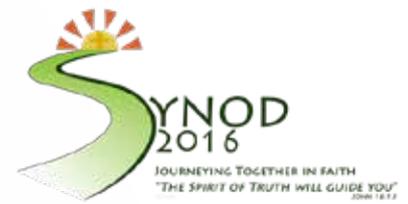# SYNOD UPDATE

Our Synod Journey

Where are we now and where are we going?

The Synod Journey continues...

After three days of deliberation during the Diocesan Synod in April the Church in Limerick 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. These proposals at the first Irish synod for 50 years were decided on by 400 delegates, over 300 of them lay. 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. "From here we have to implement these proposals. We will put them into a Pastoral Plan and policy, formulate decrees, publish the documents and also send them to Rome. We will then embark on implementation and while this won't happen overnight, we will have a clear plan to work to. 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."

Immediately following the Synod Fr Tony Mullins said: "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."

This brief newsletter aims to outline the steps which have already taken place and also the steps that are yet to take place as we move forward on this Synod journey.

Step One: Interpreting the Vote

In the immediate aftermath of the last General Election many commentators remarked that 'the people have spoken; now we need to figure out what they said'! In many ways that is also true of our Synod vote. Even though electronic voting was rejected in the political world we found it extremely useful at the Synod. Voting was carried out by means of zappers resembling the TV Remote Control. These devices allowed each person to vote one of three ways – by pressing Number 1 to say 'I strongly support this proposal', by pressing 2 to say 'I support this proposal' or Number 3 to say 'I do not support this proposal'. This system enabled us to vote quickly and efficiently across 101 proposals. We were also able to immediately get an initial read on the result by displaying the percentages of those who voted for each of the three options.

Since the Synod we have been able to study the results in much greater detail by accessing the data on the particular software used. We now have the exact number of votes for each proposal.
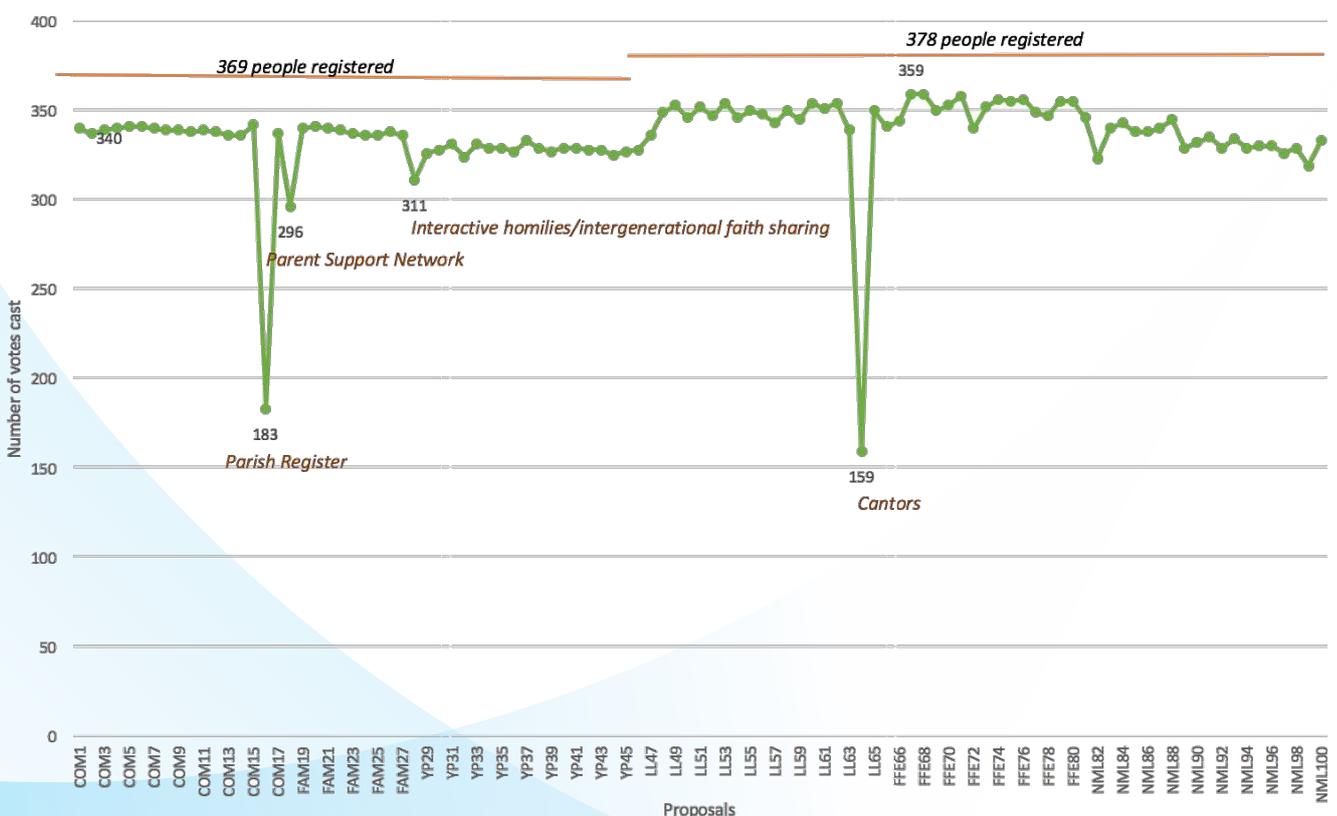
By comparing this figure with the numbers who signed in we can measure abstentions and percentages of those present who lodged a vote. The figure below provides an overview of the numbers of people voting throughout the Synod.

