

A man in white clerical robes, including a zucchetto and a crozier, is shown from the chest up. He is holding the crozier in his right hand, raised towards the top of the frame. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.

A Feast *for*

All Peoples

PATHWAYS TO SYNODALITY

SHARING FAITH IN THE
DIOCESE OF WESTMINSTER

AVRIL
BAIGENT

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The production of *A Feast for All Peoples* has been a collaboration between the School for Synodality and the Agency for Evangelisation in the Diocese of Westminster.

The School for Synodality is a national project to support the development of a listening, missionary Church in England and Wales. Avril Baigent is a co-founder of the project and is also Director of Pastoral Development for the Diocese of Northampton. She was a facilitator at the Rome Synod Assembly.

The Agency for Evangelisation helps people encounter Christ and joyfully live and share their faith. We support parishes across the Diocese of Westminster in Mission Matters, Catechesis, and Marriage & Family Life. This bi-annual resource supports parish small groups in growing together in faith.

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A Feast for All Peoples

PATHWAYS TO SYNODALITY

When they had gone ashore, they saw a charcoal fire there, with fish on it, and bread. [...] Jesus said to them, "Come and have breakfast". Now, none of the disciples dared to ask him, "Who are you?" because they knew it was the Lord. Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them and did the same with the fish.

John 21: 9.12-13 (NRSV-CE)



Foreword

'The purpose of the synod...is intended to inspire people to dream about the Church we are called to be, to make hopes flourish, to stimulate trust, to bind up wounds, to weave new and deeper relationships, to learn from one another, to build bridges, to enlighten minds, warm hearts and restore strength to our hands for our common mission.' - Vademecum for the Synod on Synodality

These heartfelt and inspiring words launched us in 2021 on our Synodal Pathway, a pathway that has now reached and embraced literally millions of Catholics across the world. In launching what the late Pope Francis described as a 'Church-wide listening process' he invited us to listen again to each other, sharing and hearing experiences of faith with all its joys and challenges, and to find fresh ways of strengthening each other. As Cardinal Vincent Nichols put it at the time:

'This lovely initiative of Pope Francis is an opportunity for us to show our care for the family of the Church. It shines with the Holy Father's character of openness, compassion, and eagerness for renewal.' - Pastoral Letter, 2nd-3rd October 2021

The Synodal Pathway has brought us a long way, and our journey continues now under the leadership and guiding hand of Pope Leo XIV. We hope that this new faith-sharing resource, *A Feast for All Peoples*, will help open up the rich treasures of the Final Document of the Synod on Synodality, and that it will encourage each of us to read and study that Final Document for ourselves. Doing so will inspire us to dream even more.

We are indebted to Avril Baigent from the School for Synodality for preparing this resource, drawing on a deep love for the Church and her own experience of being a participant in the Synod on Synodality in Rome. To her and the School for Synodality team, thank you.

May this resource, and the deep listening, sharing and praying which will accompany it, help us to experience what *A Feast for All Peoples* can truly mean, and inspire us to bring the whole world to the table.



Canon Chris Vipers
Director of the Agency for Evangelisation
Diocese of Westminster

Introduction

In 2021, Pope Francis initiated a 'Synod on Synodality' – an invitation to the global Catholic community to reflect on our life and mission in a rapidly changing world. Our feast is for all peoples, as Jesus breaks bread with us, and asks us in turn to feed his sheep. We are called to proclaim the Kingdom of God together to the women and men of our time.

The word 'synod' comes from the Greek, meaning 'to walk together'. Stepping out on this journey, we open ourselves to the challenge of the Holy Spirit through prayer, listening, courageous speaking and discernment. By doing this, we recognise the gifts and respond to the cries of all, including those on the margins. Only together can we truly read the signs of our times. Building community and participation, we are empowered to step out ever more courageously in mission.

Synodality is rooted in the scriptures and the tradition of the Church. The hearts of the disciples were transformed by the conversation with Jesus on the walk to Emmaus. In the 'Council of Jerusalem' (cf Acts 15) the early Church used discussion, listening and patient waiting on the Holy Spirit to resolve dissent and take a momentous decision. In more recent times, the synodal journey helps put into practice what the Second Vatican Council taught about the Church as the Pilgrim People of God. Each of us – lay, religious, priests and bishops - are invited to rediscover our baptismal dignity and proclaim the Gospel in every part of our lives.

Pope Leo XIV, in his very first address, said "we want to be a synodal Church, a Church that walks, a Church that always seeks peace...that always tries to be close especially to those who suffer." At the heart of synodality is a radical commitment to relationship, even with those with whom we disagree, or have little in common. Authentic practices of listening and encounter enable us to be a prophetic voice in a polarising world. Our task now is to become a more truly synodal Church, learning together how to bring practices of discerning the Holy Spirit into the life of our communities.

The Final Document is a good starting point for this task. It was produced by the Second Synod Assembly on October 2024 and was declared as part of the ordinary magisterium of the Church by Pope Francis. In these sessions, you will have the opportunity to explore together five significant passages, with signposts to other parts of the text.

You are invited, not just to a conversation, but to a journey of conversion and renewal, learning some of the practices and dispositions of synodality along the

way. We take Jesus as our teacher and guide as we open ourselves in prayer and listen deeply to one another and the Holy Spirit. As Pope Francis wrote about Jesus' encounter (Pope Francis, *Homily for the Opening of the Synod Path*, Oct 9 2021) with the rich young man:

"The Lord does not stand aloof; he does not appear annoyed or disturbed. Instead, he is completely present to this person. He is open to encounter. Nothing leaves Jesus indifferent...Encountering faces, meeting eyes, sharing each individual's history. That is the closeness that Jesus embodies. He knows that someone's life can be changed by a single encounter."



