

FOR A SYNODAL CHURCH

COMMUNION, PARTICIPATION AND MISSION

In October 2021 the Catholic Church's synodal process on the theme of synodality began. This was the first time that a worldwide listening process and consultation with parishes and dioceses was attempted and many people in Ireland took part in a listening process during the early months of 2022.

Did you take part in a listening consultation? Have you been wondering what happened after that?

By the end of May last year, dioceses and groups that held listening processes submitted a summarised document called a synthesis to the Irish Catholic Bishops' Conference. These submissions were reviewed in a spirit of prayer and discernment over the weekend of Pentecost (June 2022) by members of a National Steering Committee and the themes that were resonating across the submissions were presented at an assembly in Athlone on 18 June 2022.

Following this assembly, a National Synthesis document with 15 emerging themes from the Catholic Church in Ireland was prepared and sent to the synod office in Rome. *You can find this document at [synod.ie/national-synthesis](https://www.synod.ie/national-synthesis)*

The synod office in Rome received 112 national syntheses from around the world and, in September 2022, members of the synod leadership team along with 20 other experts from 17 countries gathered in Frascati, Italy, to summarise all these documents. They produced an international document called *Enlarge the Space of Your Tent*, which was published in October 2022. You can find this document online at www.synod.va

Enlarge the Space of Your Tent was offered back to the local churches with an invitation to seek insights, to find areas of convergence and divergence with their own local listening, and to offer some pastoral



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 communion | participation | mission

initiatives or calls to action for the Universal Church to discern further. During November and December last year dioceses and groups were once again invited to reflect on *Enlarge the Space of Your Tent* so a national delegation could bring these insights, challenges, and calls to action to a Continental Assembly.

For the first time ever, seven continental assemblies took place across five continents so each continent could gather and respond once more to the Universal Church with these reflections. The European Continental Assembly, was held from 5 to 9 February in Prague this year and the Irish delegation consisted of four in-person delegates and ten online delegates. There were 200 people present at the Prague assembly representing 39 bishops' conferences from 45 different European countries and a further 390 delegates online. Fr Éamonn Fitzgibbon from the Diocese of Limerick and Ms Julieann Moran, General Secretary for the Irish Synodal Pathway, delivered the Irish delegation's address to the assembly (you can find this video online at www.synod.ie).

Each continental assembly sent their reflections to Rome and a document called an *Instrumentum Laboris* is currently being prepared and is due to be published in June this year. This document will then become the official working document for the Synod of Bishops, which will take place in Rome from 4 to 9 October this year and in October 2024.



But wasn't there an Irish Synod or Synodal Pathway announced too?



Yes, just three days after Pope Francis announced the Universal Synod, the Irish Catholic Bishops' Conference announced that the Catholic Church in Ireland was beginning a five-year synodal pathway culminating in a Synod or series of synodal assemblies. The bishops brought together a committee (men, women, laity, ordained, and religious) as a National Steering Committee to discern and make recommendations as to what the synodal pathway might look like. However, as the engagement with the Universal Synod increased, the two processes have naturally overlapped and all the consultations, listening sessions, and discernment processes for the Universal Synod

have become invaluable stepping stones and learnings for the Irish Synodal Pathway. The infographic below shows the two processes in tandem with each other. Encouraged by the depth of engagement so far, all the submissions received from dioceses and other groups, as well as the National Synthesis, will be used as tools and stimuli for further outreach, to draw more people into the conversations, to bring in voices yet to be heard on the Irish Synodal Pathway. The Catholic Church in Ireland will also have to consider how it will bring together, reflect, and seek to implement the fruits and recommendations from the Universal Synod, alongside any Apostolic Exhortation issued by the Holy Father following the Synod.

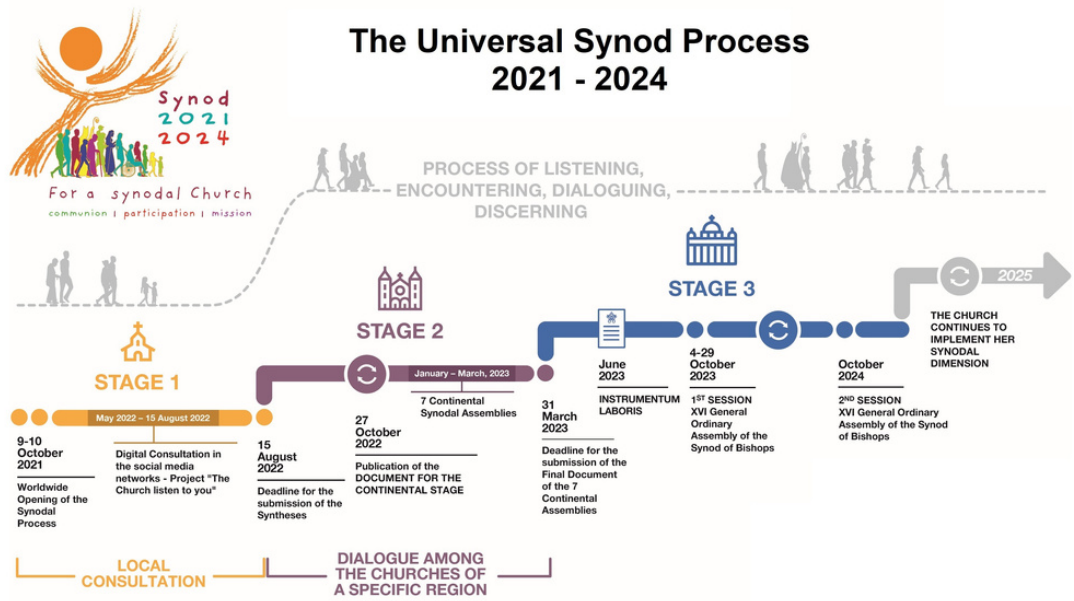
The synodal journey of the Catholic Church in Ireland has definitely begun but there is a growing realisation that this is a long-haul journey; that it is going to take time. Next steps in Ireland include further engagement with clergy, religious, and laity as we invite them to reflect upon their own experiences of modelling and practising synodality, not only during this time of the Universal Synod, but in any aspect of our day-to-day mission and ministries as the people of God in Ireland, the *Pobal Dé*. The National Steering Committee is currently conducting research and carrying out a needs analysis amongst local leaders in order to develop leadership training and formation programmes that will support, increase, and improve engagement in the synodal process and strengthen the sustainability of the synodal pathway for the future. Towards the end of the summer, the committee will also be making its recommendations to the Irish Catholic Bishops' Conference for the structure and content of the Irish Synodal Pathway and what resources and supports will be needed for its implementation.



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The Irish Synodal Pathway