Following the advice of those with expertise in this area we have applied a 'weighting' to the votes. We have accorded 2 points to each Number 1 vote and 1 point to each Number 2. The Number 3 vote (that which rejected the proposal) has been accorded a weighting of minus 1 and the abstentions a value of zero. Using this weighting each proposal has been given an overall score. The scores have been ranked within each theme; this gives us a ranked list of proposals designated by the delegates.

The above explains the 'quantitative' aspect of the vote but there has also been a good deal of work carried out to assess the qualitative dimension of the vote. Meetings have taken place with those who facilitated the groups at the Synod as well as with the facilitators and some of the observers. Further meetings have taken place with the Preparatory Commission and Diocesan Staff. This contributes to getting a fuller picture of what has been said by means of the electronic voting.

Not all proposals can be treated equally; some proposals are strategic in nature and others are very straightforward projects that are good to do (assuming they fit with the local needs). The Pastoral Plan needs to identify strategic priorities without which it runs the risk of being a collection of disparate projects. Proposals which received a strong mandate from the delegates also need to be prioritised.

Synod Voting Levels

Step 2: Building the Scaffold

In many ways the proposals are like 'building blocks' which enable us to construct a Plan for the future. However before the blocks can be placed we need a scaffold which will allow us to create a plan. Essentially this is a framework which contains timelines and offers a menu of options for Parishes, Pastoral Areas, Community Groups/Agencies and the Diocese to implement the decisions of the Synod. The plan will build on the Vision for each theme as outlined in the Delegates Workbook, articulating the Goals and most importantly naming the actions which are required to fulfil the Vision and achieve the desired outcome.
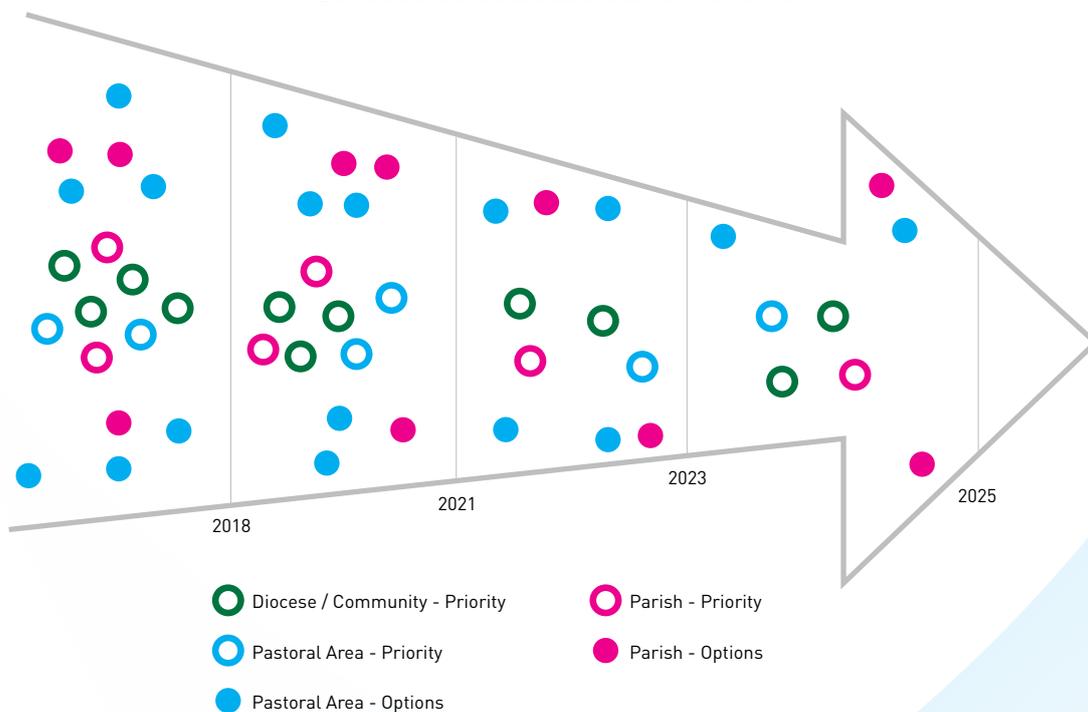
The diagram below offers a possible framework for a broad Strategic Plan: It includes a timeline, it conveys movement and journey towards a point – the end of the arrow would need to include a clearly expressed statement of where we hope to be by implementing these proposals.