A Note From Cardinal Radcliffe

"Synodality" may sound like ugly jargon, but it is founded on a principle which is at the root of our faith. 'Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them' (Matthew 18:20). In opening ourselves to each other, we discover the presence of the Lord. We discover each other as fellow disciples, searching for the Lord who has already found us. This requires a profound listening to each other, attentive to the insights into our faith which each of us has, however difficult we may find to articulate them. This mutual attention, which is rooted in love, is already bringing about a profound renewal of the Church. It is to be hoped that this short book will help millions of people to walk the way together.



God bless,

Cardinal Timothy Radcliffe OP

Cardinal Radcliffe, invited by Pope Francis, guided pre-synod retreats and offered reflections at the 2023 and 2024 Synod on Synodality, urging openness, dialogue, and freedom from fear-driven decisions.

THE PRACTICALITIES OF RUNNING A SESSION

These sessions work best when undertaken in small groups of around 6 -12 people with a facilitator who can guide the group. Conversation in the Spirit relies on good communication – being able to hear and understand one another. This can impact people with poor hearing, those with English as an additional language, or those whose verbal skills are not so strong. Using this method will ensure that each person is given opportunities to share even if they find it difficult and discourages louder voices from dominating the conversation.

HOSPITALITY is essential to building good relationships. Chatting over a cup of tea before beginning, remembering to welcome and introduce new people, and offering to pray for one another from one week to the next will create strong bonds in the small group.

ROOM SET UP If you have more than one small group in a room, they need to be spaced out from each other so that they can hear others from their group clearly and not be distracted by other groups. The chairs should be arranged in a circle or around a table so everyone can see and hear one another. You can have one or three plus groups in a room, as long as the room is big enough. Two groups do not work as you will be listening to the other group when you are supposed to be reflecting. Small groups work well in informal café or lounge spaces – church pews pose more problems. Having a prayer focus such as a candle and open Bible in the middle of the group will help people to engage on a spiritual level.

SILENCE is very important – but to begin with not everyone finds it easy. People can find it helpful to use the silence to jot down their key thoughts as they reflect. A brief silence can be helpful at other points, for example if the group is finding it difficult not to talk over each other, or if there is conflict in the group.

It can be helpful to have a **talking stone** or stick, especially if you do not have enough facilitators for each group. Whoever is holding the stone talks and everyone else listens. The process of putting the stone down and picking it up also helps to slow the pace of the conversation and aids listening.

TIMING is important. The suggested time for each session is 60-90 minutes. Each person is encouraged to start by making just one or two key points so that there is time to hear from everyone.

These sessions can also happen online, which might benefit those who are house bound, geographically spread out, or parents with young children.

Although this method feels slow to some, giving people time to think before they

speaking can make for very effective conversations. All voices are heard, and with each round, the wisdom of the group is built on, and people start to see new connections and possibilities. Drawing out the fruit of the conversation in the final round brings it back to next steps and makes sure the benefits are not lost. We have found that listening to all the voices makes for a richer and more considered conversation, which in turn leads to better decisions at the end of the journey. We should expect nothing less from a conversation rooted in the Holy Spirit.

THE ROLE OF THE FACILITATOR

These small groups work best with a facilitator, a fellow participant who will guide the group through the process.

It is their responsibility to:

- Prepare for their small group ahead of the session.
- Create a safe and accepting environment where all feel welcome.
- Guide the group through the Conversation in the Spirit method and help everyone to maintain a listening and discerning posture.
- Remind the group that we can hear a variety of viewpoints even if we don't agree. A little disagreement is fine as long as it is charitable.
- Assign the tasks, for example asking people to read the passages.
- Ensure that each participant has the opportunity to speak.
- Encourage members to see the Conversation in the Spirit not as a discussion group, but as a time of listening, sharing, and learning together.

THE PATTERN OF THE SESSIONS

Each week your faith sharing group will have the opportunity to participate in the practices of synodality as you read from scripture and the final document of the Synod on Synodality. Everyone is offered the space to participate through reading, praying, listening and sharing. The pattern of these sessions provides a tried and tested framework that helps participants to tune into the Holy Spirit. Each session consists of the following:

- Opening prayer.
- Lectio Divina on a scripture passage related to the theme.
- Introduction to the theme.
- Reflection on the theme.
- Reading an extract of the Final Document: For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation and Mission.
- Conversation in the Spirit using one or more of the questions provided.
- Closing Prayer - Examen

This booklet will guide both facilitators and participants through this journey. Here is some background information on some of the key elements for those who would like to go deeper.

OPENING PRAYER – ADSUMUS PRAYER

We suggest you use the ancient Adsumus prayer to begin, which has been used for centuries at assemblies and synods and was used to open every session of the Second Vatican Council, and at the Rome Assemblies.

LECTIO DIVINA – DIVINE READING

This is an ancient practice of reflecting on life with Scripture which has become central to synodality. It enables us to become comfortable with silence, to listen to a range of perspectives, and to be open to surprises. Even in a familiar passage, someone might share a word or phrase that is new to us. Above all, we open ourselves to the Holy Spirit and to one another.

In this simple form:

- Open by asking the Holy Spirit to speak to us through the reading.
- Ask one person in the group to read the passage aloud.
- Have a period of silence to allow people to reflect on what word or phrase is particularly resonating with them.
- Read the passage again - it's good to have a different voice if possible.
- Allow another time of silence.
- Ask people to share the word or phrase that struck them. Keep this sharing simple as you want to have time to hear from everyone.
- Finish by asking the Holy Spirit to bless the time of conversation to come – for listening hearts and courageous speaking.

For a fuller guide to using Lectio Divina in this way on the School for Synodality website:

<https://shorturl.at/VOAYZ>.



