



For a synodal Church  
communion | participation | mission

## Walking Together - Diocese of Plymouth Guide for Parishes



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This guide for parishes should be read in conjunction with the other materials provided

# Walking Together - Diocese of Plymouth Guide for Parishes

At the heart of the vision of Synod 2023 is listening.

*'I encourage you to fully engage with this important process in the life of the Church, locally and universally, so that we can all be more effective missionary disciples. Very important is our prayer to the Holy Spirit so that we listen to what God is saying to us, as well as listening deeply to what we are saying to one another. May the Holy Spirit guide us on this journey together and give us a share in God's wisdom and understanding.'* **Bishop Mark O'Toole**

During the Diocesan phase of our Walking Together, parishes, schools and individuals are invited to reach out and involve the greatest number of people possible, and especially those on the periphery who are often excluded and forgotten. This is a wonderful opportunity for everyone to contribute to the future of our Church.

Parishes are best placed to decide how best to run their Walking Together reflections. The following are some suggestions for an Advent journey.

## Advent journey suggestions

Four Listening and Discernment sessions in small groups during Advent, covering four main Walking Together themes in the parish, school or organisational setting. It is anticipated that each of these sessions will take about 1.5 hours

A one day listening and discernment event combining all four themes

Local Conversations at coffee mornings or other events

Individual reflection

Some people may not wish or be able to participate in a four-week process or a one-day event. People are welcome to use the resources individually and perhaps consider one of the themes each week and to gather with people at a convenient time, maybe after Mass or through an online group, to listen and respond to the themes.

There is a set of reflections and themes to explore during each week of Advent. People are invited to pray, reflect, discern and then feedback thoughts and ideas. The most important part of this journey is listening: both to the Holy Spirit and each other.

*'We are invited to become 'experts in the art of encounter. We do so, not so much by organising events or theorizing about problems, or planning strategies for pastoral reorganisation, but in taking time to encounter the Lord and one another. Time to devote to prayer and to adoration – that form of prayer that we so often neglect– and to hearing what the Spirit wants to say to us individually and to the Church'.* **Bishop Mark O'Toole**

## The Themes

The overarching themes for the four weeks of our Diocesan journey explore how we listen, our mission, how we celebrate, and our dreams. There are three questions to explore each week with some prompts for use as needed. The questions follow a pathway from listening and reflection about us as individuals, about our parish and about the global Church. The main questions are below and there are hand-outs for each week of advent to offer further prompts for discussion as needed. More detailed guidance is provided for facilitators.

This is not a checklist of questions to be answered but some prompts for group and individual discernment. The questions are accompanied by scripture readings and reflections.

WEEK OF	OUR DIOCESAN JOURNEY: POINTS FOR REFLECTION
28 November	Opening question - What has your faith meant to you these past 18 months living with Covid?
	<b>LISTEN</b>
	How do I listen to God? How do I listen to others?  How does our parish listen to others? How does our parish listen to God?  How do we as a Church listen to others? How do we as a Church listen to those outside of the Church?
5 December	<b>MISSION</b>
	What is my mission?  What is the mission of my parish community?  What is the mission of the whole Church?
	<b>CELEBRATION</b>
13 December	How do I celebrate the presence of God in His Word and in the Sacraments?  How does my parish celebrate the Word and the Sacraments?  How does the wider Church celebrate journeying together?
	<b>DREAM</b>
	What is God's dream for me?  What is God's dream for us/our parish?  What is God's dream for the wider Church / world?

## Resources

We will provide a listening resource which will include:

- The Synod Prayer
- A Guide for Facilitators
- One-page guides for each of the four sessions (which can be used in a one-day event or independently)
- Feedback forms which can also be completed online

There are many other approaches that parishes can take – it is up to each parish to choose for itself how to approach this journey and what to discuss. There will also be opportunities for people to join online discussions offered by the Diocese. The following are some resources that participants may wish to reflect on before meeting:

- Bishop Mark's reflection on 17 October sets out the context for our Diocesan journey - <https://www.plymouth-diocese.org.uk/bishop-mark-launches-diocesan-synodal-journey-walking-together/>
- Synod 2023 – a short video on the next two years in the life of the Church For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, Mission - Catholic Bishops' Conference - <https://www.cbcew.org.uk/synodal-church/>
- Other resources are on our Diocesan Website - <https://www.plymouth-diocese.org.uk/synod/>

## Feedback

The most important action is listening to the Holy Spirit and to each other and not the production of a document or summary of what was discussed. However, we would welcome some feedback so that we hear what each other has to say and what the Holy Spirit is saying through us.

Please summarise your reflections on the forms provided and send to [synodfeedback@prcdtr.org.uk](mailto:synodfeedback@prcdtr.org.uk). Facilitators will also be given a link to fill in the summary online if they are able to do this. This summary is not an exercise in consensus – just a reflection of some of the main themes and views that emerge.

The synodal working group will draw together emerging themes in early 2022 and we will be sharing progress with updates for parish newsletters. The reflections gathered will inform both the global synodal process but also our own Diocesan reflections and the ongoing work as part of 'A Precious Place of God's Grace'.

## Any Questions?

The Synodal working group will respond to questions about process or resources and will put answers on the website. Our role is not to offer solutions to wider issues raised but to collate what has been shared and capture the breadth of contribution for the next phase of this listening journey. [synodfeedback@prcdtr.org.uk](mailto:synodfeedback@prcdtr.org.uk)

