



Vision for the Synodal Journey



Diocese of Westminster



Synod Prayer

Adsumus, Sancte Spiritus

Prayer of invocation to the Holy Spirit

We stand before You, Holy Spirit,
as we gather together in Your name.

With You alone to guide us,
make Yourself at home in our hearts;
Teach us the way we must go
and how we are to pursue it.

We are weak and sinful;
do not let us promote disorder.
Do not let ignorance lead us down the wrong path
nor partiality influence our actions.

Let us find in You our unity
so that we may journey together to eternal life
and not stray from the way of truth
and what is right.

All this we ask of You,
who are at work in every place and time,
in the communion of the Father and the Son,
forever and ever. Amen.



“That very same day, two of them were on their way to a village called Emmaus...and they were talking together about all that had happened. Now as they talked this over, Jesus himself came up and walked by their side...” (Luke 24:13-16)

Introduction

In October 2023 the bishops of the Church will come together in Synod. The path toward this Synod, ‘For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, Mission’, begins in October this year, 2021, in a worldwide invitation to all the faithful. Pope Francis has invited the entire Church to ‘reflect on a theme that is decisive for its life and mission’, the path of synodality.

Purpose of the Synod

“The purpose of this Synod... is intended to inspire people to dream about the Church we are called to be, to make people’s hopes flourish, to stimulate trust, to bind up wounds, to weave new and deeper relationships, to learn from one another, to build bridges, to enlighten minds, warm hearts, and restore strength to our hands for our common mission (PD, 32).

Thus the objective of this synodal process is not only a series of exercises that start and stop, but rather a journey of growing authentically towards the communion and mission that God calls the Church to live out in the third millennium.” (Vademecum for the Synod on Synodality 1.3)

What is meant by “synod” and “synodality”?

‘Synod’ is a word used over the centuries, whose meaning draws on the deepest themes of our faith. It comes from two Greek words: ‘συν’ (with) and ‘ὁδός’ (path), it indicates the path along which the People of God walk together.’
Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church, 3


‘Synodality’ is the process of ‘journeying together’, a way of being the Church as envisaged by the Second Vatican Council (cf Lumen Gentium 12), journeying forwards in mission, together in communion where everybody has a part to play. ‘First and foremost, synodality denotes the particular style that qualifies the life and mission of the Church, expressing her nature as the People of God journeying together and gathering in assembly, summoned by the Lord Jesus in the power of the Holy Spirit to proclaim the Gospel. Synodality ought to be expressed in the Church’s ordinary way of living and working.’ (Vademecum 1.2)

Pope Francis has affirmed that: “A synodal Church is a Church which listens... The faithful People, the College of Bishops, the Bishop of Rome: all listening to each other; and all listening to the Holy Spirit.”



Our Context

Jesus said to them, "What matters are you discussing as you walk along?" (Luke 24: 17)



This call to the synodal journey takes place in a period of global pandemic. Some parts of the world appear to be emerging from it, while other parts of the world are still suffering its full effects. The pandemic has exacerbated already existing inequalities and inequities in the world. 'At the same time, this global crisis has revived our sense that we are all in the same boat, and that "one person's problems are the problems of all"' (Vademecum. 1.1)

The Synod calls us, as urged by the Second Vatican Council, to 'scrutinise the signs of the times and interpret them in the light of the Gospel' (Lumen Gentium 4). It should, therefore, cause us to reflect on what we have learnt and experienced in the life of the Church during this time, and to reflect too on the anxieties and fears it has evoked within us.

'This journey, which follows in the wake of the Church's "renewal" proposed by the Second Vatican Council, is both a gift and a task: by journeying together and reflecting together on the journey that has been made, the Church will be able to learn through her experience which processes can help her to live communion, to achieve participation, to open herself to mission. Our "journeying together" is, in fact, what most effectively enacts and manifests the nature of the Church as the pilgrim and missionary People of God.' (Synod Preparatory Document, 1) So here are the intertwined elements of a synodal Church, that which the title of the Synod proposes: communion, participation and mission.

