

**INFORMATIVE NOTE ON PROPOSED PROCESS**

The consultation which took place before the Extraordinary Session of the Synod last year was hurried and had many flaws in both process and language. Despite these deficiencies, overall it did bring rich suggestions from around the world which were taken up at the Synod.

This year I propose that in each parish - **before the end of January 2015** - each Parish Pastoral Council and each Parish team meet and set out a plan regarding how the reflection process should take place in the Parish. Given the extensive content of the documentation it might be useful to set up a small working-group to work through it.

The reflection process itself should take place **during the months of February and March 2015**. I leave it up to each Parish to determine how that discussion should take place. The wider the participation the better!

The responses of each parish should be sent to the Office for Evangelization and Ecumenism **before the end of March 2015**, so that a consolidated report of the Irish Church can be prepared in time to prepare the formal working document of the Synod.

There is an important distinction between purposes of the two Synods which should be reflected in the discussion process. The aim of the extraordinary Synod was to gather *factual information* about the situation of the marriage and the family in our times. The aim of the Ordinary Synod is to take up the conclusions of the extraordinary Synod and begin to reflect on *how our pastoral services to support marriage and family life should be strengthened and renewed*.

It is also important to look at the broad range of challenges which must be addressed in the pastoral care of marriage and the family and not just at some controversial questions. The Synod discussed questions such as preparation for marriage and the education of young people to the Christian understanding of marriage. It spoke of a renewed itinerary of faith which might accompany men and women during the course of their married and family life. It looked at ways in which the Church can reach out towards those who simply cohabit or enter only civil marriages and lead them, step by step, towards a fuller understanding and appreciation of the Sacrament of Marriage. It spoke of the role of the family in passing on the faith to the coming generations. These are all questions which are vital for the Church.

I attach to this letter a copy of the final document of the Extraordinary Synod, the *Relatio Sinodi*. Hopefully this document will soon be available in print form, but rather than wait for that I feel that the process of consultation should begin as soon as possible.

I also attach a list of questions prepared by the General Secretariat of the Synod to guide the reflection worldwide. It is not necessary for each parish to answer all the questions. Each parish can choose those which they feel most suited. You may find that some of the language of the questionnaire could be improved. It is always hard to produce a document for the universal Church with the variety of linguistic expressions that exist. It is however important that changes in language do not alter the content of the questions.