

## AMRI welcomes announcement of Synodal Path for the Catholic Church

The AMRI Executive wholeheartedly welcomes the announcement of a new Synodal Pathway for the Catholic Church in Ireland leading to the holding of a National Synodal Assembly within the next five years.

As a missionary organisation, we note that synod and mission are closely connected. Cardinal Mario Grech in his recent address to the Bishops of Ireland on Synodality highlights this, quoting the International Theological Commission, *Synodality in the life and mission of the Church*: “Making a synodal Church a reality is an indispensable precondition for a new missionary energy that will involve the entire People of God. Synodality is lived out in the Church in the service of mission.” A synodal path then must be a way to reach out to those on the margins, to listen to their voices as they challenge and reveal Christ to us.

The synodal path is a journey of engagement, listening, dialogue, and inclusive of all the People of God, especially those who have been hurt, disillusioned or rejected by the Church. We are in a new changing cultural context that calls on us to respond differently to society’s cultural, spiritual and religious needs as we proclaim the Gospel. This experience calls for a dynamic of an open and truthful dialogue in order to discern, learn and share as we welcome those estranged from the Church. It’s the challenge of presenting old and proven values in a new way and accepting newness in a process of inclusion and mutual enrichment.

This has implications for the process and methodologies to be used. We welcome that *the process* of synodality is the starting point. Religious congregations have a culture of engaging facilitators skilled in discernment, design and implementation of large group processes. Listening and learning to hold very diverse views respectfully, often in creative tension, can give rise to a new appreciation of each other, allowing new possibilities to emerge.

A key question for us, as leaders, is: What do we need to let go of to allow the new to emerge? What are the attitudes, beliefs, values and ways of doing things that may have served us well in the past but are now becoming barriers to a renewed Church? Enabling people to articulate a new and radical vision of Church at the outset will be important to sustain people for the five year journey (Is it too long?). “Without a vision the people perish” (Proverbs 29:18). As a religion of the book, we probably over rely on words. and the IEC is already calling for written submissions. “Preach the Gospel always, and if necessary, use words!”, attributed to St Francis. We are in the era of digital visual communication. To tap the creative imagination of the People of God, we as leaders need to encourage the articulation of a new vision of a Church for all, but especially with those who

are poor. Through the use of creative arts – poetry, imagination, music, artwork, dance, digital media and more; we can glimpse the kingdom of God among us.

We have a special concern about listening to the voices of young people and women as part of the synodal process. We have a particular concern around the lack of supports and structures that enable laypeople, especially young people and women, find and express their voice and exercise leadership. Within the organisational architecture of the Church, bishops have the IEC, religious have AMRI, but laypeople have no such resources or structure. If there is no redesign of the architecture, done in a way that is respectful of current leadership roles, we are not likely to see a radical change in five years' time in terms of the fulfilment of the vision of Vatican II on the role of the laity. Therefore we would suggest that early on the synodal path both IEC and AMRI facilitate the emergence of a national forum or council for laypeople.

We are very fortunate to have a Lay Mission Committee as part of AMRI. This group is already initiating a conversation on the contribution of laypeople to the synodal path with plans for a webinar to generate ideas on a more inclusive and participatory Church.

Many of our AMRI members are very experienced in facilitating discernment processes. The AMRI Executive encourages members to send their submissions individually, as we believe their suggestions could be very useful in helping design the synodal process. The AMRI Executive is willing and available to assist with the Synodal pathway in whatever way we can.

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