THE FINAL DOCUMENT: FOR A SYNODAL CHURCH: COMMUNION, PARTICIPATION, MISSION

The Final Document was written by a group of around 350 Assembly delegates from every part of the world - cardinals, bishops, religious and lay people - over the course of a month in October 2024 and then taken into Church teaching by Pope Francis. It is a beautiful, if sometimes technical, document, ranging from deep theological reflection on the resurrection appearances of Jesus to practical checklists for discernment processes. Representing a global experience of Catholicism, it draws on submissions from the previous three years as sifted by the Conversations in the Spirit at the Synodal Assembly. It consists of five sections:

Part I - The Heart of Synodality: Called by the Holy Spirit to Conversion

The theological foundations of synodality.

Part II - On the Boat, Together: The Conversion of Relationships

Vocation, ministries and charisms for mission.

Part III - “Cast the Net”: The Conversion of Processes

Discernment, decision-making, accountability and transparency.

Part IV - An Abundant Catch: The Conversion of Bonds

The local and universal Church.

Part V - “So I Send You”: Forming a People for Missionary Discipleship

Rethinking formation and catechesis through a listening and discerning lens.

Conclusion: A Feast for All Peoples

This study will draw on five of the 154 passages for reflection and conversation. There are additional sections suggested at the end of each week for those who would like to explore the document further. The text can be downloaded in multiple translations from the Synod office website via:

<https://www.synod.va/en/news/final-document-of-the-xvi-assembly.html>.



CONVERSATION IN THE SPIRIT

Conversation in the Spirit is becoming one of the best-known practices of synodality, partly because it is so distinctive. It is held in small groups of between 6-12 people and works best with one person facilitating. It is a strange way to have a conversation. Often, when we are listening to someone talk, our attention is more focused on how we might respond than on what the person speaking is actually saying. Discussions can become dominated by assertive voices, leaving those who are less confident with no space to speak. Conversation in the Spirit picks up the practices of silence and listening from *Lectio Divina* to create the conditions for deep sharing and conversion.

PROCESS OF CONVERSATION IN THE SPIRIT

The Conversation in the Spirit happens over three rounds. In the first two rounds, everyone has the opportunity to speak without being interrupted. The third round can be more of a general conversation. The pattern is as follows:

- Silence: to reflect on the question. You can jot notes down if helpful.
- Round 1: hear from each person without responding.
- Silence.
- Round 2: again, hear from each person: what has moved you or resonated with you?
- Silence.
- Round 3: What are the fruits of the conversation? (if reporting back, or moving to action, you could take notes of the main points discussed)

Each session has three questions. You are welcome to either focus on one question for three rounds, or you can also ask one question per round.





PRINCIPLES OF CONVERSATION IN THE SPIRIT

- Aim to listen far more than you talk.
- Encourage everyone to speak – some people might like to go last if they usually don't say much in a group.
- Be aware of your own 'airtime' – keep contributions brief and to the point. Jotting down thoughts in the initial silence can help with this.
- Remain curious – don't dismiss perspectives that you don't agree with but ask why people think like that. They may well have a good reason for their view.
- Keep confidentiality. The meeting should feel like a safe place for people to be able to express their views. You can share the learning with a wider group but keep the details confidential.

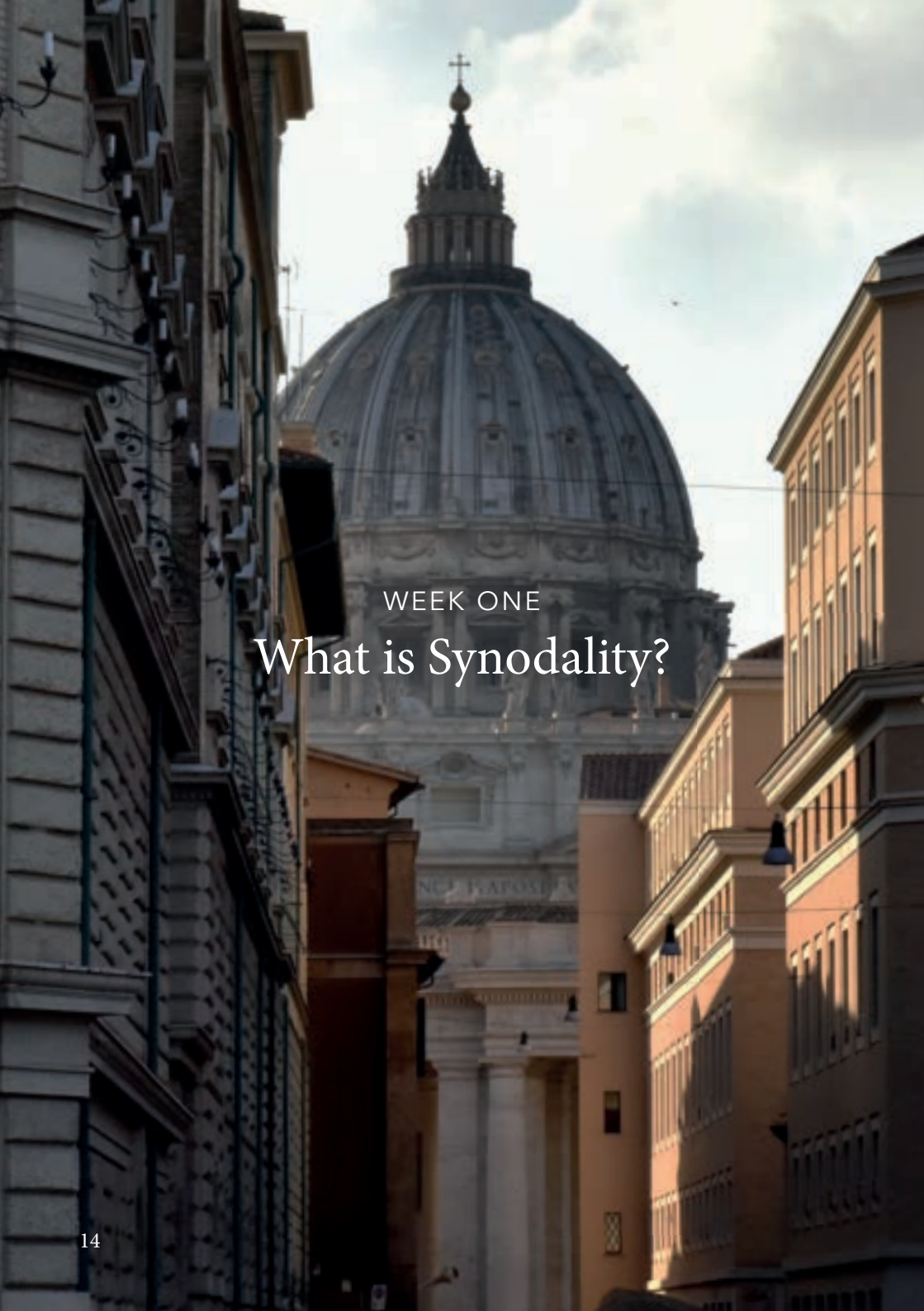
You can find out more information about Conversation in the Spirit on the School for Synodality webpage, including a helpful explanatory video:

