

Sharing the Good News

NEWSLETTER OF THE IRISH CATHOLIC BISHOPS' CONFERENCE



Bishops announce plans for a National Synod within the next five years

At their Spring General Meeting, which concluded on Wednesday 10 March, the Irish Bishops' Conference announced their decision to embark on a synodal pathway for the Catholic Church in Ireland leading to the holding of a National Synodal Assembly within the next five years.

The bishops said, "Since the 2018 Ordinary General Assembly of Bishops in Rome on the theme of young people, the faith and vocational discernment, we have been giving active consideration to calling a National Synodal Assembly for the Church in Ireland. Conversations at local, regional and national level have informed the work of a subgroup of the Episcopal Conference which was established to explore the idea further. During the 2020 Winter General Meeting of the Bishops' Conference we decided to proceed along a synodal pathway, and, since then, we have been assisted and greatly encouraged by Cardinal Grech and Sr. Natalie Becquart, of the General Secretariat for the Synod of Bishops, who addressed us on 3 February last."

Bishops said, "The initial two-year phase of embarking on the synodal pathway and leading, in time, to a National Synod, helpfully coincides with preparation for the 2022 Ordinary General Assembly of Bishops in Rome entitled, 'For a synodal Church: communion, participation and mission'. We envisage the next two years as a period of prayer, listening and discernment, involving a nationwide consultative conversation on this theme. This will allow individuals and parishes, religious orders and associations as well as groups, movements and organisations both within the Church and in Irish society at large, to share their insights into the Church in Ireland – past, present and future."

Outlining the immediate next steps, the bishops said, "Next June, at the Summer General Meeting, bishops intend to establish a task group to plan and oversee the first steps along the synodal pathway. This task group will be made up of lay women and men, including young people, religious, priests and bishops. We encourage reflection, study and research on the theme of synodality at parish, diocesan, regional and national level and we invite writers, theologians and lecturers to prepare papers for sharing and discussion in the initial two-year phase. From 6 April next, an online page will be available on the Bishops' Conference website for the submission of ideas and suggestions. For more see www.catholicbishops.ie/synod.

Northern Catholic Bishops announce cautious return to public worship from 26 March

The Northern Catholic Bishops have announced that, where possible, there can be a cautious return to public worship for the faithful from 26 March, in time for the celebration of Holy Week and Easter.

The bishops said, "In making this announcement, made possible through the collective and heroic effort of so many in our society in their response to the current pandemic, especially our health care workers, we emphasise the need for continued caution and a rigorous application of all mitigations and safeguards required to ensure the safest possible return to public worship in our Churches."



They also stressed that public worship should only begin again after a thorough risk assessment, in consultation with Covid-19 Support Teams in parishes. This means that some parishes may decide that, in their particular circumstances, it is not possible to return to public worship until a later date.

Bishops also reminded the faithful that the obligation to attend Mass on Sundays and Holy Days remains suspended and that every person should consider carefully if returning to collective worship is the safe and appropriate step for them, at this time.

You can read their statement in full on www.catholicbishops.ie.

Pope Francis to designate Knock as International Marian and Eucharistic Shrine



Archbishop Michael Neary of Tuam has welcomed Pope Francis' formal recognition of the Shrine at Knock as an International Marian and Eucharistic Shrine, "as a hugely significant milestone in the history of the Shrine."

Pope Francis will formally designate the Shrine on the Feast of Saint Joseph, Friday 19 March, in a homily which will be transmitted via video link at the Mass in the Shrine Chapel.

The Mass will be celebrated by Archbishop Michael Neary and concelebrated by Father Richard Gibbons, PP and Rector of Knock Shrine.

The archbishop said, "In view of the way in which the two Papal visits – 1979 and 2018 – and Mother Teresa, had acknowledged the international dimension of the Shrine, I, with the approval of the Bishops' Conference, petitioned the Holy See to designate Knock as an International Shrine. It is a source of great joy to join with Father Richard Gibbons, whose devoted ministry in Knock is most impressive, and with our people in expressing our profound gratitude to Pope Francis for acceding to my request."

You can be part of the Mass and the announcement on www.knockshrine.ie.

