



## **Let us Journey Together!**

### ***A Pastoral Message from Archbishop Eamon Martin, Bishop Michael Router and the Synodal Core Group for the Archdiocese of Armagh***

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

Last Sunday in Rome, October 10<sup>th</sup> 2021, the Holy Father, Pope Francis, invited Catholics all over the world to come with him “on a journey” as a “Synodal Church”. The word synod means “walking together”. It indicates a way of being together as Church and “discerning” how best to spread the Gospel amidst the challenges of life in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

On Pentecost Day the Holy Spirit descended upon the disciples, giving them the guidance and courage they needed to go out and spread the Good News about Jesus Christ to all the nations of the world. Like those in the early Christian Church, we pray together today, asking the Holy Spirit to guide us and help us to discern what God wants of the Church in our time.

We encourage you to join us as we respond to Pope Francis’ call and set out on a synodal journey in the Archdiocese of Armagh. We want to involve as many people as possible so that we can harvest the ideas and wisdom of all the baptised and listen to the ‘sense of the faith’ that is alive in the People of God. Our challenge is to discern together what the Holy Spirit is telling us at this critical juncture in our history.

The theme which Pope Francis has chosen for the synodal process 2021-2023 is: *For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, Mission*. As Catholics we are spread across the world in many different communities, large and small, but God unites us all as one. To develop greater “communion” is not to expect everyone to be the same, but to overcome divisions and to walk forward together, sharing a common path. Even within our own diocese, stretching from Magherafelt in Co Derry to Drogheda in Co Louth, there is a wide variety of parishes, movements, and communities. Hopefully, the forthcoming synodal process will bring us closer together and help us to recognise that we are united by our common baptism - as members of the Body of Christ.

The life of the Church will be much richer and more dynamic if all baptised Catholics can find ways to answer God’s call and bring a variety of gifts to the service of all. Although the faith has been handed on for centuries in Ireland, we live today in a very challenging secular environment, where, sadly, many people do not know the joy of encountering, believing in, and following, Jesus Christ. Some have lost their sense of being part of the Church and others,

for various reasons, may feel they no longer wish to be involved. It is therefore important that this synodal process will be an inclusive one where we listen to others who have many different perspectives. No one is excluded. All are invited and welcome to participate.

We pray that, as we walk together on this “synodal journey”, we will find a greater sense of our shared mission to announce the Good News of Jesus Christ in faith, hope and love. How much the world today needs to encounter Christ and to understand how his Word gives ‘a reason for living’, ‘a reason for hoping’! You, the lay women and men of our diocese, have a vital role to play in this. Sometimes the work of spreading the Gospel and building the Kingdom of God is left to ordained priests and deacons, or to those who are consecrated as religious. You, however, have a special mission in witnessing to the Gospel. As baptised members of the Church, as disciples of Jesus, you are called to act in the midst of humanity to bring the Kingdom of God to life in every facet of society.

Here in the Archdiocese of Armagh over the next few months, we will be joining the worldwide synodal consultation, seeking to understand how well we are “journeying together”, and how we might, in our parishes and diocese, “journey better together”. We will soon be inviting your responses to a number of questions. You can choose to answer these as individuals, as families, as members of your parish community or any other group. We hope to gather your responses via questionnaires, online and “in person” group discussion, and a variety of social media platforms. This initial phase will lead to further opportunities for you to participate at diocesan and national level.

All the replies will be collated and sent in response to Pope Francis’ invitation to the universal Church. As he said himself last week in Rome: “Let us listen to one another”, and “Whenever we enter into dialogue, we allow ourselves to be challenged, to advance on the journey”.

This is therefore an opportunity for us to listen to the Holy Spirit and discern what God wants from the Church around the world, in Ireland and in the Archdiocese of Armagh. Please God, it will lead us to renewal and to new life in the years ahead.

Thank you, in anticipation of your support. Let us journey together!

**With blessings to you all,**

*+ Eamon Martin*

**Archbishop Eamon Martin**

*+ Michael Router*

**Bishop Michael Router**

**With members of the Synodal Core Group for the Archdiocese of Armagh**