<https://www.schoolforsynodality.org.uk/our-resources/conversations-in-the-spirit-a-how-to-guide>



EXAMEN

The Examen is an Ignatian contemplative practice, helping us to slow down and tune in to God's presence in our lives. It can be used in simple form at the end of a meeting to highlight moments of unexpected grace or challenge.



WEEK ONE

What is Synodality?

PURPOSE

To establish the foundation of our journey together
by exploring the notion of synodality.

OPENING PRAYER

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.

LECTIO DIVINA: JESUS THE ULTIMATE LISTENER

They came to Jericho. As he and his disciples and a large crowd were leaving Jericho, Bartimaeus son of Timaeus, a blind beggar, was sitting by the roadside. When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout out and say, 'Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!' Many sternly ordered him to be quiet, but he cried out even more loudly, 'Son of David, have mercy on me!' Jesus stood still and said, 'Call him here.' And they called the blind man, saying to him, 'Take heart; get up, he is calling you.' So throwing off his cloak, he sprang up and came to Jesus. Then Jesus said to him, 'What do you want me to do for you?' The blind man said to him, 'My teacher, let me see again.' Jesus said to him, 'Go; your faith has made you well.' Immediately he regained his sight and followed him on the way.

Mark 10: 46-52 (NRSV-CE)

REFLECTION

We often know this story as being about blindness and seeing, but it also reveals Jesus as the perfect listener: encouraging Bartimaeus to speak boldly of what is in his heart. As you reflect on this passage, note the dynamics of speaking, being silenced, the invitation to speak, and the results of the encounter. What word or phrase is particularly resonating with you?

INTRODUCTION TO THE THEME

Synodality is a way of being church that responds to our hurting, changing world through prayerful listening and discernment. It has three distinct aspects. Firstly, there are synodal events such as the Assemblies in Rome or a diocesan synod. Secondly, there are institutional synodal structures such as pastoral councils or discernment processes. Finally, and most importantly, it is the everyday style of our life and mission as a Catholic community – our habits and practices, for example how we welcome strangers or resolve conflict. If you are a person who likes precise definitions, you might find this all very vague! However, if we think of how hard it is to capture the distinctive culture of our families, or the place we live, it becomes easier to understand why synodality is often expressed in metaphors (for example, walking together) as well as concrete recommendations. It's also important to remember that the Final Document was written for the global church, itself having thousands of local expressions and cultures. In our session today, we will start to unpack the notion of synodality, and its particular expression in your local community.

PASSAGE FOR REFLECTION: THE MEANING AND DIMENSIONS OF SYNODALITY

PARAGRAPH 28

Synodality is the walking together of Christians with Christ and towards God's Kingdom, in union with all humanity. Oriented towards mission, synodality involves gathering at all levels of the Church for mutual listening, dialogue, and communal discernment. It also involves reaching consensus as an expression of Christ rendering Himself present, He who is alive in the Spirit. Furthermore, it consists in reaching decisions according to differentiated co-responsibilities. Along these lines, we can understand better what it means to say that synodality is a constitutive dimension of the Church (International Theological Commission, *Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church*, 2018). In simple and concise terms, synodality is a path of spiritual renewal and structural reform that enables the Church to be more participatory and missionary so that it can walk with every man and woman, radiating the light of Christ.

CONVERSATION IN THE SPIRIT:
QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

Take a few moments of silence to reflect on the questions. You can use the space below each question to jot down a thought to share if you find this helpful.

ROUND ONE

There’s a lot in this passage! What stands out to you when first reading it?

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— BRIEF SILENCE —

ROUND TWO

What idea do you find most radical or exciting on deeper reflection?

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— BRIEF SILENCE —

ROUND THREE

How might this notion of journeying together through deep listening renew both our spiritual life and our Church structures?

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Use the space below to capture what resonated with you from the conversation.
What thought or action do you want to take away?

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CLOSING EXAMEN

As we look back over our conversation today, we invite the Holy Spirit to show us moments of joy, challenge or surprise.

We will have some time in silence to reflect together:

- Where have you noticed God's presence?
- What has surprised you?
- What are you grateful for?

Invite people to share what they are thankful for, if they feel comfortable.