Archbishop Eamon Martin offers message of hope to the people of Ireland at home and abroad

In his Saint Patrick's Day 2021 message to the people of Ireland at home and abroad, Archbishop Eamon Martin said, that he is thinking of those in our country and beyond who are struggling during the pandemic – either from contracting the virus themselves, or having to isolate; those in hospital and intensive care; those whose jobs or livelihoods have been threatened; those who are exhausted from caring and worrying.

Archbishop Martin said, "I pray that they will find in Saint Patrick the courage and resilience they need to go on, surrounded, as he was, by the love and protection of God." The archbishop was speaking from Saint Patrick's Cathedral, Armagh where he offered Mass and shared a video message for the Feast of Saint Patrick.



Dr Jessie Rogers appointed first woman and lay Dean of the Faculty of Theology at the Pontifical University Maynooth

The President of Saint Patrick's College, Maynooth, Rev Prof Michael Mullaney, has announced the appointment of Dr Jessie Rogers as the first woman and lay Dean of the Faculty of Theology at the Pontifical University Maynooth.

Dr Rogers, originally South African, undertook her graduate studies at the University of Stellenbosch and came to Ireland in 2007 to teach in Mary Immaculate College before joining the Faculty of Theology at Saint Patrick's College in 2014. As a Scripture scholar specialising in the Old Testament, her academic work focuses on biblical wisdom literature.



In recent years it has broadened to include spirituality and a focus on the theology of childhood. Dr Rogers is a member of the Irish Biblical Association, the South African Society for Near Eastern Studies, the European Society for Catholic Theology, and the Godly Play International College of Trainers. Dr Rogers brings international and ecumenical experience to her new role.

Bishops of Tuam Province reflection on Covid one year on

Bishops from the six dioceses in the Province of Tuam published a pastoral message in which they reflect on the impact of Covid-19 on the parish communities in the West of Ireland, one year on from the appearance of the pandemic in Ireland. The message comes from Archbishop Michael Neary of Tuam, Brendan Kelly of Galway, Bishop John Fleming of Killala, Bishop Kevin Doran of Elphin, Bishop Michael Duignan of Clonfert and Bishop Paul Dempsey of Achonry and is offered to the priests, religious and people of the six dioceses.



You can read their statement in full on www.catholicbishops.ie.

Archbishop of Dublin highlights the importance of public worship in his Saint Patrick's Day homily

Archbishop Dermot Farrell of Dublin has called on the public authorities to prioritise public worship in any easing of Covid-19 restrictions. Speaking in Saint Patrick's Church, Ringsend on Saint Patrick's Day, Archbishop Farrell said, "As a matter of human dignity and fairness – but even more so as matter of wellbeing and the restoration of normality, I call on the public authorities to give assurance that the legitimate desire of people to gather responsibly and within reasonable guidelines to exercise their constitutional right to worship will be prioritised in the easing of restrictions."

Archbishop Farrell went on to say, "We come together in faith and offer our prayer for the healing of the many sick people, remembering the victims of this past year, and asking that their families and friends might find consolation and comfort. We pray for all who are called to carry the burden of the pandemic – especially people who work in the health services to guarantee the smooth functioning of society, and for all who support them."

You can read the archbishop's homily in full on www.dublindiocese.ie.



Pope Francis' Year of the Family begins on the Feast of St Joseph

Pope Francis' year of reflection on the Family begins on the Feast of Saint Joseph on 19 March. The Holy Father is offering the 'Amoris Laetitia Family Year' as a special year to grow in family love. He has invited all to a renewed and creative pastoral drive to place the family at the centre of of both Church and society. Resources for the Year are available to download from the Dicastery for Laity Family and Life on www.laityfamilylife.va.

Reflection on the crisis facing those forced to flee

The Council for Justice and Peace of the Irish Catholic Bishops' Conference developed a Lenten Reflection on the crisis facing people who are forced to flee often because of persecution, conflict, violence, or human rights violations. The Council invites readers to reflect through the model 'See, Judge and Act' on the difficulties encountered by those who face the devastating reality that their best option is to flee to another country seeking refuge and to think about how our faith asks us to respond to this reality. The document is available on www.catholicbishops.ie.



'In Christ We Journey'

The leaders of Ireland's main Churches issued a message on St Patrick's Day entitled 'In Christ We Journey Together', that reflects on the 1921 centenaries and contains an invitation to wider civic society for further dialogue. You can read the statement and watch a video version on www.catholicbishops.ie