of hope.

Maybe tonight we'll just sleep.

There's no need to dream - for tonight.

Synod moments of grace sustaining us on a journey

By Fr Eamonn Fitzgibbon, Synod Director

The phrase we chose two years ago for our Synod is 'Journeying Together In Faith' - it is an appropriate logo because the word 'synod' actually means walking or journeying together and we do so guided by God's Spirit. Words and mottos are all very well, they connect and make sense at a head level. But over the three days of Synod, I had particular experiences where these words rang true at the level of heart and soul.



My phone was busy during the days leading up to the Synod as a variety of messages came in by text or e-mail. Many texted to send best wishes and convey prayer messages; a small number of our delegates were unable to be present because of illness, a number are in the middle of cancer treatment; others sent apologies because of bereavement. As these various messages came I suddenly realised that over the last two years the 400 delegates to the Synod have truly become a community. As we journeyed together friendships have been formed and a unity and mutual concern has grown within the group. This found expression in the Synod in the way in which various opinions, different viewpoints and disparate positions could be named openly and without fear. Voices were heard respectfully and the truth was indeed spoken in love.

I had a number of particular 'grace moments' each day when I recognised God's Spirit present in a powerful way.

On Friday a woman spoke very movingly about the experience of bereavement and the need for compassion and love towards those who are in grief. This intervention set a tone whereby delegates could speak from the heart.

On Saturday as part of our Interfaith Observers Group we were joined in the afternoon by Imam Shaykh Dr. Umar Al-Qadri and Eva Coombs from the Jewish community. Jessie Rogers, who was our facilitator on discernment, led us in a beautiful prayer about the call of Abraham. Jessie had not realised that at that moment we would have representatives of the three Abrahamic faiths - the three faiths who have Abraham as our 'father in faith' - and in fact she had prepared that prayer earlier in the week. Some

might call this a happy coincidence - I recognise it for what it is, the Holy Spirit reminding us that he was very much with us.

On Sunday afternoon during an Open Forum on universal Church issues and in the midst of a lively debate in which many strongly held and deeply felt views were aired, I noticed many priests seemed a little uncomfortable and vulnerable.

It is true to say that sometimes negative comment on Church can be taken personally by us priests as we can become so identified with our role. Any-

way, out of nowhere a lay delegate just said she wanted to acknowledge the good work done by priests and religious. Spontaneously all the lay people in the room rose to their feet for sustained applause. It was an emotional and uplifting moment for the priests who were present. Once more the Spirit was reminding us that God is walking with us accompanying us as we 'journey together in faith'.

It is these grace moments on the journey of Synod - and on the journey of life - that sustain us along the way.

Issues outside remit of diocese named as inclusiveness of Synod affirmed

THE inclusiveness of Synod was such that no issues, even those outside the jurisdiction of the Church locally, went unnamed and unchecked.

And so, in the penultimate session of Synod, issues that have deeply troubled the Church universally over decades were aired with gusto by delegates and with some conflicting opinions and views.

From celibacy, married priests and women priests to divorce and remarriage, Communion and 2nd relationships and, of course, one of the key issues of the Synod, equality for women - all were laid bare as the Synod drew to a close.

Opening the session, Synod Director Eamonn Fitzgibbon explained that though the diocese had no jurisdiction on these issues, it was essential that they were discussed.

Many contributions were made, among them, Vincent Hanley, a delegate from Knockaderry/Clounagh in West Limerick, said these are very important issues and need to be considered.

"Up to now we have been very pragmatic in our discussions but there are elephants in the room and especially the situation around women priests," he said. "This issue came up again and again in our listening process, in the questionnaires and our assemblies."

Marian Wallace, a delegate from Ardpatrick, said it is time there was change. "Mothers are the backbone of the Church, we teach our children we bring them to Church but we are tired of inequality and we are tired of religious apartheid," she said.

There were some differing views, however, including Ita O'Shaughnessy's. "I do not agree with the gender balance. God made male and female, we complement each other...Mary was humble and we need to be humble too."

Fr David Gibson, from St Patrick's, Limerick City, urged the Church to go back to its roots. "The Church is thriving in places where it

has gone back to its roots and it realises where it is again, and that it's different from general society.

"Religious communities are thriving. The ones who have gone back to the more traditional ways are thriving. That's where the Church is thriving whether we want to see it or not."

On the issue of sacraments for people in second relationships or divorced, Margaret Ives from Kilcornan said, "Should you find yourself in a position where you are in a relationship that, for whatever reason, you have to get out of and you've the courage to do that, you cannot return to the Church and receive the Sacrament of Marriage again.

"Should you commit murder you can return and receive all the sacraments."

Delegate Peadar Ó Conaghaile said it was easier to follow the liturgy in Irish than English following the changes in recent years, while Fr Frank O'Connor asked why the liturgy had to have a 'sacred' language, which was stilted and awkward, especially since Jesus spoke in the everyday language of the people.

Mary Immaculate delegate Kathy Swift said that any disposal of unwanted churches should benefit the local community: "We owe it to the people who helped build the churches to give them to communities and not keep them locked and not sell them."

There was a unanimous standing ovation after Margaret O'Sullivan paid tribute to the contribution priests have made throughout the years.

Noreen Ramsey, a delegate from Cratloe, urged Bishop Leahy to make sure delegates' concerns were passed on.

Responding, Bishop Leahy assured delegates that all the issues raised will be taken into his account of the Synod that will be sent to Rome.