LET US PRAY:

Glory be to the Father, to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit. As it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

EXPLORE FURTHER

- A summary of the Synod process: paragraphs 4 and 50.
- Synodality as encounter with the Lord: paragraphs 13-14.
- The sacramental roots of synodality: paragraphs 21-27.
- The three aspects of synodality: paragraph 30.





WEEK TWO

Synodality as a Spiritual Practice

PURPOSE

To be rooted in the understanding that synodality is above all a call to holiness, requiring dispositions of self-emptying, patience and humility.

OPENING PRAYER

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.

LECTIO DIVINA: BECOMING GRACE-FILLED COMMUNITIES

'I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all.

But each of us was given grace according to the measure of Christ's gift. The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ.' *Ephesians 4:1-7, 11-13 (NRSV-CE)*

REFLECTION

This is a wonderfully rich passage. Let us take time to dwell on whatever word or phrase is speaking to us today. We should allow ourselves to feel both the encouragement and challenge of St Paul's writing to the early Church at Ephesus. Perhaps we shouldn't be surprised that even the first Christians needed reminding to bear with one another in love.

What is it that the Holy Spirit is inviting you to know today?

INTRODUCTION TO THE THEME

The past few decades of our Catholic life have been a process of sustaining our faith and mission in the face of a challenging world. Over that time, we might say that we got better at meetings (agendas, minutes, actions) but that we sometimes disconnected 'prayer' from 'getting things done'. In this beautiful passage of Ephesians, St Paul tells us that all that we do – 'the work of ministry' – is rooted in our baptism, for a life of relationship with the Lord that requires humility, gentleness and patience. The passage of the Final Document for this session picks up these themes and urges us to reconnect to Scripture, silence, and conversion as our ordinary way of being. Often, we want a particular outcome from our shared decision-making processes (whether that is to keep things as they are, or to move in a particular direction). What would it be like to enter such a conversation with openness and humility, willing to be transformed by what we hear? It's not easy to see ourselves in the self-emptying model of Christ, which is why we need to accompany one another on this journey.

PASSAGE FOR REFLECTION: SYNODAL SPIRITUALITY

PARAGRAPH 43

Synodality is primarily a spiritual disposition. It permeates the daily life of the Baptised as well as every aspect of the Church's mission. A synodal spirituality flows from the action of the Holy Spirit and requires listening to the Word of God, contemplation, silence and conversion of heart. As Pope Francis stated in his opening address of the Second Session, "the Holy Spirit is a sure guide and our first task is to learn how to discern his voice, since he speaks through everyone and in all things". A spirituality of synodality also requires asceticism, humility, patience and a willingness to forgive and be forgiven. It welcomes with gratitude and humility the variety of gifts and tasks distributed by the Holy Spirit for the service of the one Lord (cf 1 Corinthians 12: 4-5). It does so without ambition, envy or desire

for domination or control, cultivating the same attitude as Christ who “emptied himself, taking the form of a slave” (Phil. 2:7). We recognise the fruits of a spirituality of synodality when the daily life of the Church is marked by unity and harmony in pluriformity. No one can progress along the path of authentic spirituality alone; we need support, including formation and spiritual accompaniment, both as individuals and as a community.

CONVERSATION IN THE SPIRIT:
QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

Take a few moments of silence to reflect on the questions. You can use the space below each question to jot down a thought to share if you find this helpful.

ROUND ONE

When we see synodality as primarily spiritual, what challenges and opportunities arise for our decision-making, community life and leadership?

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BRIEF SILENCE

ROUND TWO

Patience, humility and a willingness to forgive are not popular dispositions in our competitive world. How do we go about cultivating these, individually and in our community life?

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BRIEF SILENCE

ROUND THREE

What difference does it make to have these reflections with others, rather than on our own?

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Use the space below to capture what resonated with you from the conversation.
What thought or action do you want to take away?

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CLOSING EXAMEN

As we look back over our conversation today, we invite the Holy Spirit to show us moments of joy, challenge or surprise.

We will have some time in silence to reflect together:

- Where have you noticed God's presence?
- What has surprised you?
- What are you grateful for?

Invite people to share what they are thankful for, if they feel comfortable.

LET US PRAY:

Glory be to the Father, to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit. As it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

EXPLORE FURTHER

- Family life as the first school for synodality: paragraph 35.
- The joy of diversity in the Church: paragraphs 37-39.
- The necessity of partners from other Christian denominations and faiths on this journey: paragraphs 40-42.



A close-up photograph of a hand holding a small, lit candle. The hand is positioned in the lower half of the frame, with the fingers gently cupping the candle. The candle's flame is bright and yellow, casting a warm, orange glow on the skin of the hand. The background is a soft, out-of-focus twilight sky with shades of blue and purple. The overall mood is contemplative and hopeful.

WEEK THREE

Synodality for Mission

PURPOSE

An opportunity to reflect on our calling as missionary disciples, and the needs of the people around us.

OPENING PRAYER

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.

LECTIO DIVINA: JESUS CALLS THE DISCIPLES

'Once while Jesus was standing beside the lake of Gennesaret, and the crowd was pressing in on him to hear the word of God, he saw two boats there at the shore of the lake; the fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets. He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to put out a little way from the shore. Then he sat down and taught the crowds from the boat. When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, 'Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch.' Simon answered, 'Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing. Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets.' When they had done this, they caught so many fish that their nets were beginning to break. So they signalled to their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both boats, so that they began to sink. But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, 'Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!' For he and all who were with him were amazed at the catch of fish that they had taken; and so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. Then Jesus said to Simon, 'Do not be afraid; from now on you will be

catching people.'When they had brought their boats to shore, they left everything and followed him.'

