



**Bishop Brian McGee of Argyll and The Isles, representing Scotland at the Synod in Rome continues his reflections for us. He writes:**

Today (22 October) we finished our 4th module with only the final one remaining. Participants prepare for the module's topic in advance. Each module begins with Mass in St Peter's Basilica which is followed by an introductory session delivered by theologians. The Small Groups then meet for two initial sessions followed by three General Sessions when all 37 Groups deliver their draft reports and there is also opportunity for individual spoken interventions. Finally the Small Group meets again, and in light of further reflection after the Assembly's comments, complete together and submit their report. Each module takes about 18 hours of listening, sharing and prayer. Very thorough!

As well as collaborating in the 4 Small Group reports I have also written four personal submissions - one for each module - and made two spoken interventions during the General Assembly. I have tried to represent the views I heard during the consultation in Scotland over the past two years as well as expressing my own thoughts in line with my conscience. These thoughts have matured over the past three weeks, for which I am grateful.

An important group at the Synod are the 'experts', among whom are the facilitators who ensure that the Small Groups run smoothly. A second group of experts are the Theologians which also includes Canon Lawyers. The Synod has almost 40 official theologians: male and female; clergy, religious and lay who hail from across the world. I have enjoyed speaking with them.

They have a difficult task. Since the Synod began the theologians have received over 1,500 written submissions! These are separated into the 5 official language groups and translated. Their task is to create a synthesis looking for common themes, both convergences and divergences, without dismissing minority opinions as well as recording potential complications

The theologians have finished synthesising the earlier modules and they must continue their work over the weekend. We are grateful for their commitment and wait with interest to read the fruit of their labours.

The Work continues on the Synod's synthesis report before being made public. It is important to remember that the Synod was never intended to resemble a Parliament's debating chamber but rather is a spiritual experience where communal discernment of God's Will is the primary purpose. This goal is beautifully symbolised by the prominent position of God's Word and the icon of Our Lady.



On the Synod's first day the Scriptures were solemnly processed into the Hall and then displayed for all to see. We are constantly encouraged to reflect on God's Word. The icon is greatly loved by the locals and is called Protectress (or health) of the Roman People. It is believed that the artist was St Luke. The Synod has been placed under the protection of our Blessed Mother. This evening all participants will pray the Rosary together. As we enter into our final few days please pray that like Mary we will treasure God's Word in our hearts and thus be guided by the Holy Spirit and nothing else.

**On a personal note the Bishop writes:**

With over 400 people participating in the Synod getting accommodation was a thought. I was very fortunate that Bishop Alan McGuckian of Raphoe (St Columba's birth place), and himself a Jesuit, got a room for me at the Jesuit General Curia (their headquarters).

It is really handy, being less than a 10 minute walk to the Paul VI Hall in the Vatican. My room is good and the food excellent. The Jesuits themselves have been extremely welcoming. The Community is roughly 50 men with maybe another 25 visitors, mainly involved with the Synod. It is fascinating chatting with them over meals as they come from every part of the world and involved in works such as education, care of refugees, writing and spiritual direction. St Ignatius of Loyola founded the Society of Jesus in 1540 and it is wonderful to see such rich fruit still being borne.

The desire to discern God's Will, which was a great charism of Ignatius, permeates the Synod. Of course, Pope Francis is the first Jesuit to be elected Pope.

