

# THE PORTICO

## SPECIAL EDITION

### Synod: Pope Francis briefs the people as Bishop of Rome

With the first phase of the Synod fast approaching, Pope Francis briefed the people in his own Diocese of Rome. Explaining that the first phase takes place in the diocese, he asked the people of the Diocese for their commitment to this process. He explained that “it is not about garnering opinions, not a survey, but a matter of listening to the Holy Spirit.... To have ears, to listen, is the first thing we need to do. To hear God’s voice, to sense his presence, to witness his passage and his breath of life.”

The Pope affirmed that “Synodality is an expression of the Church’s nature, her form, style and mission.” He located it within the context of the New Testament and the core Tradition of the Church. He emphasised the importance of the role of all the baptised in this process as the subject of the *sensus fidei in credendo*.



Pope Francis himself later told his Cardinals that this speech is central to his thinking on the Synod, and it is worth studying it in full here: [Address of Pope Francis to the Diocese of Rome](#), 18 September 2021

### “Synodality: Communion, Participation, Mission”



The new Synod has as its theme, Synodality itself - Cardinal Grech (Secretary of the Synod of Bishops) states that “Synodality is the form that realizes the participation of all the people of God in mission.” He remind us that “synodality was the form

and style of the early Church... which Vatican II wanted to recover” and goes on to say that to be faithful to the Tradition of the Church, we must go boldly down this path of the Synodal church. (Report: [Vatican News](#), 21 July 2021)

### Synod 2021-2023 Official Website

The Vatican’s official website for the forthcoming global Synod (“For a Synodal Church”) holds many useful and informative documents, including news items, the official *Preparatory Document*, the *Vademecum* or Guidance., and a *Roadmap* for the Diocesan phase, which are all relevant to us.

Readers can find the site here: [Synod 2021-2023](#).



**T**HE PORTICO’s Special Edition puts together news, views and information on the forthcoming global Synod which our Pope will open next week on 9 October. The diocesan phase, involving ALL of us, is due to start on 17 October 2021. As we go to press, we still await information and guidance as to how our own Plymouth Diocese phase will be carried out, but will update you as and when.

Meanwhile, the Synod has already sparked some strong and controversial opinions across our Church. The success of the Synod depends in no small part on our willingness to be informed, and to participate actively in the process. This **PORTICO** Special Edition hopes to help you do that.

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## “Learning a way of living the church”

The Pope’s closest advisors - the Council of Cardinals - met online recently to discuss the forthcoming Synod. They were joined by Pope Francis who identified two speeches that he sees as central to his thinking, and offered his personal reflections on the purpose of the Synod, at the heart of which is



*“learning a way of living the Church, marked at all levels by mutual listening and a pastoral attitude, particularly in the face of the temptations of clericalism and rigidity.”*

The Cardinals also discussed the need to overcome “sectarianism and partisan interests.”

Full report: [Vatican News](#), 22 September 2021

## Bishops of England and Wales

Bishops’ Conference of England and Wales website also provides a page on the Synodal process. Mostly factual in content, it reminds us and the Bishops that “Theirs (the Bishops) is the charism of discernment as they are the ‘authentic guardians, interpreters and witnesses to the faith of the whole Church.’ Therefore, the bishops have a key role in listening to the people of God in their particular Church, and under the power of the Holy Spirit, to hear and discern what is being said of that Church.”

The CBCEW site is informative but notably muted in tone compared with the messages emanating from the Vatican, perhaps leaving such matters in the hands of individual Bishops to address their diocese.

Webpage can be found here: [CBCEW guidance on the synodal process](#).

## Bishops to engage all the faithful in the Synod

Cardinal Grech, the Secretary General of the Synod of Bishops, in an interview with Vatican News, emphasises that the first, diocesan phase of the synodal process, which opens on 10 October “is a founding phase, it must engage not only Catholics but all the baptised.”



Asked why a synod on synodality, he replied: “Because the Church wants to understand itself better. If the Church does not assume the style of synodality, it will not be Church. I say this because,

as the Magisterium reminds us, talking about synodality and the Church means talking about the same thing. If there is not a Church that is communion, where all the baptised feel that they participate, then evangelisation will also suffer.”

Full article here: [Vatican News](#), 7 September 2021

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**Synodality:** what is it?. The word “synod translates as “journeying together” - A journey that reveals how God’s Word, and the people who heed and put their faith in that Word, journey together. The Word of God journeys with us. Everyone has a part to play; no one is a mere extra.

**Question:** the main question that we are asked to consider is: How is our “walking together” in synodality realized today in the Church? What steps does the Spirit invite us to take in order to grow in our “walking together”?

The question is HOW, not whether we should. We are NOT asked to express our views on all the existing issues that exist within the Church today - sex abuse, married priests, women priests, sexuality, the Liturgy, reception of Holy Communion, etc etc.

Instead, we are asked to focus on something that maybe sits underneath all of the above and shapes the environment within which we can address and fix these issues: that is, - how do we live, work and make decisions as a church?

**GOAL:** “In this Synod, we want to get to the point where we can say, “it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us”, for, guided by the Holy Spirit, you will be in constant dialogue among yourselves, but also in dialogue with the Holy Spirit”

**Discernment: a Rough Guide**  
The Pope calls on us all to participate in discerning how best to realise synodality in the church. So what is “discernment”, this term that has gained currency?

