

Transcript of a talk given by Dr. Austen Ivereigh

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I'm here really with three hats tonight. The first hat is the one is as a writer and a follower of Francis. And before I go on, my publisher would not forgive me if I did not tell you. And I have a new book coming out in a couple of weeks' time, and it has a rather unusual title. I told Pope Francis about it last year in May. I said I was writing a book which had a subtitle 'On retreat with Pope Francis' and he said, 'Oh, that's wonderful. What does the pope think?' I said, 'Well, I hope he likes the idea.' Fortunately he did, and he's written me a lovely forward. The title is 'First belong to God', which comes from *Gaudete et Exsultate*, a 2018 document on holiness. It's an eight day Ignatian retreat, using his talks that he used to give as a Jesuit in Argentina, and I mentioned it partly because I need to mention it, but partly also because it touches well on the theme of the Synod, which I've been asked to speak to you about tonight.

And that's my second hat because I've been very privileged to be involved in the Synod on synodality from the beginning. I was first asked by the bishops of England and Wales to form part of the group that did the National synthesis for England and Wales. Our job was to take all the Synod reports from all the diocese and produce a synthesis. Then, later I was asked by the Synod Secretariat in Rome to be part of a group meeting in Frascati in Italy, to do a global synthesis of all the Bishops Conferences reports from the entire world, which I can tell you was an extraordinary experience. That was in September 2022, and then recently, I was at the Synod of Bishops assembly in Rome in October. This was the first of two Synod of Bishops, which are concluding this universal phase.

That's the last year of the three year process of the Synod of synodality, and then I have a third hat, which I think it's important to mention which is I'm a Catholic. I'm a parishioner. I live in Herefordshire on the English periphery of a Welsh diocese. I didn't realise till I moved there that Herefordshire is part of the Archdiocese of Cardiff, which is wonderfully weird. I'm at the Benedictine parish and just moving to this new parish in this new part of England, and feeling that this event, this extraordinary thing that we have been living through – the Synod on synodality – has to be relevant to my parish, it has to be relevant to this parish, otherwise, what is it for?

And so, with these three hats combined tonight, I just want to go through in three stages really, first of all, the big picture: why I think Pope Francis has called this, why this vision, this intuition of a Synod on synodality – not dissimilar to John the 23rd having a deep spiritual intuition that the time was right for Vatican II, for the great Ecumenical Council. Francis very much, in my conversations with him, describes it in the same way, but of course, it's my job as a commentator to flesh out that intuition and give as it were, some of the reasons that I think he's called it.

So the first part: Why synodality? Why now? Why under Francis? And then, secondly, to consider some of the fruits of synodality. So far, a lot of people are saying well, what the heck is happening? How is this changing things? We're in a curious intermediate time, but I think it's important to share some of those fruits. And then thirdly, to think a little bit about implementing synodality in our diocese and parishes, and specifically the road from here to the October 2024 Assembly which concludes the three year Synod on synodality. So that's what I thought I'd do with you.

So why synodality? Why now? What's this all about? It's very unusual for me to start with mentioning a book but I want to do it because thinking so much about synodality involves talk of processes, and changes and reform and I think that's the very thing which synodality is not supposed to be, at least in Francis's vision of it. It is a conversion of culture, of mindset, of a way of thinking, of a way of being, a way of operating. It's a cultural conversion and as I was reading a book recently which had been recommended to me I found the connection between this book and synodality quite startling, even though it has nothing to do with the Synod. It's by a writer who writes for The New York Times called David Brooks. He's Jewish who's been on a big journey in the last few years where he's been exploring Catholicism. He's been on a kind of moral journey. He's a beautiful writer, and the

