

Diocese of Plymouth Synodal Process Q&A

This note offers a short summary of the upcoming Synodal process and what that means for the Diocese of Plymouth. A longer Q&A can be found on the website of the [Catholic Bishops Conference of England and Wales](#).

What is Synodality?

Synodality comes from a Greek word meaning the 'walking together' (syn-) on a 'particular way' (-hodos). In October 2021, Pope Francis will open a three-year synodal journey with three phases (diocesan, continental, universal) of consultations and discernment, culminating with an assembly in October 2023 in Rome.

Our Diocese will begin its synodal journey on Sunday, 17 October, under the leadership of Bishop Mark O'Toole. The first phase of the journey will be a consultation across our Diocese running from October 2021-March 2022, culminating in a pre-Synodal event. The consultation will be based on key questions and themes from the Vatican as well as building on the discussions already underway about the future of our Diocese set out in ['A Precious Place of God's Grace'](#).

What is this journey about?

It is hoped that this journey will be a positive catalyst which encourages real communication and a sharing of wisdom amongst the faithful and communities of the Diocese of Plymouth. 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* encourages "a respectful, mutual listening, free of ideology and predetermined agendas".

Our 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.

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." Spirituality will be one of the basic themes. Synodality is not meant to be only a discussion of problems, of different things that there are in society - there cannot be synodality without the Spirit, and there is no Spirit without prayer. There will be a core set of questions for parishes to reflect on.

How can I get involved?

The 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. Resources will be provided by the Diocese to parishes, schools and groups to support this listening and discernment process.

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.

How does this affect *'A Precious Place of God's Grace'*?

"A Precious Place of God's Grace", is a reflection document, inviting the Catholics of the Diocese to be "disciple-making-disciples", and to be focused on mission as they face the challenges of living the faith today. This document and the feedback received so far, will form an integral part of our Diocesan Synodal journey.

Will my contribution bring about change?

'A Precious Place of God's Grace' started a process of discernment into the way our Diocese needs to be at this moment in time. This journey of discernment is ongoing and is not separate from the Synodal process, but an integral part of the whole.

Some of the reflections already shared, as well as the fruits of engagement in the coming months, will feed into decisions affecting our Diocese in the short term, as well as the longer term Synodal process which culminates in 2023. Not every suggestion can be taken up, but there will be feedback on the consultation process and what themes will be taken forward.