

# SYNODAL CHURCH 1

## STEP 1

Know your Diocesan Synod Contacts. They are Fionnuala Frances and Kevan Grady.

[synod@hallam-diocese.com](mailto:synod@hallam-diocese.com)

Pray for them.

## STEP 2

Join the Hallam Diocese Synodal Team. This is the working group of people willing to lead us through the synodal process. Anyone is invited to be part of this group; get in touch if you feel that this is what you are called to do. The Holy Spirit is a core member of the group.

Pray for them.

## STEP 3

Join the Liturgy to celebrate the Hallam Synodal Process which will be held at 4.30pm on Sunday 17th October at St Marie's Cathedral and live-streamed across the diocese. Participate on-line, in your parish groups or with friends. Arrange to meet afterwards to talk about how you might go forward together on this synodal journey.

Pray for this holy journey we are on together

## STEP 4

With your parish priest, decide in your parish who will be the representative(s) for Synodal Meetings, and let Fionnuala and Kevan know the names. They will then be invited to join the working group to pray, discern and plan the synodal path.

Pray for them.

## STEP 5

With the help of your parish co-ordinators, listen, gather in the views and voices of as many people as possible. Particularly include those on the margins, who may not always feel listened to. No-one is excluded, everyone has a voice, all are invited to participate, and your parish can decide how best to do this in your area.

Pray for each other and for the people you listen to.

## **STEP 6**

Deliver the messages from your group to Bishop Ralph between 1 January and 30 April 2022.

You can write a letter, email or respond using this website. As well as responding as a group, you can respond individually. Bishop Ralph will put your thoughts together and take a 10 page summary of what you have all told him to the meeting of Bishops.

Pray for Bishop Ralph.

The Bishops of England and Wales will pray and discern and collate the views from all the dioceses.

Pray for the Bishops.

They will bring those views to the meeting with Pope Francis in October 2023.

Pray for Pope Francis.

## **Given at Westminster Cathedral at the Mass opening the diocesan phase of the listening journey on Saturday 16th October 2021**

Every Catholic diocese in the world is invited, this weekend, to launch its 'Synodal Pathway', a journey of mutual listening and discernment.

We can't be left out!

This is the Pope's invitation and he has given us plenty of indications about what he hopes and prays for. The journey he describes is a long one, leading not only to a Synod of Bishops in 2023 but to a refreshed and refreshing way of living our life of faith, in a Church in which all are included in prayerful reflection, enriching one another in our different roles and through our different experiences.

Last Sunday Pope Francis presented three words that he sees as key to this journey. They were 'meet, listen, discern'. They are worth pondering. So, I provide for you all, on paper, the key points from his homily.

He wants us to meet with people with whom we don't often gather, especially with people who are often left out, or who feel left out. He wants us to listen from the heart as we share our journey of faith. He wants us to ponder, prayerfully, what we see as gifts of God emerging in our meetings.

Pope Francis is also very clear about what he doesn't want. He says continually: 'It is not about gathering opinions, no. This is not a survey but about listening to the Holy Spirit... The first commitment', he says, 'is to have ears, to listen.' Again, he says: 'This is not about distinguishing between majorities and minorities: a parliament does this'. Rather, he says, 'the rejected must be part of the process and we must include our miseries!'

Meet, listen, discern.

Over the coming weeks, opportunities will emerge for you to do this. And there is no limit, except that of time, for we have until February to complete our reflections, whether in our parish, in a school, in a religious house, a group of friends, or reaching out to those whom we barely know. Indeed, we are encouraged to pay special attention to those 'still, small voices', those not clamouring for attention, but needing every encouragement to make their contribution.

Meet, listen, discern.

But what are we going to be talking about?

There are three simple steps I propose.

Our conversations are to be based on our experience of living the faith. Recent months, the long months of the pandemic, have thrown fresh light on that experience. So, we begin by listening to how we have lived our faith during this time, what has helped, what was missing, who was left out. We ask 'How did God touch my life in those long and difficult months?'

Then the second step is to broaden out those reflections to the wider themes of this process: communion, participation and mission. Communion: What do we learn about the strengths and weaknesses of our life as a Church? Participation: How easy is it to make a contribution, to participate? What is the way of participation that you would most appreciate? And mission: our call to serve the world, working alongside all brothers and sisters.

