



Imagining a Synodal Parish

Patricia Carroll leads the Office for Mission and Ministry in the Dublin archdiocese and dreams of what a parish of the future might look like. Her book *Becoming a Pastoral Parish Council* is available from Messenger Publications.

At the national pre-synodal gathering in Athlone in June someone asked me, 'What does a synodal parish look like?' Reflecting on the feedback various dioceses have given during the first stages of Ireland's synodal pathway, I think some key features of a synodal parish have emerged. They connect with the three main themes of the Synod, which are communion, participation and mission.

Communion

The first feature of a synodal parish will be that it is a community that invests time in listening. In a synodal parish small groups will gather often, and people will spend intentional time with one another, listening to one another's concerns so that they can understand more deeply where the Spirit is moving. The synodal parish is a place where people feel they belong, and it welcomes all who want to be there, anyone who is seeking God. The synodal parish is also a place where people are affirmed in their giftedness, helped to recognise their gifts and place them at the service of the community. Families feel at home in this synodal parish, as they are accompanied through the moments that matter, such as birth, life com-

mitment and death, as well as the big moments of celebration. The liturgy in the synodal parish will be accessible, simple and prayerful. Homilies will be relevant and meaningful, speaking to the heart and to personal experience.

Participation

It will be a parish where baptism is taken seriously and many people are responding to a call to minister. There will be lots of opportunities to take part in not only sanctuary-based ministries but also in outreach ministries that advocate for social justice and for those who are on the margins of our society. In fact, it will be a parish where there are many instituted ministries such as acolyte, reader and catechist. If the feedback from dioceses around the world is enacted, this will mean men and women in ordained ministries. In the synodal parish, the role of women in leadership will be more evident. Lay people will be given the charge of the parish as numbers of clergy continue to decline. In this synodal parish, there will be an acceptance of the divorced, remarried and LGBT+ people and a welcome and commitment to the homeless and the poor. The synodal parish will make every effort to bridge

In the synodal parish, the role of women in leadership will be more evident.



the gap between the young and the old and will be a place where young people can find warm acceptance and accompaniment from an older generation to grow into a mature, confident Christian faith.

Mission

The synodal parish will recognise that it exists to serve the world. It will be very conscious that the care of creation is at the heart of living a gospel response. Those who are active in a parish will be able to dialogue with those who are out there in the streets in a meaningful and confident way. There might be a church where the parish gathers, or perhaps the synodal parish will be located in the shopping centre or in a sports facility or in other

places where people naturally gather. In the synodal parish, mission will also be about engaging online, making use of the arts to communicate the Gospel and more intentional use of social media.

I can hear you say, 'This parish is unreal!' Perhaps this is true, but Pope Francis has encouraged us to dream, and that is what this pathway is allowing many people to do, to dream with the Holy Spirit and each other about the future. All the above reflects the feedback that has come through from actual parish communities. It's their dream, and perhaps if we continue to listen to each other to understand, and open ourselves up more and more to God's dream for us, he will help us make it happen. 