book is called very simply 'How to Know a Person' and the subtitle is 'the art of seeing others deeply and being deeply seen'. You may think this is a strange topic for a book but he very quickly shows you how key and important this is. It is a quest to understand and acquire the skills and the mindsets that are needed to have a compassionate understanding of, and empathy with, other people, the people around us, because he's aware in himself, but more especially in the society in which we now live, that this is what is most threatened. He calls it a creeping dehumanization. It's becoming harder and harder to relate to each other in the way we get treated by the market, by the state. All the forces within our organizations, the pressures of time and technology, are making the ordinary interaction harder. I don't want to give a whole talk on this, but he says, and he argues it brilliantly, that we are living in the middle of a sort of vast emotional, relational and spiritual crisis and there's evidence for it in loneliness and anxiety and depression and suicide, the breakdown of civility in our political discourse, polarization. I don't need to go into it. I think you all understand that, and I think if you picked up his book, and I recommend it, you will see very quickly what he means. There is a crisis we're going through. By his subtitle, the art of seeing others deeply and being deeply seen, he makes clear that by 'seeing' he means being recognized, being known, being heard. These are some of the most important things we can do for each other to enable each other to be seen and recognized and heard. Here's the headline: we don't learn these skills at school. And here's the other headline: we don't learn them in church. We don't learn how to see others, make them feel respected, valued and safe.

So what he calls the moral knowledge, (he sees this as a moral question and moral crisis) is something that he thinks we need to focus on because when people don't feel seen, when they don't feel recognized, they withdraw into themselves, they shut down socially, and then we have all the other problems, which we know about.

Why do I mention this and why does this matter for synodality? Listen to Pope Francis speaking last year to a group of journalists. He said this:

'Precisely at this time when there is so much talking and such little listening, when the notion of the common good risks being weakened, the entire church has embarked on a journey to rediscover the word 'together'. We must rediscover the word 'together', walking together, discussing together, taking responsibility together for a communitarian discernment, just as the first apostles did, which for us is prayer. This is synodality which we would like to become part of our everyday culture. We are trying to learn a new way of living relationships and listening to one another, hearing and following the voice of the Spirit.'

And he goes on to describe a little bit of the process.

'We've opened our doors, we've offered people the opportunity to participate. We've tried to take into account people's needs and suggestions. We want to contribute together, to building the church where everyone feels at home where no one is excluded. That word of the gospel that is so important: everyone.'

And last year, of course, at World Youth Day, he ended one of his addresses to the young people, talking in Spanish he said 'Todos, Todos, Todos'. You probably remember it, it became a kind of a slogan: 'Everyone, Everyone, Everyone.' This has been his huge message over the last year – the church is for everyone. Why? Because God is love and mercy is for everyone.

And that's the first thing that people need to see. Now, let me just go back to Brooks for a moment. Brooks says, and he cites lots of studies, that when people choose to leave a job or a role or abandon an institution you find it's quite unusual for it to be primarily about pay or conditions. That's part of it, but mostly he says, you find that the reason is relational. People leave institutions and jobs because they don't feel recognized and they don't feel seen. They felt invisible. If you apply this to the church, and you look at all the studies about people who stopped going to church, they will often cite many reasons but the one reason that they usually give is that they feel that they're simply not recognised or valued by the church. And in the Synod in the beginning of the Diocesan phase in early 2022, time and time again, we heard through all the diocesan reports about people who don't feel valued or recognised: LGBT people, gay people, women aren't feeling recognized, their ministries not

being recognised in the church. Different categories of people felt unrecognised, not valued, not seen – and of course, young people came up time and time again. ‘Why are the young people not in church?’ You go to ask the young people, and they say ‘Because we don't feel seen, we don't feel recognized. We don't feel valued.’