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## “a radical reform of the church's power structures”

National Catholic Register's Region News service recently interviewed some members of the Synod Commissions, set up by the Pope to support the Synod's steering committee. These provide interesting perspectives:

David McCallum, a member of the Synod Commission on Methodology said that “If people just think about this as a meeting on meetings, they are so missing the point”; the preparation process and the 2023 Synod have the potential to revolutionize the way decisions are made in the Catholic Church and promote a more decentralized structure of authority.

Rafael Luciani, a member of the synod's Commission for Theology believes that ultimately, the 2023 Synod will likely change power dynamics and relationships in the Catholic Church, but the change “has to come from local churches, not from Rome”. This “new ecclesial culture” is the real novelty of the synod, according to Luciani, but doubts remain in the local churches, where the “biggest question,” according to Luciani, “is the question of authority.”

Full article here: [NCR report](#). (RNS, Vatican, 7 September 2021)

## Root and Branch Synod

A perhaps controversial “lay-led inclusive synod” was recently held in Bristol and online on 5-12 September amid criticism from some Bishops. It was inspired by the notion that the Church needs a truly inclusive Synod that “starts with women, and doesn't end there”. It



offers [The Bristol Text](#), a set of reflections and proposals as a contribution to the forthcoming global Synod, and to help inform each of us as Catholics to discern what our Lord is trying to tell us

Prof Mary Macalees, the former President of Republic of Ireland, in her [keynote](#)

[speech](#) was sceptical about the process of the forthcoming Synod, observing that the lay consultative phase seemed limited. Critical of the current state of Canon Law, she argued that synodality can only work if set in a context of an unequivocal acceptance by the Church that all the faithful are entitled to the inalienable rights set out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Full records can be found here: [The Root & Branch synod website](#)

## ACTA National Conference: 16 October 2021

ACTA's National Conference this year will be held via ZOOM, will also have as its theme, “Synodality: A Path for Renewing both the Church and Society”. It will have some well-known speakers in attendance. For more info and to join, go to the [ACTA website](#)



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In many ways it has been a feature the church in the earliest times. and continues particularly in Jesuit spirituality. St Paul refers to “distinguishing between spirits” (Corinthians) while for St Ignatius, it is about “desiring and choosing only what is most conducive for us to the end for which we are created.”

So the process is about finding the voice of the Spirit of God speaking to us in the ordinary and practical details of our lives, amongst the clamour of all other voices. It is not just an intellectual exercise, but a profoundly spiritual one. We draw on insights from all our human philosophy and sciences, our social and church norms - but at the same time we transcend them, leaving ourselves genuinely open to hear and listen to what the Lord says to us in a variety of ways.

Discernment, as a process taught and practised, therefore requires prolonged prayer in dialogue with God, openness, a sincere examination of conscience and a detachment from self. Through these, we strive for an authentic process of leaving ourselves behind so we can approach the mystery of God, to help us carry out the mission to which he has called us, for the good of all our brothers and sisters.

Pope Francis suggested a series of steps or questions we can apply to test the authenticity of our own discernment, [here](#). (3 May 2020)

More recently, discernment in groups as well as individuals has become more commonplace, and the synodal process is perhaps

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## “Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church”:

The document published by the Vatican’s International Theological Commission in 2018 offers some guidelines for deeper study of the theology of Synodality and considering implications for pastoral orientations and the Church’s mission. One of its main starting points is that -

*“The teaching of Scripture and Tradition show that synodality is an essential dimension of the Church. Through synodality, the Church reveals and configures herself as the pilgrim People of God and as the assembly convoked by the risen Lord.” (42)*

Full text here: [Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church](#).

## Synodality: a foundational document?

Pope Francis recently referred to his speech at the Ceremony commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the institution of the Synod of Bishops, 17 October 2015, reflecting that it was central to his thinking on the coming Synod. We note the following extracts -

*“The world in which we live, and which we are called to love and serve, even with its contradictions, demands that the Church strengthen cooperation in all areas of her mission. It is precisely this path of synodality which God expects of the Church of the third millennium.”*

*“A synodal church manifests “a dynamism of communion which inspires all ecclesial decisions.”*

*“Only to the extent that these (organs of the Church) keep connected to the “base” and start from people and their daily problems, can a synodal Church begin to take shape: these means, even when they prove wearisome, must be valued as an opportunity for listening and sharing.”*

Full text here: [Synod of Bishops 50th Anniversary speech](#)

## Some Synod Scenarios



The Edinburgh Jesuit Centre hosted three online talks with well known and authoritative speakers from the Amazon, the Vatican and the recent Liverpool Synod

You can watch these sessions here:

[Edinburgh Jesuit Centre](#)

## [WWW.THE-PORTICO.COM](http://WWW.THE-PORTICO.COM)

Our website is being updated to include a page dedicated to the Synod. Check our site for updated news, views and events on the Synod, as and when they happen. Do write to us if you find anything you wish to share!

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trying for a global exercise in discernment by all the faithful.

(This Rough Guide is based on the briefing for an experimental workshop on Group Discernment held by the Truro Men’s Retreat group, during lockdown).

If anyone is interested to learn more about discernment, either individually or together, please contact THE PORTICO.

## We stand before you, Holy Spirit

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.

*(Simplified version of the prayer of invocation historically used for hundreds of years at Councils, Synods and other Church gatherings.)*

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