There is a menu of options around the proposals so that parishes and other community groups/agencies would create their own adapted version of the Pastoral Plan using a similar framework. Some proposals may be essential and others, options for consideration. Proposals are colour coded to identify whether they are intended to be implemented at the parish, pastoral area, community group/agency or diocese level.

The creation of a broad strategic plan with key milestones gives a picture of where we are all going together – parishes, pastoral areas and diocese – but it doesn't imply that everybody has to be doing the same thing at the same time.

Diocesan Pastoral Plan Overview

2018   2021   2023   2025

○ Diocese / Community - Priority   ○ Parish - Priority

○ Pastoral Area - Priority   ● Parish - Options

● Pastoral Area - Options

Step 3: Creating a Plan

Using the 'scaffold' from Step 2 we can then construct the plan from the building blocks which are the proposals. In the autumn, meetings will take place with diocesan staff (who will have responsibility for implementing much of the plan) and others who have been engaged with the Synod process to populate this framework with the relevant proposals – those that have emerged from Stage 1. This needs to be both strategic and operational. Once more Jessie Rogers will assist us by developing a discernment process to enable this to happen in a way that is congruent with the Synod process to date. We will also establish a Synod Implementation Commission – to replace the Preparatory Commission.

We will thus prepare a draft Pastoral Plan on the basis of Steps One through Three. We will also prepare a set of Diocesan Statutes and finalise a report for Rome.

On October 15th we will gather delegates to present these drafts and the rationale behind them and take on board any further amendments and recommendations. Delegates will also assess how the Pastoral Plan can be delivered at local level. The figure below illustrates the Synod implementation timeline.

Please note graphs showing the ranking of proposals are now available on the Synod website www.Synod2016.com. This newsletter update is also available for download at www.Synod2016.com and www.limerickdiocese.org.

Synod Implementation Timeline

April	Analysis of Voting
May	Consult with Facilitators & Observers
June	Scoring & Ranking of Proposals
July	Construct Framework (Scaffold) for Pastoral Plan
Sept	Drafting Pastoral Plan
Oct	Present Draft Pastoral Plan
	Finalise Plan and Present to Rome
2017 - 2027	Implement Pastoral Plan