

# French Revolution: A diocesan assembly split 50-50 with laity

## Heeding a message from Pope Francis, one diocese is seeking to 'build bridges' with its parishioners

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Two years after the closure of its synod, the Diocese of Saint-Brieuc and Tréguier in Côtes-d'Armor, northern France, has announced the creation of a diocesan assembly of which half will be lay people.

Amid a crisis of trust in the Church, it says, this initiative aspires to involve the laity more.

The information was made official one year and one week after [Pope Francis' strong call](#), in his [Letter to the People of God](#), for the "ecclesial and social transformation" of Catholic communities throughout the world.

The upcoming creation of a 150-member diocesan assembly, half of whom are lay people chosen from the parishes, was announced publicly on Aug. 29 by Bishop Denis Moutel of Saint-Brieuc and Tréguier. It is expected the assembly will meet annually, probably starting next spring.

"This project was born in the wake of our diocesan synod, which gave us a concrete and living experience of synodality between 2015 and 2017, with the aim of involving as many people as possible," said Bishop Moutel.

"At the time, nearly a thousand small synodal teams had gathered in this framework. At a time when several cases — scandals of abuse of authority and sexual assaults — have shaken the Church, there has been a strong demand for more bridges."

### **Involve the faithful more**

While fighting against the culture of clericalism — among priests, as well as among parishioners — this initiative seeks to involve the faithful at the grassroots level more. Valuing their talents, paying attention to others (especially the poorest) and listening to the word of God.

In the wake of the proceedings of the synod, the work of the new diocesan entity will focus on pastoral orientations yet to be determined.

Shortly after the announcement of its creation, expectations already seem high.

"Among its areas of reflection, I hope that it will address the worrying question of catechesis today, and how to make proposals to the children of a new generation, especially in rural areas," says Father Guy Marzin, parish priest at Guingamp and member of the Presbyteral Council.

"We must not bet everything on piety — it is also essential to form people and to deepen their knowledge of the Church's social doctrine," said Jef Philippe, permanent deacon and episcopal delegate for the Breton faith and culture.

## **'Decision-makers'**

It is still too early, at this stage, to evaluate the willingness of parishioners to mobilize in this new site, the outlines of which should be specified at the next back-to-school Masses. But many of them already believe that the formula will hit the nail on the head.

"In this climate of current crisis the laity, more seeking explanations and more educated, want to have their say. The idea will really be to come together, to exchange, to work as a team on the future of the Church," said Philippe.

Another notable advance is that this initiative will contribute to alleviating the pastoral burden of priests, who are too often overburdened in major diocesan meetings.

"Not all of them will be members of this assembly, which will make it possible, by involving the laity more, not to disperse our exercise too much between different bodies," adds Father Marzin, who heads a parish of 60,000 inhabitants and three other priests.

At the end of August, the bishop again announced the establishment of a diocesan missionary council, composed of 25 members who will meet four times a year to reflect on other important pastoral challenges facing the diocese.

"While not so long ago, we attended Mass without really being a part of it, all these changes encourage us to move from a consumer attitude of the Church to that of a decision-maker," Philippe said.

"The establishment of this assembly may not be entirely obvious at first, but it is essential. I hope that this formula will continue to spread elsewhere."