



diocese
of limerick
our catholic community

Letter on the Convocation of the Diocesan Synod to be read out at Masses at the Weekend of 27/28 September

27th September, 2014.

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

A year and a half have now passed since I was ordained Bishop and I continue to be grateful for the warm welcome and encouragement I have received throughout the Diocese. It has been a busy and lively time for me, meeting many people, discussing the strengths of our Diocese as well as naming the challenges we face. At this stage, having consulted with the College of Consultors, the Priests' Council and lay members of the Pastoral Areas, I have decided to convoke a Diocesan Synod. It will be the first Synod for our Diocese since the 1930s and indeed in Ireland since the 1950s.

The meaning of the word "Synod" is "journeying together". It is a long-established practice in the Church to use this term for significant meetings where members of the Church come together to review things and make decisions. Pope Francis describes a Synod as a "wonderful experience", "an intense moment of growth".

In our case the Synod will be a large three-day meeting with around 400 representatives of the life of faith in this Diocese. The official launching of the Synod will take place on December 7th 2014 with a liturgy in St. John's Cathedral and the actual meeting of the Synod will take place in Spring 2016. Between the launching of the Synod and the 2016 gathering there will be a vast process of reflection and sharing, catechesis and prayer, out of which we will identify the issues that will be discussed at the Synod. I hope that as many as possible throughout the Diocese will be involved.

I have appointed Fr. Éamonn Fitzgibbon, Episcopal Vicar, as Director of the Synod. It will be his task to co-ordinate the many strands of preparation for

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"Come and see the works of God tremendous his deeds among us" - Ps. 66 (65)

the Synod as well as the Synod event itself. He will soon engage in a process of arranging for the selection of delegates. For the Synod to be the journey it needs to be, we must all travel together listening to one another and learning from one another.

I have written a longer pastoral letter that explains in more detail my reasons and hopes for the Synod. I invite you to read it. I hope it can serve as a reflection document for use throughout the Diocese in the coming weeks and months.

There's one thing I would like to emphasise. If the Synod were only to be a meeting of a few days in Spring 2016, it would be a waste of time. The risk would be that it would only produce a report gathering dust on the shelf. The Synod will have to mark a real step forward for our Diocese, indicating a realistic pathway of genuine renewal for all of us who feel faith is important. For that to be the case, we will all need to approach the Synod as something that involves us personally. The Synod has to be about more than changing structures.

The spiritual attitude with which we approach the period of discernment ahead of us is very important. Our journey towards the Synod in 2016 needs to be a spiritual experience of journeying together in communion with one another, deepening our knowledge of the Faith and spending time in prayer. For that reason, I would like us all to focus in a new way on the Gospel. We will be distributing copies of Luke's Gospel throughout the Diocese in the coming months.

No one, no matter what age, should feel a stranger to the Synod process. In the coming year and a half there will be many gatherings for discussion, catechesis and prayer. We will be opening a website for the Synod. I invite you to send in observations or suggestions. And by 'you' I mean people of deep faith but also those who might consider they do not have deep faith or seldom take part in worship or feel they have lost their faith.

We are about to set out on a journey. It's a chance to ask ourselves: what Church do we want to be as we face the challenges ahead of us? What face of

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the Church do we want to present to society today in order to serve it with humility? How best can we be salt, light and leaven in the world?

I would like to suggest that for the duration of our preparation for the Synod we ask the Holy Spirit with renewed trust and fervour to assist and inspire us. I will arrange for the distribution of the prayer that was recited every day during the Second Vatican Council.

As we set out towards the Synod, let's entrust our journey to Mary, the mother and first missionary disciple of Jesus. Her journey of faith is a model for us all.

Let's encourage one another to make our own the words of Pope Francis in his Apostolic Letter on the Joy of the Gospel: 'I dream of a "missionary option", that is, a missionary impulse capable of transforming everything, so that the Church's customs, ways of doing things, times and schedules, language and structures can be suitably channelled for the evangelization of today's world rather than for her self-preservation.'

We are at a crucial time in the history of our Diocese. The missionary commitment of each one of us is essential.

With kind regards,

+ Brendan Leahy,
Bishop of Limerick

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