

# The Vatican Synod on Synodality 2023

Participation guidelines for parishes



For a synodal Church  
community | participation | mission



## Prayer for the Synod: Adsumus, Sancte Spiritus

Every session of the Second Vatican Council began with the prayer Adsumus Sancte Spiritus, the first word of the original Latin, meaning, “We stand before You, Holy Spirit,” which has been historically used at Councils, Synods and other Church gatherings for hundreds of years, and is attributed to Saint Isidore of Seville (c. 560 - 4 April 636). As we embrace this Synodal Process, this prayer invites the Holy Spirit to be at work in us so that we may be a community and a people of grace. For the Synodal journey from 2021 to 2023, we propose to the following simplified version,<sup>1</sup> so that any group or liturgical assembly can pray it more easily.



We stand before You, Holy Spirit,  
as we gather together in Your name.  
With You alone to guide us,  
make Yourself at home in our hearts;  
teach us the way we must go  
and how we are to pursue it.  
We are weak and sinful;  
do not let us promote disorder.  
Do not let ignorance lead us down the wrong path  
nor partiality influence our actions.  
Let us find in You our unity  
so that we may journey together to eternal life  
and not stray from the way of truth  
and what is right.  
All this we ask of You,  
who are at work in every place and time,  
in the communion of the Father and the Son,  
forever and ever.  
Amen.



<sup>1</sup>The original version of the Adsumus, Sancte Spiritus can be found on the Synod website.



## Building on our synodal journey

Here in the Archdiocese of Liverpool, we have already engaged in our own Synod which has culminated in the creation of the Liverpool Archdiocesan Pastoral Plan.

In the meantime, Pope Francis has asked the whole Catholic Church to engage in a similar process of discernment under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Even though we began our own synodal journey in 2018, it is important that we engage with the universal Church. As with our Synod, this universal synod on synodality called

by Pope Francis, involves everyone in the Church – lay, religious and clergy.

Submissions may be made **via the diocesan website (the preferred submission method)**, email [vaticansynod@rcaol.org.uk](mailto:vaticansynod@rcaol.org.uk) or by post to St Margaret Clitherow Centre, Liverpool Archdiocesan Office, Croxteth Drive, Liverpool, L17 1AA. In your submissions please do follow the guidance provided here or online. This will aid us in collating your responses, which will be combined with those received from Synod 2020 and presented to the

Bishops' Conference as part of the Vatican Synod 2023 submission.

The universal synodal process we are joining is guided by a fundamental question:

*How does this “journeying together,” which takes place today on different levels (from the local level to the universal one), allow the Church to proclaim the Gospel in accordance with the mission entrusted to Her; and what steps does the Spirit invite us to take in order to grow as a synodal Church? (PD 2)*

As we have already experienced here in Liverpool, when everyone journeys together, listening first to the Lord in their heart and then speaking openly and listening with each other, we learn to hear the voice of the Lord speaking to us. 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).



## Some commonly asked questions and key terms

### What is the Synod about?

Pope Francis wants the Church to grow in three key areas:

**Communion**

**Participation**

**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.

This universal Synod continues to help us journey together as we invite more people into a relationship with Christ.

This is the first time that the **whole Church** has engaged in such a broad listening process ahead of a Synod of Bishops. The fruit of the discernment at the local level will then feed into the discussion at the diocesan level, which in turn will feed into a continental phase involving national episcopal conferences. Finally, the fruits of this discernment will be presented to Pope Francis when he meets with the bishops of the Church for the universal Synod in October 2023.

## Why are we having another listening phase and other Synod?

In order to journey together, Pope Francis wants every person to take their place at the heart of the Church and to hear every voice. Although we have already begun to engage with the synodal process in the archdiocese, which initially generated 27,000 responses, we may find ourselves in a different place on our journey. This may include fresh insights, which we will submit to the Bishops' Conference together with the summary of the listening phases of Synod 2020.

We hope to continue listening attentively to the Holy Spirit as we discern together how to be the church God is calling us to be.

## Key terms

### Discernment

The Synodal Process entails discernment leading towards consensus. In this process, we listen to each other 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 dispositions, listening and talking to one another in an authentic, meaningful, and welcoming way. And God comes to lead and inspire us as we seek to discern God's will.



## Communion

The dogmatic constitution *Lumen Gentium*<sup>2</sup> sets out a vision of the nature and mission of the Church as communion, with the theological presuppositions of a suitable re-launch of synodality. Synodality is a living expression of the Church where people live in communion with one another. The guarantor of this communion is Christ who is present as the Head united to His Body<sup>3</sup>. He is the fullness and means of salvation for all people and all people are invited to live this communion. The Church is therefore Catholic (universal) because she embraces all in their rich diversity. The synodal path expresses and promotes catholicity in two ways: it helps the People of God walk together and share their faith.



## Participation

A synodal Church is a Church of participation and co-responsibility. Synodality gives expression to the participation of all according to their gifts and calling. The authority conferred on the College of Bishops headed by the Pope is the authority of Christ. Participation allows the People of God to serve the Church and creation through the gifts they have all received from the Holy Spirit. The Catechism of the Catholic Church says that 'the ministerial priesthood is at the service of the common priesthood, and this is the means by which Christ unceasingly builds up and leads his Church.'<sup>4</sup> The authority of the ministerial priesthood is therefore not a delegated and representative function of the people but it is a gift of God for the entire Church.

