

St Francis, Stratford:

What's all this about a "synod" and the "Synodal Process"

The title of the 2023 Synod of Bishops is "For a Synodal Church:

- **Communion,**
- **Participation,**
- **Mission."**

The process which encompasses the stated aim of Pope Francis that the Church in today's world should have a vision of a

- **missionary communion orientated to evangelisation.**

The process begins in the Local Church and then moves to the level of the Bishops' Conference. From there, discernment takes place in the Regional Area – for England and Wales, it would be steered by the European Council of Bishops' Conferences – before moving on to the Universal Church with the final Synod Gathering of Bishops in 2023, **sub et cum Petro.**

This process reflects the teaching of the Second Vatican Council in the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, **Lumen Gentium.** In this Council Document, the universality of the People of God is affirmed (LG§12) and by their anointing in the Holy Spirit, the universal body is "incapable of being at fault in belief."

The sacrament of Baptism offers entry into the life of faith and love.

QUESTIONS

1. What does "Synodality" mean?

Synodality comes from a Greek word meaning the "walking together" (syn-) on a "particular way" (-hodos)

2. If the process is already defined, how do we “walk together?”

Every member of the Church has got 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* says **“we need a respectful, mutual listening, free of ideology and predetermined agendas”**

This is at the heart of the process. Each diocese will form its own means of running this listening process so that it reaches as broad a scope of people as possible.

3. 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. Catholic organisations and charities also have a role to play in this work. Echoing the experience of the Second Vatican Council, Ecumenical and Interreligious engagement is also encouraged, and this is best facilitated at the local level. This is an important voice from outside the Church that offers an insight into the collaboration for the good of everyone.

4. 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.**”

Therefore any topics can be raised.

The whole 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. Pope Francis says “we listen, we discuss in groups but above all we pay attention to what the Spirit has to say to us.”

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