Now, this is really interesting, because you can see this as a crisis, which it is, but you can also see it as an awakening, as a kind of an awakening of the Spirit. This is something going on right now in our time, which I think Francis has perceived very powerfully and very beautifully, which is to say there is this awakening of people to want to be seen and recognized and valued. This really, really matters. It is not a secondary issue for our faith because at the heart of the gospel is the recognition of the dignity and the humanity of all of us, of people. What's so striking about Jesus is how he pays attention to people, individuals, individuals in particular situations. He listens deeply. He asks questions, ‘What is it you want me to do for you? What are you looking for? What are you seeking?’ That's how God is and the reason that Jesus awakens people to their dignity is because he takes time to enable them to be seen above all people in a society which does not see them and does not recognise them or that does not attach the value to them. It's in today's possible, early first chapter of Mark when you go and spend a day with Jesus, and you go with him and he preaches in the synagogue and he heals people and he casts out spirits. And what are the people saying? The people said, ‘This guy has authority, not like the scribes and the Pharisees.’ The Gospel doesn't give you details, but you can fill it in. The scribes and the Pharisees come in, they tell you what to think, they tell you what to do, they tell you what the law is. They tell you what you have to do as your duty. But Jesus allows you to be seen Jesus calls you, gives you agency. Jesus awakens you to your dignity. He gives you space to grow and to change.

So why do they say he has authority and not the other guys? Because they recognise that that's how God is, and therefore the authority of Jesus is that he *performs* God: he doesn't just speak about God, he performs who God is, God's mercy. Todos, todos, todos.

So if the internal culture of this time is one where many people feel, for whatever reason, unrecognised, unvalued, unseen – that is serious. There's a disjuncture between what the gospel calls us to and what people are asking for, or what the Spirit is moving in people to ask. We might say no wonder the churches are empty compared with how they used to be. The biggest religious group now in the West after Christians and Muslims are the so called ‘nones’, the ones who tick ‘none of the above’ when you ask what religion they are, and this is a very, very fast growing category, particularly among young people.

But here's the interesting thing. They're not atheists. They haven't rejected Christianity, but what they are saying is that the church is not a place where they feel at home. So we have to learn as a church to enter into deep listening and dialogue with the Spirit which is speaking to us through all these people who say they do not feel valued and recognised. We have to care enough about them to go out and listen to them, rather than saying, ‘Why don't you come to church?’. I often get asked ‘How do we get the young people back into church?’ and I say, if you cared about young people, you would go out first of all, to listen to them and see what's going on in their hearts. Maybe church is not the place they want to be?

I'm going to share one more insight from the Brooks book. It's an interesting distinction. He says in every group, there are two kinds of people: there are the diminishers and there are the illuminators. Diminishers make people feel small and unseen; they see people as people to be used rather than to be befriended; they stereotype and ignore you; they blather on, they invite you for coffee and just talk about themselves. You probably know a few people like this – you might be a bit like that yourself. I know I can be.

Illuminators are the opposite. They are curious about others, they try to understand others; they ask deep questions to try to understand their point of view; they make people feel bigger, deeper, respected – they make people feel seen. Jesus was obviously the greatest illuminator of all time. This may be one way of viewing synodality: instead of all this

stuff about structural change, (which is necessary and good), maybe at the heart of this journey is that the church is called to become an illuminator rather than a diminisher – and when I say the church can be a diminisher I mean that sometimes the moral message of the church, the truth which the church proclaims, can let people feel diminished. That doesn't necessarily mean that the Church teaching or the church doctrine is wrong or needs to be changed, but it means something has gone wrong if the truth which the church proclaims, fails to proclaim the truth about God.

In the Synod report, which I helped draw up in England and Wales, we had a very good line and now I remember helping to write it. I said it was a good line because it got taken up in the front part of the Global Report, and actually it made its way in a different form into the document that the bishops had with them back in October. One of the interesting things about the Senate is how things develop and that actually they become clearer over time and I find it very interesting that this line has made it through. What was that line? We said that people dreamt of a church that more fully lives a Christological paradox that can boldly proclaim its authentic teaching while at the same time offering a radical witness of radical inclusion and acceptance through its pastoral and accompanying discernment. Okay, rather long and laboured phrase but you get the idea: a church that boldly proclaims the truth at the same time as offering this radical message of inclusion.

