

Helping people walk the Synodal Way

Introduction

The current Synodal Process we are undertaking is guided by a fundamental question:

How does 'journeying together' take place today on different levels (from the local level to the universal one), allowing the Church to proclaim the Gospel? And, what steps is the Spirit inviting us to take in order to grow as a synodal Church? (PD 2)

The Archbishop is currently inviting us to take part in the diocesan listening phase of the Synod. Each local parish is invited to host a meeting or series of meetings where conversations about the mission of the Lord in the parish and diocese can be prayerfully examined and where the will of the Lord can be discerned, as we seek to grow in faith and number.

Coming together in this way, we place ourselves in the presence of the Lord, and one another, to hear his voice more clearly. All of this is done to help us to witness more effectively in our parish, diocese and Church.

To help you in this phase of the process, we are offering some meeting templates, together with prayer resources for those meetings, to help you - and those with whom you gather together - to listen and hear what the Lord is saying to his Church. We are also offering guidance in how you might approach the selection of your parish delegates. Every person matters to the Lord and his Church, every voice matters and every story is important.

To help in gathering together people from across the life of your parish and community, we have also included some commonly asked questions to help you explain the Synodal Way and to encourage people to enter into this vital period of discernment.

Websites: rcaos.org.uk/synod
aec.rcaos.org.uk/synod
Email: synod@rcaos.org.uk
Address: Synod Listening Group, c/o Archbishop's House,
150 St George's Road, London, SE1 6HX



Some commonly asked questions

What is a synod?

In a synod the whole Church enters into a process of discernment with the aid of the Holy Spirit. It involves all bishops, priests, religious, and lay Catholics, each participating according to the gifts and charisms of their vocation. As everyone journeys together, speaking openly and listening with the heart, we can learn to hear the voice of the Lord. Pope Francis describes it like this:

‘Synodality is a style, it is a walk together, and it is what the Lord expects from the Church of the third millennium’ (Address to the International Theological Commission, 29 November 2019).

What is the Synod on?

‘For a synodal Church: communion, participation and mission.’

The Holy Father wants the Church to grow in three key areas: Communion, Participation and Mission. By growing together in Communion, the people of God deepen their participation in the life of the Church and so become more effective missionary disciples in the world.

The purpose of the Synod is to help us grow together and so equip us to call more men and women to enter into life with the Lord Jesus. With the Lord as our guide, the Church continues her mission of inviting others to join the Way.

At the practical level, this will involve people gathering together for prayer and conversation at every level of the Church, local, diocesan and universal. This is the first time that the whole Church has engaged in such a threefold listening process ahead of a Synod of Bishops. The fruit of the discernment at the local level will feed into the discussion at the diocesan level, which in turn will feed into a continental phase featuring national episcopal conferences. Finally, the fruits of this discernment will be presented to the Holy Father when he meets with the bishops of the Church in October 2023.

Why are we doing a listening phase?

‘One listening to the others; and all listening to the Holy Spirit.’

In order to journey together, the Holy Father wants every person to take their place at the heart of the Church and to hear every voice. To help us in discerning the voice of the Lord, each local parish will be encouraged to gather together, pray, study the scriptures, and work through some questions about the mission of the Church in your area. Pope Francis wants to take seriously what is happening in the Church at every level, and so your parish is important. As we listen attentively to what the Holy Spirit is saying, we learn how to respond to where he is leading us in mission. We gain a new insight into how to apply the teaching of the Church into the context in which the Lord has planted us.

How can we describe discernment?

The Synodal Process entails a discernment process oriented towards consensus. We listen to each other in order to discern what God is saying to all of us. This kind of discernment is not only a one-time event, but ultimately a way of life, grounded in Christ, following the lead of the Holy Spirit, living for the greater glory of God. **Communal discernment helps to build flourishing and resilient communities for the mission of the Church today.** Discernment is a grace from God, but it requires our human involvement in simple ways: praying, reflection, paying attention to one's inner disposition, listening and talking to one another in an authentic, meaningful, and welcoming way. Discernment, in this spiritual key, plants seeds that can bear the fruits of fraternity, healing, communion, mission, and more. God comes to lead and inspire us as we seek to discern His will.

Can people submit their contributions outside of the parish listening process?

Yes. However, there is a real benefit in shared prayerful discernment. Alternative means to contribute are via the diocesan and Agency for Evangelisation and Catechesis websites; as well as by post. Details overleaf and on page 1.

Next Steps?

Announce it at Mass

Inform the people that the Synod is happening and that there will be a number of opportunities to share and listen to each other and, ultimately, to the Holy Spirit.

Put it in the newsletter

The Archbishop is calling us to take part in the listening phase of the Synod which Pope Francis has invited the whole Church to join. As the parish of [...] we will be holding a meeting(s) on [...] for more information visit our website [parish website?] or [<https://rcaos.org.uk/synod>]

Personally invite people

Personal invitation is one of the most effective ways of encouraging people to attend. You may wish to ask specific groups to have their own meetings before holding a general parish meeting.

Help in selecting your parish delegates who will support the process in your parish and attend the diocesan meeting in your area of the diocese, can be found in the document: **Selecting Parish Delegates**

Ways to submit contributions and find out more information

Websites: rcaos.org.uk/synod (from 18 October 2021)
aec.rcaos.org.uk/synod (from 11 October 2021)

Email: synod@rcaos.org.uk

Address: Synod Listening Group, c/o Archbishop's House,
150 St George's Road, London, SE1 6HX