



A Church Where Everyone Feels at Home

We hear much of the preparation for the forthcoming Synod. **Fr Albert McDonnell**, Co-Parish Priest of Kildysart, Co. Clare, writes about the welcome to everyone in this preparation.

People who listen, reflect and pray make the best decisions. As Church we are called to embrace this wisdom. Everyone with responsibility in the Church is surrounded by formal or informal groups which guide the leader's ministry. Decision-makers acting in splendid isolation runs contrary to the spirit and frequently the letter of the law of the Church and the Church's true nature.

Pope Francis believes that the Spirit is calling us to build a Church where everyone feels at home. The phrase 'synodal Church' best describes this understanding of Church. It is not something new, rather the Pope is inviting us to rediscover our true self as God's people. The Pope's 'synodal process' is the largest public consultation in human history. Every one of the 1.3 billion Catholics across the world is invited to offer their thoughts on how we can best fulfil the mission given to us by Christ to bring the joy of the Gospel to the world.

Every time we gather with even one or two others in Christ's name, we are Church. Every act of prayer, kindness, love, forgiveness, justice, tenderness makes us Church. Every gesture of

reverence towards Christ's presence in the poor, sick or marginalised makes us Church. Where charity and love are found, there also is Christ. Pope Francis is leading a move from 'them' to 'us'. The gifts, prayer and presence of every single Catholic is valuable and should be cherished. We are not mere consumers of a service offered by the Church, rather we are Church, giving and receiving, sharing and offering.

During October, 2023 bishops together with other people of faith will gather in Rome to foster the building of a Church where everyone feels at home. This will be an important meeting. However, if Pope Francis' dream is to become reality, it cannot be the only important meeting. The gathering in Rome needs to resonate with the dreams and hopes of believers in dioceses, pastoral areas, parishes and faith communities across the world.

Pope Francis' vision of a Church where everyone feels at home must become embedded in every believing community and in the hearts of our leaders and indeed every believer. We begin by making the best use of the structures that we have already. The law of the Church promotes involve-



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ment by the members of the parish in all aspects of its life including prayer, the work of justice, decision making, reaching out. Each parish and diocese is to have a pastoral council and a finance council and other groups which reflect and communicate the needs and dreams of the people. We are building on what was achieved at Vatican II. Many of us remember when the priest was the only active person at the celebration of the Eucharist. Today, there are so many people involved in numerous life-giving ministries. Baptism is the first sacrament and the gateway to all others. No matter what pathway we tread in life, we will always stand on that common, shared platform.

The more people that embrace this radical dream of a synodal Church, the more real it will be. Living as Church

resembles family life. There are stressful moments but beneath it all there is a strong bond which unites. Families move forward by chatting, sharing and working together. Pope Francis' synodal pathway will be a spiritual time of sharing. Like the disciples on the road to Emmaus, it will give us an opportunity to share our stories, learn from each other and grow together in faith and love. A Church where everyone will feel at home, will hopefully await us at journey's end. It will take time for the nuts and bolts at parish or universal level to become clear.

We will be given opportunities to share our stories and dreams as part of the synodal process during the next few months. Our Church can only become what it is called to be to the extent to which we accept that invitation. 💕