The third step is to gather the fruits of this reflection and to offer that fruit to the wider diocese so that an overall picture of our life and faith, our dreams and hopes, our desires and insights might emerge.

I thank each of you, present here this evening, who have accepted a role in this process on behalf of your parish. I know there will be plenty of help and advice available. Take it up. But do not be anxious. Do not pay attention to those who are saying that this is a divisive and risky endeavour. Do not be tempted to reduce it to a gathering of opinions. It is not ideas we are to be talking about, but the touch and movement of the Holy Spirit in the lives of each of us, whether woman or man, young or old, layperson or priest, or cardinal! We all have our contributions to make. This is a journey that will be true in as much as it is made with a loving and open heart, with humility and deference, with twice as much listening as talking! Let this be your guide. In this way, we can ask to enrich each other and, together, enrich the life of the Church.

The Scripture readings at Mass this weekend give us a wonderful picture of group sharing and listening between the disciples. It's not very edifying: ambition and jealousy quickly emerge and threaten to dominate the proceedings. But Jesus has two messages about the pathway we are to follow: it is the pathway of humble service, and it is a pathway which goes by the road of suffering, even to the Hill of Calvary.

This message of salvation must shape our efforts, always, and especially in these months. We will hear stories of frustration, disappointment and dismay, as well as those of joy and gratitude. We will need to be humble servants to one another. Only by recognising our limitations before God, and our weaknesses, will this process avoid becoming yet another experience of polarisation. The witness we must give, in contrast, is one of a dialogue of the heart in both difference and profound unity. And all the time in prayer, but not the kind of prayer that seeks God's agreement and support for my plans and wishes, for myself or for the Church. No, our prayer is one that seeks that God's will may be done in each one of us and in the Church.

Remember the opening prayer of this Mass: 'Almighty ever-living God, grant that we may always conform our will to yours, and serve your majesty in sincerity of heart.' If we make that the inspiration of our journey together, it will be truly blessed.

So let it be.

Amen.

✠ Cardinal Vincent Nichols

## **SYNODAL CHURCH 2**

If the process is already defined, how do we 'walk together?'

Every member of the Church has the right to speak, and the obligation to allow those charged with the work of discernment the freedom to do so. Pope Francis in his book *Let us Dream* says "we need a respectful, mutual listening, free of ideology and predetermined agendas". This is at the heart of the process. Each diocese will form its own means of running this listening process so that it reaches as broad a scope of people as possible.

### **Is this just for parishes and dioceses?**

No, 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. Catholic organisations and charities also have a role to play in this work.

Echoing the experience of the Second Vatican Council, 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.

### **Can we talk about any topic?**

Pope Francis says "what is under discussion at synodal gatherings are not the traditional truths of Christian doctrine". The Synod is concerned mainly with how teaching can be lived and applied in the changing contexts of our time. Therefore all topics can be raised but it is important to realise that not all will form part of the ongoing discussion.

### **Will this make the Church more democratic, like other churches?**

The Synodal Process is not about a democratic debate. It is place of respectful mutual listening and experiencing the call of the Holy Spirit to move in new ways. Again the Pope is clear on this: "Another temptation that so often confuses people is treating the Synod as a kind of parliament underpinned by a 'political battle' in which in order to govern one side must defeat the other...this goes against the spirit of the synod as a protected space of community discernment. What it will do is embed at all levels of the Church a new way of listening and hearing, of discernment and action which remains faithful to the truths received but expresses them in the context of a particular time".

### **How does this discernment take place?**

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 process of spiritual discernment is incumbent on everyone's part; truly being open to the Spirit and seeing where the local Church is being led in its own context, with the bishops listening carefully to the views of the faithful, and the faithful respecting the authentic role of the bishop as one who governs the local Church and promotes communion. Discernment is always orientated towards the mission of the universal Church which continually moves towards Christ, the Way, the Truth and the Life who calls his people into a unity of purpose".