Luke 5:1-11 (NRSV-CE)

REFLECTION

This passage gives us a wonderful range of responses to the call to mission, from Jesus' creativity in using the boats as a make-shift pulpit, to Simon's weariness, and then the astonishment of the disciples. Tuning in to your own experiences, which word or phrase stands out for you at this time? What does the Holy Spirit want to show you?

INTRODUCTION TO THE THEME

This week we come to the core of our understanding of ourselves as Christians – through the dignity of our baptism, called for mission and gifted by the Holy Spirit. Whatever our context – family, work, friends, our local community or even online – we are each given the dispositions and abilities to share the Gospel message of hope. We might not see ourselves as gifted in this way. We might need new skills or the opportunity to grow in faith in order to feel confident. But like the disciples in today's Scripture, if we can let down our nets for a catch, we might be surprised by the result.

PASSAGE FOR REFLECTION: WE ARE ALL CALLED TO MISSION

PARAGRAPH 58

Each Baptised person responds to missionary needs in the contexts in which they live and work, according to their dispositions and abilities. This demonstrates the freedom of the Spirit in bestowing God's gifts. Owing to this dynamism in the Spirit, the People of God, listening to the reality in which they live, discover new forms of commitment and new ways to fulfil their mission. Christians, each according to their diverse roles - within the family and other states of life; in the workplace and in their professions; engaged civilly, politically, socially or ecologically; in the development of a culture inspired by the Gospel, including the evangelisation of the digital environment - walk the paths of the world and proclaim the Gospel where they live, sustained by the gifts of the Spirit.

CONVERSATION IN THE SPIRIT:
QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

Take a few moments of silence to reflect on the questions. You can use the space below each question to jot down a thought to share if you find this helpful.

ROUND ONE

When you hear the word mission, what do you think of? How does it compare to the description here of walking the paths of the world and proclaiming the Gospel where you live?

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— BRIEF SILENCE —

ROUND TWO

Which of these missionary contexts (family, workplace, civic life, online etc.) could you be called to?

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— BRIEF SILENCE —

ROUND THREE

What support from your community or diocese would you need to carry your mission out?

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Use the space below to capture what resonated with you from the conversation. What thought or action do you want to take away?

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CLOSING EXAMEN

As we look back over our conversation today, we invite the Holy Spirit to show us moments of joy, challenge or surprise.

We will have some time in silence to reflect together:

- Where have you noticed God's presence?
- What has surprised you?
- What are you grateful for?

Invite people to share what they are thankful for, if they feel comfortable.

LET US PRAY:

Glory be to the Father, to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit. As it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

EXPLORE FURTHER

- Relationships at the heart of a synodal Church: paragraphs 50-52.
- Recognising our woundedness as key to mission: paragraphs 55-56.
- Varieties of gifts and ministries: paragraph 57.
- Recognising the experience and potential of women in the Church: paragraph 52, 60.
- The special vocation of children, young people, disabled people, married people and those in consecrated life: paragraph 61-65.
- The roles of bishops, priests and deacons: paragraphs 68-74.
- The potential for lay involvement in the life of the Church: paragraphs 77-78.





WEEK FOUR

Synodality as Ecclesial Discernment

PURPOSE

To explore how synodal practices might transform our structures
and decision-making

OPENING PRAYER

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.

LECTIO DIVINA: DISCERNMENT AT THE HEART OF OUR COMMUNITY LIFE

'I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy, because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now. And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.

And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.'

Philippians 1:3-6, 9-11 (ESV-CE)

REFLECTION

For St Paul, discernment emerges from prayer, for mission and for the glory of God. Is this how you have thought of it? What word or phrase is tugging at you as you read these words together?

INTRODUCTION TO THE THEME

You might remember the description in week one of synodality as ‘spiritual renewal and structural reform.’ So far, we have mostly explored elements of spiritual renewal. However, if renewal is to make a lasting difference, it must also involve structural reform. This week we will reflect on the structures of our Catholic communities for discernment, decision-making, accountability and transparency, and what it means to become a synodal community. How can we bring all that we’ve considered so far about the spirituality and mission of synodality into local discernment and decision-making processes? What needs to change about our current structures to bring this about?

PASSAGE FOR REFLECTION: ECCLESIAL DISCERNMENT FOR MISSION

PARAGRAPH 82

Ecclesial discernment is not an organisational technique but rather a spiritual practice grounded in a living faith. It calls for interior freedom, humility, prayer, mutual trust, an openness to the new and a surrender to the will of God. It is never just a setting out of one’s own personal or group point of view or a summing up of differing individual opinions. Each person, speaking according to their conscience, is called to open themselves to the others who share according to their conscience. In this sharing, they seek to recognise together “what the Spirit is saying to the Churches” (Revelation 2:7). As ecclesial discernment entails the contribution of everyone, it is both the condition and a privileged expression of synodality, in which communion, mission and participation are lived. The more everyone is heard, the richer the discernment. Therefore, it is essential that we promote the broadest participation possible in the discernment process, particularly involving those who are at the margins of the Christian community and society.

CONVERSATION IN THE SPIRIT: QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

Take a few moments of silence to reflect on the questions. You can use the space below each question to jot down a thought to share if you find this helpful.

ROUND ONE

Reflect on a recent decision-making process you have been involved in (not necessarily in a Church setting). How is this description of discernment different?

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— BRIEF SILENCE —

ROUND TWO

What conditions/practices/spiritual preparation are needed to move from “one’s own personal point of view” to “recognising together what the Spirit is saying to the Churches”?

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— BRIEF SILENCE —

ROUND THREE

How do we listen to all the voices, especially those at the margins? There may be some in your group or parish who have professional experience of this; many of us have experienced it at some point in our lives.

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Use the space below to capture what resonated with you from the conversation.
What thought or action do you want to take away?

