



# Synod Newsletter No. 1

Friday 17<sup>th</sup> December 2021



## What is a Synod?

Since 1965, the Catholic Church has held periodic 'Synods'. These have involved meetings of Bishops in Rome to advise the Pope on various issues.

This builds on previous Church tradition, whereby Popes have listened to many views when making decisions. This tradition goes back to the early Church. All its members would meet regularly to listen to each other in order to discern what God wanted them to do.

## What is the current Synod about?

Pope Francis now wants us to return to the approach used by the early Church. He is keen for all the faithful to actively participate in discussions about key issues. Bishops have always represented local perspectives, but the Holy Father wants to change the way the Church works so that every voice is heard.

The current Synod therefore focuses on how we can better 'journey together' as a Church in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. This is very apt as the word Synod literally means 'journey together'. The Synod will culminate in a meeting of Bishops in Rome. However, it starts with discussions within the local Church, i.e. every Diocese in the world.



## How does the Synodal process work?

Although Pope Francis wants to hear from as many people as possible, it is not ultimately their voices he wants to hear. The key idea is that by listening to many voices we will be better able to hear what the Holy Spirit is prompting us to do.

Accordingly, the Synod using a three-stage process: encounter - listen - discern. Firstly, we must encounter each other. We need to meet in small groups to share our personal experiences, speaking from our hearts. As this happens, we must listen carefully to what we hear others say. Finally, in a prayerful and reflective way, we use all that we have heard to discern what the Holy Spirit is saying to us.

## How will we participate in the Synod at St Joseph's?

Bishop Richard is inviting all parishes to share their thoughts with him as part of the first stage of the Synod. At St Joseph's, Fr Bill would like to include as many people as possible in this process. Consequently, we will provide as wide a range of opportunities as we can so that everyone can contribute.

We will organise **online groups**, which will meet for 90 minute discussions once a week for three weeks in January. Each week will focus on a different theme for the Synod: communion, participation (which is the most important to Pope Francis) and mission.

We will provide resources to support **family or informal groups** to arrange their own discussions. We will also support our **school community**, as it is crucial that children's voices are heard. It is no coincidence that in the logo for the Synod, children are leading the way!

Covid restrictions may impact on our ability to encounter each other. This is why we will arrange online groups. However, if circumstances allow, we will also have one **face-to-face session** using the church hall.



## How can I get involved?

In the first instance, we invite you to begin thinking about some key Synod questions. We hope the Christmas period will be an excellent chance for some informal discussions with family and friends. Questions you might like to consider include:

- How well do we 'journey together' in our parish and in our diocese? How can we do this better?
- How can we live more meaningfully as Christians in the 21<sup>st</sup> century?
- How can we better live out our mission as witnesses to the Gospel in these times?

We are now looking for volunteers to lead the discussion groups in January. We will provide training and support for all group leaders. We would like groups to be fairly small, e.g. 6-10 participants. If you are interested, please email Chris Donovan, the parish's Synod coordinator, using [synod@st-josephs-epsom.org.uk](mailto:synod@st-josephs-epsom.org.uk).

Early in the new year, we will make available resources to support discussions and invite people to sign up for online groups.

### Key dates

Week beginning Sunday 2<sup>nd</sup> January -  
training for group leaders

Week beginning Sunday 9<sup>th</sup> January -  
online group sessions on the theme of  
communion

Week beginning Sunday 16<sup>th</sup> January -  
online group sessions on the theme of  
participation

Week beginning Sunday 23<sup>rd</sup> January -  
online group sessions on the theme of  
mission

Saturday 29<sup>th</sup> January from 2pm to 5pm -  
face-to-face discussion groups in church hall

Friday 4<sup>th</sup> February -  
deadline to respond to the Diocese

Wednesday 9<sup>th</sup> March -  
Bishop Richard will present a summary of  
Diocesan responses in an online meeting



After this, responses will be gathered and discussed by all the Bishops of England and Wales, then all the Bishops in Europe. Finally, Bishops from across the world will gather in Rome in October 2023.

### Useful websites

There is now lots of information about the Synod readily available online. Including several interesting videos. Here are four particularly useful sites:

[Our parish website](https://st-josephs-epsom.org.uk/synod2021.php)

<https://st-josephs-epsom.org.uk/synod2021.php>

[The Diocesan website](https://www.abdiocese.org.uk/synod)

<https://www.abdiocese.org.uk/synod>

[The Bishops Conference website](https://www.cbcew.org.uk/synodal-church)

<https://www.cbcew.org.uk/synodal-church>

[The Vatican website](https://www.synod.va/en.html)

<https://www.synod.va/en.html>

### Contact us

If you have any comments, suggestions or questions about the Synod, please talk to Fr Bill, Fr Stephen or Chris Donovan ([synod@st-josephs-epsom.org.uk](mailto:synod@st-josephs-epsom.org.uk)).

### Prayer for the Synod

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.