Baptismal Calling

'Every synodal process, in which the Bishops are called to discern what the Spirit is saying to the Church, not by themselves but by listening to the People of God, is an evident form of that "journeying together" which makes the Church grow.' (Synod Preparatory Document 14)

Our responsibility to share in this synodal journey, this journeying together, is by virtue of our Baptism, which makes all the baptised participants in Christ's priestly, prophetic and kingly ministry. Pope Francis asks us all 'to enter with confidence and courage into the path of synodality. In this "journeying together," we ask the Spirit to help us discover how communion, which brings together in unity the variety of gifts, charisms, and ministries, is for the mission: a synodal Church is a Church "going forth," a missionary Church "whose doors are open" (EG, no. 46). (Preparatory Document 15)

"...synodality represents the path by which the Church can be renewed by the action of the Holy Spirit, listening together to what God has to say to his people. However, this journey together not only unites us more deeply with one another as the People of God, it also sends us out to pursue our mission as a prophetic witness that embraces the entire family of humanity, together with our fellow Christian denominations and other faith traditions. (Vademecum 1.1)

'...the Synodal Process is carried out through listening to all the baptised..... Special care should be taken to involve those persons who may risk being excluded: women, the handicapped, refugees, migrants, the elderly, people who live in poverty, Catholics who rarely or never practise their faith, etc. Creative means should also be found in order to involve children and youth. (Vademecum. 2.1)



A Spiritual Process: Listening, Discernment and Participation

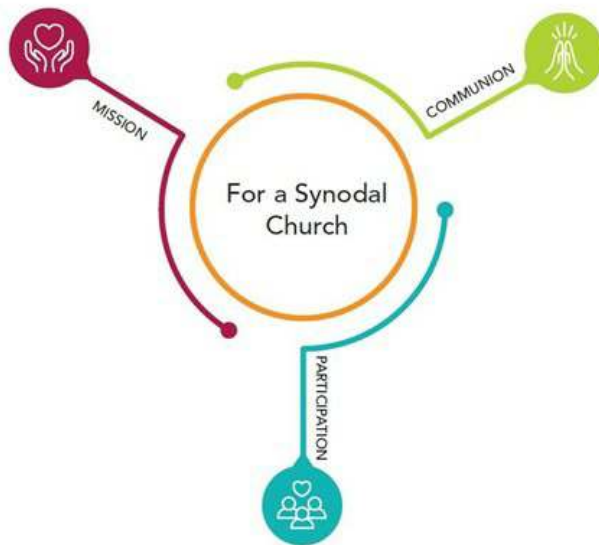
“If listening is the method of the Synodal Process, and discerning is the aim, then participation is the path. Fostering participation leads us out of ourselves to involve others who hold different views than we do.” (Vademecum. 2.2)

During this first part of the synodal journey our parishes are called to reflect on the question of how the Church carries out her mission of proclaiming the Gospel. This requires first a willingness to listen to the Holy Spirit, to hear where the Spirit is calling each one of us, to be prepared to meet the Spirit in others – to be open to the Spirit speaking in them. We are called to consider how this “journeying together” is happening today in our own parish or community and the wider Church, and to listen to what steps the Spirit is inviting us to take so we can grow in our “journeying together”

‘The Synodal Process is first and foremost a spiritual process... It requires us to learn and exercise the art of personal and communal discernment. We listen to each other, to our faith tradition, and to the signs of the times in order to discern what God is saying to all of us. Pope Francis characterises the two interrelated goals of this process of listening: “to listen to God, so that with him we may hear the cry of his people; to listen to his people until we are in harmony with the will to which God calls us.” (Vademecum 2.2)

Conclusion: Three Dimensions: Communion, Participation, Mission

“By journeying together and reflecting together on the journey that has been made, the Church will be able to learn through her experience which processes can help her to live communion, to achieve participation, to open herself to mission.” (Synod Preparatory Document, 1)



The three dimensions of the theme of the Synod are communion, participation and mission, three interrelated pillars, which we cannot separate one from the other.

God gathers us together in COMMUNION. In our diversity, and together, through the inspiration of God’s Word and the celebration of the Eucharist, we are called to be active, to respond, to be involved, and to serve one another through the gifts we have received from the Holy Spirit. The very variety of the gifts of a whole community, many unrecognised by others, invites PARTICIPATION in this synodal journey, in this journeying together, through prayer, dialogue, listening, discerning. Through all of this runs a consciousness that the Church exists to evangelise, to witness to the love of God not only in our own communities but throughout all humanity – our MISSION. The synodal process that we enter upon is intended to enable the Church to be a better witness to the Gospel, especially with those who live on the margins of our world.

The role of our parish communities, and thus, each one of us, is to be a significant, and ongoing part of that process, for this journeying together, this synodal journey, is a continuous journey, not just one moment in time. ‘A synodal Church is a Church “going forth,” a missionary Church “whose doors are open”’ (Preparatory Document 15).

Additional Resources

This resource should be read alongside the “Leader’s Guide to Synodal Pathway” on the Westminster Diocesan web page <https://rcdow.org.uk/synod/>.

Other resources on the Synod web page <https://www.synod.va/en.html> including the Vatican Synod Office Preparatory Document: <https://www.synod.va/en/news/preparatory-document.html>

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