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CLOSING EXAMEN

As we look back over our conversation today, we invite the Holy Spirit to show us moments of joy, challenge or surprise.

We will have some time in silence to reflect together:

- Where have you noticed God's presence?
- What has surprised you?
- What are you grateful for?

Invite people to share what they are thankful for, if they feel comfortable.

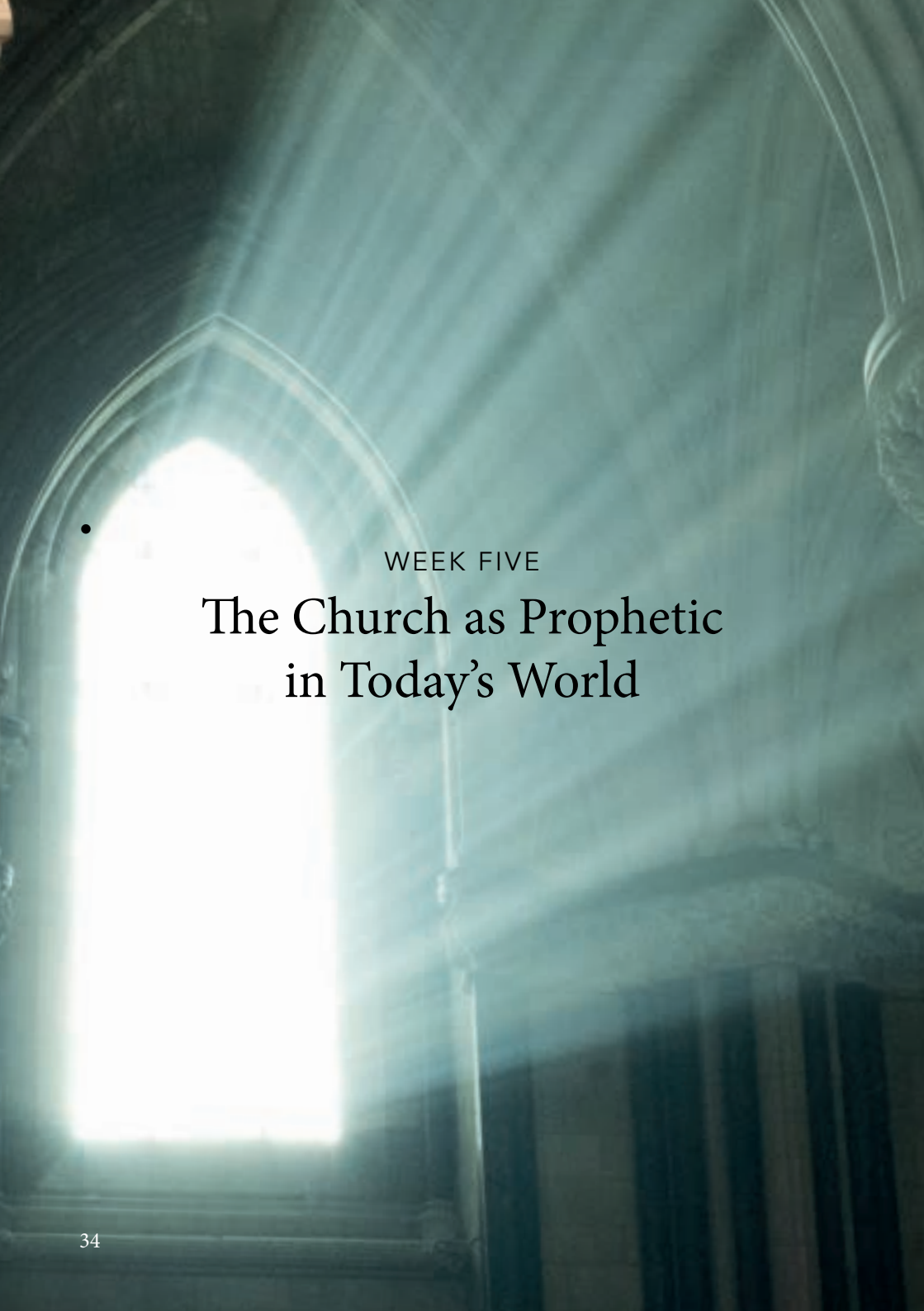
LET US PRAY:

Glory be to the Father, to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit. As it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

EXPLORE FURTHER

- A guide to processes of discernment and decision-taking: paragraphs 84-86, 93-94.
- The need for transparency and accountability for mission: paragraphs 95-102.
- Lay participation in decision-making: paragraphs 103-108.





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WEEK FIVE

The Church as Prophetic in Today's World

PURPOSE

To turn our conversation outward as we reach the end of the series.

OPENING PRAYER

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.

LECTIO DIVINA: THE POWER OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place. And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance.

Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven. And at this sound the multitude came together, and they were bewildered, because each one was hearing them speak in his own language. And they were amazed and astonished, saying, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us in his own native language? Parthians and Medes and Elamites and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabians—we hear them

telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God.” And all were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, “What does this mean?”

Acts 2: 1-12 (ESV-CE)

REFLECTION

When reading this passage, imagine that the action is taking place in your local community instead of in Jerusalem. Which parts of the community are we not speaking to currently, and who would be curious about us? What parts of this passage resonate with you as you reach the end of these sessions?

INTRODUCTION TO THE THEME

An early principle of synodality was laid out at a conference of practitioners: no more talking shops! If synodality is to transform the Church, it must have consequences. We are called to take action. In a similar way, these past few weeks have not just been a lovely opportunity to meet new people or have significant conversations. They must lead somewhere. Through our baptism and confirmation, we know ourselves as gifted with the Holy Spirit, the same Spirit that impelled the disciples out of hiding on Pentecost morning, into the streets of Jerusalem. This final session is an opportunity to draw together the experiences of the past few weeks, in the boldness of the encounters that we have had. Where is the Spirit inviting us to go? What have been the standout themes from your conversations? Use this time now to move towards action.

