



Synod 2021 - 2023: For a synodal Church: communion, participation and mission.

Our holy Father in May this year called for all the baptised to contribute to the Synod of Bishops in 2023 whose theme is Towards a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, Mission. Our participation in preparing for the Synod is to engage in a process of prayerful discernment. It is a spiritual exercise the fruit of which forms the material content of the Synod itself. To aid us in this spiritual discernment the General Secretariat of the Synod have supplied us with 10 questions to which we seek the Holy Spirit's response together in prayerful reflection on Holy Scripture. Each parish, religious community, school, chaplaincy, sodality and organisation within the Catholic Church are asked to gather together in prayer over the next 4 months to contemplate with the aid of scripture these questions. Our holy Father is especially keen that this endeavour include those on the peripheries of the Church e.g. Travelling Community, migrants, refugees, etc.

What you may ask is Synodality?

Jesus is revealed as 'the way the truth and the life.' It is to him who is our way we turn. The first name given to the Church was 'followers of the way'. Synodality is much more than ecclesial meetings and administration. It is "the specific *modus vivendi* (way of living) et *operandi* (way of operating/being) of the Church, the People of God, which reveals and gives substance to her being as communion when all her members journey together, gather in assembly and take an active part in her evangelising mission."

We are being called...

to discover the face and form of a synodal church in which "everyone has something to learn. The faithful people, the college of bishops, the Bishop of Rome: all listening to each other, and all listening to the Holy Spirit, 'the Spirit of truth' in order to know what He 'says to the Churches'."

We are asked therefore 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, for the mission: a synodal Church is a Church "going forth," a missionary Church "whose doors are open."

It calls us also to deepen relationships with other Churches and Christian communities. With which we are united by one Baptism. It is even broader and embraces all humanity whose "joys and hopes, griefs and anxieties" we share.

A synodal Church is a prophetic sign for the community of nations to pursue the good of all: practicing synodality is today for the Church the most evident way to be "the universal sacrament of salvation" "a sign and instrument of intimate union with God and of the unity of the whole human race."

The Fundamental Question

A synodal Church, in announcing the Gospel, does so "journeying together:" But how is this "journeying together" happening today in our particular Church? What steps does the Spirit invite us to take in order to grow in our "journeying together"?

We are called to

Ask ourselves what experiences in our particular Church does the fundamental question calls to mind?

Reread these experiences in great depth: What joys did they provoke? What difficulties and obstacles have they encountered? What wounds have they brought to light? What insights have they elicited?

Gather the fruits to share: Where, in these experiences, does the voice of the Spirit resound? What is he asking of us? What are the points to be confirmed, the prospects of change, the steps to be taken? Where do we register a consensus? What paths are opening up for our particular Church.

What do we do next?

Begin by talking about the fundamental question to family, friends, the lapsed you know, neighbours and invite them to a gathering each month (dates to be announced) in the parish church to participate in a process of reflective discernment. To listen to what each other has to offer after being prompted by the Holy Spirit. To discern the consensus among the fruit of the process and to record them in response to the questions under consideration.

What happens after our gatherings?

These records will be sent to the Diocesan Contact Team who will collate all the responses from all the groups, parishes, schools, chaplaincies, etc. into a 10 page document and present them to the Archbishop who in turn will present them to our Bishops' Conference for their discernment of what the Holy Spirit is saying to the Churches. The Conference of Bishops' will then forward the fruit of their discernment to the Regional European Conference of Bishops who will collate the responses from all the European countries and send them to the General Secretariat for the Synod of Bishops in time for the Synod itself.

This is a momentous and blessed time for us in the Church. It is a joyous time of blessing and grace for us. It is a time of conversion, not to set up a new Church but to build a different kind of Church. A Church which is open-armed and welcoming, a Church that is radiant with the presence of Christ and vibrant, alive in the holy Spirit, a Church that is flourishing in her mission to preach and live the way of the gospel life.

Our parishes "journeying together."

Parish/Group Facilitators

Each parish priest is asked to provide 2 facilitators who will steer the parish through the whole listening/discerning process and who will record the voiced consensus from the Guided Meditation or Lectio Divina. We are currently arranging training half-days for all our parish facilitators and will inform you once we have dates and venues fixed. Should groups be formed i.e. sodalities, chaplaincies, etc, the same applies. Should a parish/group feel it would benefit by physically joining with another parish/group in this process then it is free to do so.

The Ten Synodal Questions

By no means are parishes or groups that meet expected to respond to all 10 questions. However we do suggest a minimum of 6 be the foci of the Hours of Discernment.

Timetabling the Hours of Discernment

Across the diocese of Wales and England those involved with the preparations for the Synod are acutely aware of the extremely tight timetable. We need to have the parish reporting the fruits of their discernment by no latter than the 22nd January 2022. This will enable the Diocesan Contact team to collate the responses into a 10 page document for the Archbishop to take on to PHASE 2 of the Synodal Process at the Bishops' Conference of England and Wales.

Diocesan Synod Webpage, Social Media and Dedicated Email: synod@menevia.org

We are in the process of setting up a diocesan webpage on the Diocesan Website which will post all the relevant documents of the Synod and as a signpost to all participating parishes. We are also looking at setting up a Diocesan Facebook Page.

To assist with this a dedicated email address has been set up for submissions and any correspondence parishes, sodalities, chaplaincies or individuals wish to make. We acknowledge that not everyone may be able to physically participate in a parish event, as a last resort families or groups of friends who are able to gather in homes may wish to make known the fruit of their prayerful reflections in response to the questions by email. It is important to stress that this is a spiritual work to be undertaken where 2 or 3 are gathered in the name of the Lord to pray and reflect.

Schools

We are grateful to Mr Paul White our Diocesan Education Officer and Mrs. Sue Roberts Head Teacher in St. Francis of Assisi School in Milford Haven who are co-ordinating the involvement of our Primary Schools in the preparation programme. It is hoped that through the schools we will be able to encourage parents/grandparents, to participate in the parish Hours of Discernment too.

Our secondary schools will also be participating in the process and the Diocesan Contact Team are in contact with the Heads of RE in each school. Again we ask that all schools submit their reports back by 22nd January, 2022.

Female Religious Houses

Sr Anne Reddington has kindly accepted the oversight of involving our religious sisters in the Synodal process.

Re-presentation of the Fruits of our Discernment.

As envisaged by the Preparation Document our collective endeavour will be fed back to the parishes to foster that sense of sodality across the diocese expressed in our Communion with each other, our Participation together and to fire our hearts and mind for the Mission of the Church both Local and Universal.

With joyful hope and every blessing,

Fr John Patrick Thomas

Lead of the Diocesan Contact Team