In the synodal Church, the whole community in the rich diversity of its members is called together to pray, listen, analyse, dialogue and discern. As a result of this process, the community can offer advice on pastoral decisions which correspond as closely as possible to God's will. Since the Second Vatican Council, Canon Law recognises lay participation in the structures of the Church, especially their involvement in parish pastoral councils, diocesan synods, and diocesan pastoral councils. Although the role of the councils is consultative, priests are expected to listen carefully to and consider the views and experiences of the lay faithful.

<sup>2</sup>Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, Second Vatican Council, November 21, 1964.

<sup>3</sup>Ephesians 1:22-23

<sup>4</sup>CCC 1547



## Mission

The Church is missionary because that was the way of Christ. We are told in the Bible that 'God so loved the world that he sent his only Son' (John 3:16). Jesus was sent into the world to reveal God's love. In turn, Jesus said to his apostles, 'As the Father has sent me, so I send you' (John 20:21). 'You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, throughout Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth' (Acts 1:8). 'And Jesus said to them, "Go into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation"' (Mark 16:15). This mission has been handed to the Church, and the Church, both as a community and as individual believers, is guided by the Holy Spirit to be fulfilled.

The full document explaining terms can be found on the archdiocesan website: [www.liverpoolcatholicresources.com/synod2023](http://www.liverpoolcatholicresources.com/synod2023) and on the General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops own site: [www.synod.va/en.html](http://www.synod.va/en.html)

## How can people submit their contributions?

For those who have already been involved in the Archdiocese of Liverpool 2020 synodal journey, the contributions you made, will become part of the Liverpool Archdiocesan submission for the Vatican Synod 2023.

Any additional contributions specifically for Vatican Synod 2023 can be made through our website: [www.liverpoolcatholicresources.com/synod2023-submissions](http://www.liverpoolcatholicresources.com/synod2023-submissions)

## Next steps?

### Announce it at Mass

Inform people that the universal Synod 2023 is happening and that there is an invitation to take part in whatever way you wish. Keep a look out for the Pastoral Development bulletin for information.

### Put it in the newsletter

The archbishop is calling us to take part in the listening phase of the universal Synod 2023, which Pope Francis has invited the whole Church to join. Although we have already begun to engage with the synodal process in the archdiocese, which initially generated 27,000 responses, we may find ourselves in a different place on our journey. This may include fresh insights, which we will submit to the Bishops' Conference together with the summary of the listening phases of Synod 2020. For more information please contact/visit [include parish contact if applicable or website].

### Ways to submit contributions and find out more:

Website [www.liverpoolcatholicresources.com/synod2023](http://www.liverpoolcatholicresources.com/synod2023)

Email [vaticansynod@rcaol.org.uk](mailto:vaticansynod@rcaol.org.uk)

Address Vatican Synod Submissions, St Margaret Clitherow Centre, Liverpool Archdiocesan Office, Croxteth Drive, Liverpool L17 1AA

Resources from the Synod Office in Rome are available at [www.synod.va/en.html](http://www.synod.va/en.html) and cater for different languages.

Resources from the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales are available at [www.cbcew.org.uk/synodal-church/](http://www.cbcew.org.uk/synodal-church/)



# Questions for use in listening, sharing and reflection

## The fundamental question of the universal Synod 2023

A synodal Church, in announcing the Gospel, “journeys together.”

- How is this “journeying together” happening today in your local Church?
- What steps does the Spirit invite us to take in order to grow in our “journeying together”?<sup>5</sup>

In responding to this question, you may wish to follow this process below in prayerful reflection before looking at the ten themes:

**Recall our experiences:** What experiences of our local Church does this question call to mind?

**Reflect on these experiences in greater depth:** What joys did they bring? What difficulties and obstacles have they revealed? What wounds did they expose? What insights have they elicited?

**Notice the presence of the Holy Spirit:** Where in these experiences does the voice of the Holy Spirit resound? What is the Spirit asking of us? What can be affirmed and what needs to be changed, and how could we do this? Where do we find consensus? What opportunities are opening up for our local Church?

## Ten Themes on “lived synodality”

As Christians, we journey together in communion with one another as the People of God. Our mission, as the People of God, is to journey together with the entire human family. These two perspectives enrich one another and are helpful for our common discernment towards deeper communion and more fruitful mission.

The questions accompanying each of the following ten themes can be used as a starting point for reflection. You may choose to reflect on all ten themes or on those which most speak to you. You may wish to make general reflections on any of the themes.

## **1. COMPANIONS ON THE JOURNEY**

**In the Church and in society we are side by side on the same road.**

- a. In our local Church, who are those who “walk together”?
- b. Who are those who seem further apart?
- c. What groups or individuals are left on the margins?