Now, it was said especially of gay people, of young people, or women, of people in irregular marital situations. Many, many examples were given. But the point is that the people of God were saying, 'This is what we think the church should be', or rather, 'We think the church has got that wrong'. That is, if the truth that it proclaims wounds – or conversely if it's trying to be welcoming, but without proclaiming the truth – then there's something there which is not of Christ. What Christ does is proclaim a truth that heals: his healing teaches and his teaching heals.

So that question really touches on the culture of the church, how the church is – how we believe, rather than simply what we believe. Does the church primarily commute? Does it communicate a complex set of doctrines and prohibitions which lead people to feel diminished? Or does the church give a radical message of inclusion, of illumination, that allows people to be seen and to understand their dignity while at the same time inviting them into a journey of embracing the truth of what the Church teaches? You see, when the Pope says 'Todos, Todos, Todos', he means, (and he said this in various interviews), 'Let everybody come'. Everybody's on a journey and of course everybody needs accompaniment and needs to be taught, but the first message has to be one of radical acceptance.

So that means what? A culture of the church that is about listening, dialogue, consultation, participation, spiritual conversation, co-responsibility: all these words, which you've probably heard have been thrown up by the Synod on Synodality, are really targeting this as that's what it's really all about.

Why now? What's going on in our world? Why is it that the churches have empty? I want to mention a book some of you may well have read but isn't familiar to everybody. It's by Tomáš Halík. The book is 'The Afternoon of Christianity, and this book will be talked about a lot in a month's time. In 'The afternoon of Christianity' he takes Carl Jung's metaphor of the of the times a day to express the times of our life. So youth and young adulthood being the early morning; middle age being late morning and so on. Applied to the church we can say that the first 1000 years of Christianity was the morning and then we enter into the long noonday crisis of modernity. And now he says we're coming out of this period of modernity, when the Church of course, was built and changed a lot in order to respond to modernity, and we're now moving into this new period which he calls the afternoon of Christianity. I don't need to get into his explanation too much but just to leave you with this idea that the cogs of history are turning, the tectonic plates are shifting, and we are living through what Pope Francis calls not an era of change but a change of era and ethical transformation – and the church has been through many of these in the past: if you think how the Byzantine church looked in relation to the church of Jerusalem, or how the mediaeval church looked in relation to the church at the Counter Reformation. These are big shifts – big historical shifts. The church looks very different in one era, rather than another. That's the kind of thing we're now

living through, and at the heart of the crisis that we see at the moment it's that a model that was built for a previous era is no longer working and we need to find a new, cultural institutional expression. Not a new church, but a church that is new, to paraphrase Yves Congar. A church, in other words, that is capable of evangelising the era in which we are living rather than an era which has passed.

So at the heart of this shift, is what we would call the crisis of clericalism, and by clericalism, I do not mean the priesthood. The priesthood is an intrinsic part of what makes us Catholic. There will always be a priest: priests are utterly essential, but the crisis of the model which many of us grew up where we assume there will be very large numbers of vocations, large numbers of priests, large numbers of religious and the laity will be fundamentally educated and trained by that body of professional clergy – that era, I don't need to tell you, is very, very fast disappearing. A bishop stood up at the Synod in October, a European bishop, and he said since he had become a bishop, he had buried 300 Priests and ordained 50; an African bishop spoke about how he just has a tiny handful of priests and ministers vast rural area where there are huge numbers of Catholics and people being baptised. They're both telling the same story in a different way, which is that that model that we grew up with is fast disappearing.

So what do we need for the afternoon of Christianity? Fundamentally a cultural shift which allows us to enter to assume the responsibility, all of us, for the life and responsibility for and mission of the church and synodality is the vehicle that will take us there.

So let me just talk now about some of the fruits of this synodal process. I remember speaking to a woman called Janet in early 2022 when I was doing the report. She was a gay person in a same sex relationship, and she had become a Catholic in 2013 when she heard Francis say, 'Who am I to judge?', and she says she became a Catholic. She loves Francis and, she says, 'I realised that God loved me, and I realised that the Pope loved me but I didn't think the church loved me.' until she sat down in a spiritual conversation as part of the synodal process and she told her story – a complicated story, like most of our lives are complicated. And she was deeply heard, she was seen, she was recognised and it transformed her understanding of herself in relation to the church. The church was no longer the institution out there that judged her but she saw herself as part of this family. These are the kinds of transformations which synodality is enabling. And I want to suggest to you that if you really want to see the fruits of synodality, the place to look is probably not the documents: the place to look is probably in stories like this.

