

MEATH DIOCESAN OFFICE



February 2022.

Dear sisters and brothers in Christ,

Next Wednesday, we begin our celebration of Lent. It is now two years since the COVID pandemic struck our country and, as you know, COVID impacted heavily on our churches. For example, in April it will be three years since we will have had the opportunity to gather for the Easter ceremonies in our churches. As restrictions lift and are disappearing, there is an opportunity for the people of the Diocese of Meath to enter into the Season of Lent 2022 with a renewed sense of our identity as the People of God, joyful in our gathering in His name, confident in His mercy and hopeful in the power of His grace to transform our lives. That is what church is!

Our Lenten pilgrimage this year will have the added element of the Synodal Pathway. I echo the invitation of Pope Francis to each member of the Christian community in the Diocese of Meath to join in this moment of listening as we prayerfully discern together what the Spirit of God is saying to the Church in this diocese at this time. It is important that we have this discussion about the local church or what we call parish. This discernment must be relevant to our local parishes and influence our local parishes. This discernment must be practical, not theoretical, and must influence what we do in the years ahead. It will be a discernment guided by the Holy Spirit and rooted in faith.

The synodal meetings that have been organised at deanery level throughout the Diocese on the Tuesday evenings of Lent are an opportunity for all the Baptised in the Diocese of Meath to have a meaningful say in the universal Synod that will be held in Rome in 2023. By asking us to reflect on our experience of *communion, participation, and mission* in the life of our Church at parish level, Pope Francis is calling each of us to play our part in bringing about a new springtime for our Church. I thank the priests in the deaneries and the many lay people who have accepted the role of facilitator for their work in making this possible.

To those of you who love your Church, I say, “tell your story!”. Do not be afraid to articulate how you experience belonging to the Community of the Disciples of Christ; do not hesitate to express how your faith transforms your life and offers you hope and meaning on the journey of life. Equally, do not be afraid to express in love your concern for the future of your Church, your fears for the faith of your children and your longing for a vibrant parish community that will sustain your faith.

To those of you who at best feel that you are on the margins of the Church, or at worst feel excluded from the Church, I say, “the Church needs to hear your voice!” I ask for your honesty. Do not be afraid to share your pain or to articulate that which you seek in the Church but do not find. You are part of the Church by your Baptism and in this synodal process the voice of every baptised person is equal. Ask the Holy Spirit who dwells in your heart to give you the words that your Church needs to hear.

While this synodal process during Lent is looking towards the Synod in Rome in 2023, the Church in Ireland intends to harvest the findings of this stage of the process in order to move ahead on a synodal pathway of our own. Over the next few years, we will continue to walk this pilgrim path together, listening to each other and listening to the Lord who accompanies us always as he accompanied the disciples on the road to Emmaus, opening the Scriptures to us and revealing himself to us in the Eucharist.

May the ashes that will mark our foreheads on Ash Wednesday mark us out as the People of God on a journey, pilgrims seeking to discern God's will. And may Mary, Mother of the Church and St. Finian, our teacher of the faith, guide our steps in the way of faith, hope, and love.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Tom Deenihan". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping underline that extends to the left.

✠ Tom Deenihan.

Bishop of Meath.