

World-wide Synod of Bishops 2023 -The Synodal Process

(Extracts from the Cardinal's letter to the clergy and from the Bishops of England and Wales)

The Holy Father has called the entire Catholic Church to embark on a 'Synodal Path', in which he seeks to refresh the mission of the Church and to do so in a way which expresses the Synodal nature of the Church. We must respond to this call. The Synod gathering of Bishops will take place in 2023.

The timescale for this process set by the General Secretary of the Synod of Bishops requires us to launch an initiative this autumn. Every Parish will have needed, sooner or later, to set in train – namely, to reflect together on what we have learnt from the pandemic, how it has changed us, how to renew sacramental life and how to renew our sense of mission and purpose.

Up to now our reflection of these vital questions has, for the most part, been confined to us clergy. The Holy Father's call is that this reflection is now extended to all the faithful who have shared in this time of crisis and who will make important contributions to the revitalising of our '**communion, participation and mission**' – the key themes in the title of this Synodal invitation.

Further information will be provided on ways in which our parish can participate in this 'Synodal path', appropriate to our circumstances. This will also indicate how other groups and bodies in the diocese may do likewise.

It involves everyone. Schools, young people, hospital chaplaincies, university chaplaincies, prison chaplaincies, the religious and consecrated communities, the societies of apostolic life, those with a distinctive charism in the church all have a voice that speaks into the conversation. Ecumenical and Interreligious engagement is also encouraged, and this is best facilitated at the local level. This is an important voice from outside the Church that offers an insight into the collaboration for the good of all. Together we can enrich and help each other to respond afresh to the mission given to us by the Lord.

The whole Synodal Process is a prayerful process, rooted in the encounter with Jesus in the prayerful reading of the Sacred Scriptures and through the liturgical life of the Church and inspired by an openness to the movement of the Holy

Spirit. Listening to each other is very important. Pope Francis says of the Synod of Bishops gathering itself: "we listen, we discuss in groups but above all we pay attention to what the Spirit has to say to us". This discernment is not an activity done in isolation. Mutual listening and reflection are vital, as what is proposed grows from the unity and conviction that comes from the lived practice of faith within the community.

The Synodal Process is a pilgrimage of the whole People of God in discerning the way the Church needs to be in its localities and worldwide at this moment in time. Anyone who has been on a pilgrimage knows that the journey there is not just travelling, but an integral part of the whole. The Synod in 2023 will be an important moment in the pilgrimage but not an end point. All who commit this process in prayer, open their hearts to the Holy Spirit and speak with confidence and engage in mutual listening will assist the Church like a pilgrim.

Pope Francis has called this moment in human history as "a time of reckoning". The Synodal Process is for the whole Church not just in England and Wales and the themes from the title of the Synod can help in understanding why now is the right time to consider this:

Communion – bringing the people together as communities in the local Church, begins this prayerful insight into the ways of the Holy Spirit.

Participation – the reflections that the local Churches and communities are undertaking regarding the past 15 months of pandemic form the context of how the Church in England and Wales looks forward, not backwards, to revitalising its mission of bringing the Good News to all. The gentle call of invitation to the full practice of Catholic life, with the Eucharist at the centre of all the Church does, is an integral part of the "walking together".

Mission – understanding the local situation, will feed necessarily into an overview of the mission in the whole diocese.

I pray that during this process every voice will be welcomed and valued, and where no one feels excluded from the embrace of God's love.

FR. JOHN