Now I'm not going to pretend that this has been an easy process. I could easily fill my time here with stories of resistance, of dysfunction of incredible obdurate rejection, of this call to conversion – and it's come from many, many different quarters and I don't need to list them but it's not just from a certain kind of conservative or traditionalist that fears change. There's also an angry reaction from some people who have a very long list of changes they think the church should be enacting *tomorrow*, and why doesn't the pope just *do* it? rather than all this process. Both of them of course, want to avoid the very thing which synodality is asking us to do, which is to enter into a deep discernment with each other in search of a consensus that reflects where the Spirit is calling us. They want to avoid that hard task of discernment of negotiation of sharing each other's stories. It's like in politics at the moment - we just want everything to be imposed centrally. But I've learned in the process of this being involved in the Synod, usually in my role as a synthesiser, helping to draw up these documents. I've come to see the truth of what Francis says about the wisdom of the faithful, the ordinary faithful people. He talks about the infallibility in believing, *infallibilitas in credenza* of the ordinary faithful people. In case you think that's a radically heretical statement, it comes straight from Lumen Gentium in Vatican II. When the faithful come together and they share, and when you see this consensus emerging, that's the Spirit speaking. And I've seen that for myself. It's amazing. When ordinary people are invited to share their intuitions, their experiences, then often you'll often discover there what the Spirit is saying rather than in long lectures by highly educated people on either side.

So there have been significant transformations already happening in the church, not least in this diocese, but also in the Australian plenary Council and so on, but mostly, it's

been this global process. That has been where we have been learning how to do this, and it is a learning. Somebody called it a boot camp. What we did in Rome, in October felt like a synodality boot camp. It was gruelling at times, but we're learning all the time how to do this.

As you know, it's passed through different stages. After the first diocesan national stage we drew up this document in Frascati and that then became the basis for the assemblies of the people of God, who met in seven continental assemblies for the first time ever in the church's history. There were seven continental assemblies. You probably heard very little about it because it was incredibly underreported, which, by the way, brings me to another question we can get into in the Q&A, which is the way the Synod is communicated, which is I think very poorly, but nonetheless, there we have the seven continental assemblies made up of bishops, priests, religious and laity. The European one was in Prague, but in six other places around the world – North America, Oceania, Africa, Latin America – these meetings took place and each of those produced a report, which was in turn synthesised. So what's going on here is you're taking the ordinary faithful sharing; we're sharing the fruits of their own discussion and discernment and we're taking them to a continent and we're saying, How does that look from Europe? How does that look from Africa? How does that look from Asia? So this is also about the continents of the world in our church being seen, to use Brooks' metaphor, being recognised and valued. In the Synod in Rome in October, the Africans said very forthrightly, to the Europeans, 'Your priorities are not our priorities. Your seminaries empty, ours are full; you have resources we don't; our church is young and growing, yours is old. And you care about the LGBT issue, we don't. For us that doesn't exist: what we care about is polygamy.' In traditional African societies, where a wealthy man might have a number of wives and becomes a Catholic. do you say to that man, you have to ditch four of your wives and keep one, in which case you're probably condemning those four to poverty? It's a pastoral question in Africa, which doesn't even occur to us in Europe. I get quite amused by seeing the Germans and the Africans because the Germans are big about 'Let's have same sex blessings' but the Africans are scandalised and the Africans start to talk about the Pastoral problems with polygamy and the Germans say 'This is outrageous.' So what scandalises one region doesn't scandalise another [but this process allows the centres of the church to be seen and to be recognised.]