### **What is the role of the Bishops' Conference?**

The role of the Bishops' Conference in this process is twofold. First, its Secretariat will act as an administrative point of contact for the dioceses to liaise with for the production of the documentation for the bishops, as a whole, to consider. However, and more importantly, the bishops acting together, effect a common discernment of the points raised in the particular Churches for the whole of the territory. The bishops, whilst remaining the authentic pastors of their particular Churches and speaking on behalf of them, also work collectively to summarise the "links of culture, tradition and common history, as well as the interconnection of social relations among citizens of the same nation. It is for this reason that this part of the Diocesan Phase of the Synodal pathway has great importance.

Is this the best time to do this, after all we have experienced in the past 15 months? 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:

- a. Communion** – bringing the people together as communities in the local Church begins this prayerful insight into the ways of the Holy Spirit. When the Church gathers for the Eucharist, and what flows from it, is when the necessary self-understanding of the mission of the Church is best understood. Thus the dialogue at this level is rooted in the life of the ecclesial communities and parishes.
- b. Participation** – the reflections that the local Churches and communities are undertaking regarding the past 15 months of pandemic form the context of how the Catholic 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.”
- c. Mission** – understanding the local situation will feed necessarily into an overview of the mission in the whole diocese. Like the tesserae of a mosaic, the picture is built up of the needs for renewal so that mission to all people is firmly rooted in the life of the local community who gather, by gentle invitation by the Lord, to worship him, to be sanctified by him and to exercise both an individual and collective prophetic voice.

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 to prayer, open their hearts to the Holy Spirit and speak with confidence and engage in mutual listening will assist the Church like a pilgrim “... [to go] out from herself, open(s) herself to a new horizon, and when she comes home, she is no longer the same, so her home won’t be the same.”  
Rev. Canon Christopher Thomas

**Sent on behalf of Fionnuala Frances and Kevan Grady, Diocesan Contact for Synodal Process and Coordinators Formation and Mission**

Dear Father and Deacon,

Bishop Ralph has asked us to get in touch with you to coordinate plans for the upcoming synodal process.

1. In the weeks and months ahead, as we embark on “Towards a Synodal Church; communion, participation and mission” in the Hallam diocese, people from every parish are being invited to find ways of praying, talking and listening together, to respond to questions about how synodal we are as a Church, and in what direction should we be moving to achieve this.

What are your experiences of journeying together in your parish? Where is the Holy Spirit leading?

2. Responses gathered in your parish will contribute to the synthesised document Bishop Ralph will share with the Bishop’s conference after April 2022.

3. You will be aware of how synodality is progressing in your parish and may have lots of ideas about how best to arrange things to respond to Pope Francis’ consultation. We would be very glad to hear about those.

4. We will use the website to share information about what is happening in different parishes also.

5. Each parish is invited to send one or two representatives to join the Synod Working Group. This group will meet on Friday 22nd October on zoom to plan how we will go forward.

6. After the opening liturgy on Sunday 17th October, 4.30pm at St Marie’s Cathedral\*, we will be encouraging people within parishes to have “synod” meetings in the groups they are already involved in. Later in the process, you, and the Synod Working Group, may through prayer and discernment, have other ideas about how best to broaden this process to harder-to-reach groups.

7. An important phase of this journey is preparation. Orientation Workshops on prayer, listening and discernment as well as Synod, may help to provide a focus and method for the process. The Hallam Spirituality Group is preparing to offer these. If anyone in your parish feels called to join this group, please get in touch.

8. As you know, there may be aspects of this process of reflecting on people’s journey with the Church which may be emotionally unsettling. Encouraging people to be sensitive to this and being aware of resources for further help will be important.

9. Please provide the name(s) of the Synod Coordinator for your parish, (with contact details, or ask them to make themselves known to us).

10. As we will be sending various items for your parish newsletter over the weeks ahead, could you confirm the best email address to use? We will send notices with “For Newsletter” in the subject line where possible, so they can just be cut and pasted into the newsletter for your convenience. We will get notices to you by Wednesdays unless you let us know you need it earlier for the following weekend. (Raising awareness and encouraging participation suggestions are to be found in the Vademecum on the Vatican website.)

11. If you have any thoughts, queries, suggestions or offers of help, please don't hesitate to get in touch. A step by step guide to the Hallam process is posted on the Hallam website. (The complete preparatory documents are on the Vatican website).

Grace and peace to you

Fionnuala Frances and Kevan Grady

Diocesan Contact for Synodal Process;  
Coordinators Formation and Mission;