## **2. LISTENING**

**Listening is the first step, but it requires an open mind and heart, without prejudice.**

- a. How may God be speaking to us through voices we sometimes ignore?
- b. How are the laity listened to, especially women and young people?
- c. What enables or prevents our listening?
- d. How well do we listen to those on the peripheries and on the margins?

## **3. SPEAKING OUT**

**All are invited to speak with courage, freedom, truth, and charity.**

- a. What enables or hinders us to speak out courageously, candidly, and responsibly in our local Church and society?
- b. When and how do we manage to say what is important to us?
- c. How is our relationship with the local media (not only Catholic media)?

## **4. CELEBRATION**

**“Walking together” is only possible if it is based on communal listening to the Word and the celebration of the Eucharist.**

- a. How do prayer and liturgical celebrations inspire and guide our life and mission?
- b. How do they underpin the most important decisions?
- c. What opportunities are there for participating in the ministries of lector, acolyte and in the other liturgical ministries?

## **5. SHARING RESPONSIBILITY FOR OUR COMMON MISSION**

**Synodality is at the service of the mission of the Church in which all baptised members are called to participate as missionary disciples.**

- a. What hinders the baptised from being active in mission?
- b. What areas of mission and service are we neglecting?
- c. How does the community support its members who serve society in various ways (social and political involvement, scientific research, family life, education, business, promoting social justice, protecting human rights, pro-life issues, caring for the environment, etc.)?
- d. How does the Church help these members to live out their Christian values and give witness to their faith in their service to society?

## **6. DIALOGUE IN CHURCH AND SOCIETY**

**Dialogue requires perseverance and patience, but it also enables mutual understanding.**

- a. To what extent do diverse people in our community come together for dialogue?
- b. What issues in the Church and society do we need to pay more attention to?
- c. What experiences of dialogue and collaboration do we have with believers of other denominations, other religions and with those who have no religious affiliation?

## **7. ECUMENISM**

**The dialogue between Christians of different traditions, united by one baptism, has a special place in the synodal journey.**

- a. What relationships does our Church community have with members of other Christian denominations?
- b. What fruits have we drawn from walking together and what are the difficulties?
- c. How can we take the next steps in walking with each other?

## **8. AUTHORITY AND PARTICIPATION**

**A synodal Church is a participatory and co-responsible Church.**

- a. How is authority or governance exercised within our local Church?
- b. How is co-responsibility put into practice?
- c. Have we had fruitful experiences of synodality on a local level?
- d. How can we foster a more synodal approach in participation and leadership?

## **9. DISCERNING AND DECIDING**

**In a synodal style we make decisions through discerning the voice of the Holy Spirit in our whole community.**

- a. Do our decision-making methods help us to listen to the wider community?
- b. How do we promote participation in decision-making, transparency and accountability locally and within hierarchical structures?
- c. What is the relationship between consultation and decision-making, and how do we put this understanding into practice?

## **10. FORMING OURSELVES IN SYNODALITY**

**Synodality entails receptivity to change, formation, and on-going learning.**

- a. How does our Church community form people to be more capable of “walking together,” accompanying one another, participating in mission, and engaging in dialogue?
- b. What support do we need to continue to grow in synodality?
- c. What formation is needed to foster discernment and the exercise of authority in a synodal way?

## Feeding back and submissions

As everyone journeys together, listening first to God in their heart and then speaking openly and listening to each other, we learn to hear the voice of God speaking to us. Please remember that each one of us is encouraged to share with honesty and openness about our real-life experiences, and to reflect on what the Holy Spirit might be saying to the Church at this time.

Submissions may be made via the archdiocesan website **from 10 January 2022** [www.liverpoolcatholicresources.com/synod2023-submissions](http://www.liverpoolcatholicresources.com/synod2023-submissions) (the **preferred submission method**), email [vaticansynod@rcaol.org.uk](mailto:vaticansynod@rcaol.org.uk) or by post to St Margaret Clitherow Centre, Liverpool Archdiocesan Office, Croxteth Drive, Liverpool, L17 1AA.

In your submissions please do follow the guidance provided here or online. This will aid us in collating your responses, which will be combined with those received from Synod 2020 and presented to the Bishops' Conference as part of the Vatican Synod 2023 submission.



## Universal Synod 2023 submissions

A synodal Church, in announcing the Gospel, “journeys together.”

- How is this “journeying together” happening today in your local Church?
- What steps does the Spirit invite us to take in order to grow in our “journeying together”?<sup>6</sup>

We suggest that you respond to not more than five questions/themes.

**Please list which themes or questions you reflected on along with some of the key phrases, thoughts and comments that stood out for you for each questions/theme. If you had a discussion, was there a thread or consensus in what was shared?**

## Submitting contributions

You are invited to submit your responses online at **www.liverpoolcatholicresources.com/synod2023-submissions** or via email to [vaticansynod@rcaol.org.uk](mailto:vaticansynod@rcaol.org.uk) by 10 March 2022.

The responses gathered will be discerned by a group made up of laity, religious and clergy. The results for the Vatican Synod 2023 will be made public and added to those responses received during the Archdiocesan Synod 2020 listening phase.

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For more information, visit  
**[liverpoolcatholicresources.com/synod2023](https://liverpoolcatholicresources.com/synod2023)**