What happened in October in Rome was quite remarkable because for the first time, a Synod of Bishops was held not in the Synod Hall in the theatre style arrangement, but rather in the pool of six audience hall with round tables laid out. You probably saw pictures – it was described by somebody as a wedding banquet style layout. There were 11 to each table, and at each table there were not just officials but a third of them were not bishops (or as the Vatican describes them, 'not endowed with the Episcopal newness.'). That's to say lay people, religious men and women, priests, deacons: for the first time, 25% of the assembly was made up of those non-bishops. And what they did was rather than listen to very long speeches, they used the method of 'Conversation in the Spirit', which I'm sure many of you have examined and are familiar with, but each person speaks for four minutes in answer to a question, and the others simply listened, and there were lots of questions in the document. Then there's a period of silence where you're listening to how what you've heard resonates with you in your heart, and then you share those resonances; then there's a third part which has a freer discussion, where you're invited to identify the convergences where we might agree, where we are, where we are coming together, but where also we might disagree - that's okay – and what further steps might be necessary.

A very, very laborious process. Each Conversation in the Spirit for each module lasted over two or three days, and then each one then did a report and so on. A very laborious, gruelling process, but boy was it incredibly fruitful and revealing. I wasn't at the table, I was with the theological experts, so we were on the edge in a way, but I spoke in the coffee breaks to the people at the tables, and they would say things like, 'It's amazing. I completely disagreed with what I was hearing, but I totally understood why they were saying what they were saying, because their experience is so different.' Or 'I started to see that we are part of the same body even though we might see things very, very differently.'

So, what you have in the Conversation in the Spirit is the church's own distinct method, which has emerged from the Synod on synodality, which allows us to enter into the space of deep listening, which is so [necessary] in our society, and in our church – we have, as you know, warring tribes in the church, competing narratives, shouting each other down on social media. How do we forge or create communion out of that, where we disagree so strongly? Well, the answer is through this deep listening to each other and to the Spirit because the Spirit reveals itself in the humble patient process of listening deeply to each other. The Pope once said this very beautifully. He said, 'It makes sense. If the Holy Spirit has been poured out on all the baptised, then it makes sense for the baptised to get together to hear what the Spirit is doing in each of our lives'.

So Synods are not deliberative bodies. They don't make decisions. They are consultative bodies. They are designed to enable the church to discern. And I think already we're seeing the effect of the Synod. And let me say where I think there is a very clear example of it. It may not have occurred to you, but just before Christmas, you may have heard, there was a declaration from the Vatican called '*Fiducia supplicans*', which means 'supplicating trust', which created lots of headlines because it was about the blessing of people engaged in gay relationships or same sex relationships, actually also in other kinds of so called irregular relationships, but the media has obviously focused very heavily on people in same sex relationships. Now, why do I mention this is the fruit of synodality? Remember what we put in the England and Wales report about the church proclaiming its truth, boldly, sticking to that truth, but at the same time offering a message of radical inclusion and acceptance? What *Fiducia supplicans* is that Christian understanding and doctrine of marriage is very clear: man, woman for life, open to life and so on, but that people who are in a same sex relationship who come to a priest and say, 'Father bless us' or 'We're in need of a blessing' or we need help or we're struggling or whatever, then that priest can give them a blessing, not blessing the relationship but blessing them, because everybody who comes to God and seeks his grace from whatever place they are in, whether they are murderers in prison or whatever, God always responds to that request for grace. That's what it says in the document. In one of my articles on this, [referred to] the film Rocky. There's this great moment where Rocky's off to a big fight. He drives around and he just goes to see his parish priest who's asleep, -- an Italian priest – and Rocky pulls up in his car with a big screeching of brakes. And he calls, 'Fr. Carmine! Fr. Carmine! And the Italian priest opens the window and says 'Eh! What's happening?' And Rocky says, 'Father, I'm on my way to the fight and I got a baby on the way, and I want to blessing so that if I get beat up it's not so bad, so I'm there for my baby.' Okay, the guys in an illegitimate marriage relationship with a baby, he's off to professional boxing, which I think is condemned somewhere in the Catechism. What is the priest do? Does the priest stop and give them a lecture? No. He says 'In the name of Father Son, Holy Spirit. God go with you.' That's how God responds to us; that's how priests also are called to offer that.

Anyway, as you know, it's provoked, as you know, a great storm of protests and rejection, which is fascinating because ultimately it shows that for some people, trying to bring together these two things, truth and mercy, is a great struggle. I mention it as a fruit, but the other interesting consequence is that the African bishops said we do not want to do it in Africa, because in Africa homosexuality is a scandal, and they organised a very synodal process. They went to see Pope Francis and produced a document, with his approval, saying we won't do it. Why? Well, because in Europe and in the West, nowadays, the exclusion of gay people is the source of scandal. Whereas in Africa, homosexuality is a scandal. This isn't about a difference between what the Church teaches but it's about understanding that different cultures are able to do things at different speeds.

So I want to suggest that *Fiducia supplicans*' is a major fruit of Synodality.

And finally, just about the path to October. I want to recommend that you read – it's not particularly great reading, but nonetheless, I think you should read it – this document which was produced by the October assembly, called 'A Synodal Church in Mission.' This is the fruit of that month's deliberation where 365 members of the church from across the world came together: this is the consensus; this is what they voted on, well over 95% in each case,

and particularly the part 2, 'All disciples, all missionaries', because here you start to see very clearly a new culture of the church emerging, which I've already described in some ways, but it's very beautifully described here. [It's a church] in which we are discerning all the time, our ministries, our calls, our vocation, within the church, all of us and how we are each called to assume more and more of that obligation to the church. There's a particularly interesting section on women, which I think has become one of the great fruits of the Synod – there has been a really big attention to that question. Interestingly, the question of the Deaconate went in an interesting direction. If the Spirit of this time is calling on us to recognise that authority and ministry are being exercised in different ways in the church, do we better recognise that by expanding the clergy? Or do we start to say, actually, there's something happening at the moment with women and ministry which needs recognising in and of itself?

So there's some very interesting questions around there. None of this is settled, but you can see some very, very interesting ideas emerging.

'Toward October 2024' is a short document which has been issued by the Secretariat inviting us in the local churches to read this document and to think about how we now, tomorrow, can begin to implement some of those things. And they quote number 27 of *Evangelii Gaudium*, the famous paragraph about a missionary option in the church and the need to deepen this co-responsibility of the people of God. So it's asking us in the local churches to do this and to report back, and they're stressing this is not about reopening synodality; it is about involving people in groups with a whole variety of experience and skills and charisms to try to understand how responsibility in and for the church can be better exercised at every level. They're asking us to do this, to have projects, to write them up and to report back through our bishops but also directly to Rome so that in October, when those same 350 members gather again, they have concrete examples that they can point to, of where and how this can happen.

I could tell you many stories about how because I learned in October talking to many bishops how this is already changing the church. How in Quebec archdiocese, for example, no church meeting ever begins without 20 minutes of *Lectio Divina* – that's been implemented by the bishop and it's had a huge effect; or the Diocese of San Diego where the fruits of the Synod on young people and the marriage and the family are considered in synodal assemblies across the diocese, which then leads to new pastoral practices and so on. So there is a need to collect and gather these stories. It is happening, but perhaps the most important thing that's happening is at this level in parishes. In my parish, using conversation in the Spirit, we responded to the invasion of Ukraine by Putin by holding a series of synodal listenings. Other churches got involved in the local area and we now host five Ukrainian families across many different churches. We held an exercise called 'Ears to hear' last year, which has identified four priorities for the parish going forward, but none of these initiatives yet really do what synodality is inviting us to, which is deeply listen to the people outside, the people who no longer belong, but people who tick that box marked 'None'. This is the next stage of the Synod in which I think, as we learn to become synodal will need to become an important part of how we are and who we are as we move into the afternoon of Christianity.