PASSAGE FOR REFLECTION: A FEAST FOR ALL PEOPLES

PARAGRAPH 153

By sharing meals with His disciples, the Risen Lord fulfils the image of the prophet Isaiah, whose words have inspired the work of the Synodal Assembly: a superabundant and sumptuous banquet prepared by the Lord on the mountaintop, a symbol of conviviality and communion intended for all peoples (Isaiah 25:6-8). The breakfast that the Lord prepared for His disciples after Easter is a sign that the eschatological banquet had already begun. Even if it finds its fullness only in Heaven, the banquet of grace and mercy is already prepared for all. The Church has the mission of bringing this splendid announcement to a changing world. While nourished in the Eucharist by the Lord's Body and Blood, the Church is aware

it cannot forget the poorest, the last, the excluded, those who do not know love and are without hope, nor those who do not believe in God or do not recognise themselves in any established religion. In its prayer, the Church brings them to the Lord and then goes out to meet them with the creativity and boldness that the Spirit inspires. The Church's synodality, thus, becomes a social prophecy for today's world, inspiring new paths in the political and economic spheres, as well as collaborating with all those who believe in fellowship and peace in an exchange of gifts with the world.

CONVERSATION IN THE SPIRIT:
QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

Take a few moments of silence to reflect on the questions. You can use the space below each question to jot down a thought to share if you find this helpful.

ROUND ONE

As you reach the end of these sessions, what is burning in your heart? Where is the Holy Spirit leading next?

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— BRIEF SILENCE —

ROUND TWO

What would it look like in your community to “go out with creativity and boldness”?
What resources or support might you need?

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— BRIEF SILENCE —

ROUND THREE

What potential for local collaboration is there, for example other Christian communities, those of other faiths or secular groups, for an ‘exchange of gifts with the world’?

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Use the space below to capture what resonated with you from the conversation.
What thought or action do you want to take away?

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CLOSING EXAMEN

As we look back over our conversation today, we invite the Holy Spirit to show us moments of joy, challenge or surprise.

We will have some time in silence to reflect together:

- Where have you noticed God's presence?
- What has surprised you?
- What are you grateful for?

If people are comfortable, you can share out loud what you were grateful.

LET US PRAY:

Glory be to the Father, to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit. As it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

EXPLORE FURTHER

- Re-thinking the notion of parish in a rapidly changing world: paragraphs 110-119.
- The importance of ecumenism in synodality: paragraphs 137-139.
- Formation for synodality: paragraphs 143-151.
- Synodality as prophetic in our world: paragraphs 47-48.

Next Steps

These small group resources were designed with two outcomes in mind. Firstly, to help us to reflect on specific areas of conversion or mission that the Holy Spirit has opened our eyes to. What has surprised or challenged you over the previous five weeks? Who might help you work out what your response might look like? The Archdiocese of Westminster has many resources that could help you with next steps. Contact the Agency for Evangelisation via **evangelisation@rcdow.org.uk**

Secondly, you have had the opportunity to experience how the synodal practices of Conversation in the Spirit, Lectio Divina and the Examen can help us to explore complex topics in a rich and prayerful way. There is the opportunity to take these into other aspects of our community life. For example, how might your parish council, confirmation catechists' meetings, finance committee or music group be transformed by listening to a broader range of voices, by reading Scripture together, or by holding a Conversation in the Spirit?





PRACTICAL HELP WITH DEVELOPING SYNODALITY

The School for Synodality website has many resources to help communities embed these practices in their everyday life, including a toolkit to help parishes re-imagine their pastoral councils: <https://www.schoolforsynodality.org.uk/>

Find out what next steps other parts of the global Church are taking here: <https://www.synodresources.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/Global-Overview-of-Synodality-Implementation.pdf>

Visit the Synod Resources website for a searchable database of resources from around the world: <https://www.synodresources.org/>

EXPLORING THE FINAL DOCUMENT

Read the Pathways to Implementation document from the Vatican here: <https://www.synod.va/content/dam/synod/process/implementation/pathways/250102---ENG-Pathways-for-the-implementation-phase.pdf>

Read the Final Document in the company of theologians and practitioners with the School for Synodality book club series: <https://www.schoolforsynodality.org.uk/our-resources/final-document-book-club-2025>

Jargon Buster

- **Apostles / Evangelists / Pastors / Teachers:** Various roles within the Church for ministry and service, often referring to spiritual leadership.
- **Asceticism:** A disciplined lifestyle to grow in spiritual freedom and virtue.
- **Charisms:** Spiritual gifts given by the Holy Spirit for the good of the Church and the world.
- **Communion:** Deep fellowship and unity in the Church, grounded in shared faith and the presence of the Holy Spirit.
- **Conversation in the Spirit (CiS):** A method of spiritual dialogue based on attentive listening, silence, and shared reflection.
- **Conviviality:** The quality of living together in fellowship and joy, especially as seen in shared meals.
- **Conversion of Heart:** A transformative turning toward God and others in love and humility.
- **Co-responsibility:** Shared accountability and active participation of all the baptized in the life and mission of the Church.
- **Discernment:** A prayerful process of listening to the Holy Spirit to make decisions aligned with God's will.
- **Ecclesial:** Relating to the Church or its functions.
- **Ecclesial Discernment:** A communal spiritual process within the Church for determining God's will.
- **Eschatological:** The word comes from the Greek eschaton, meaning "last" or "end." It refers to the "last things" or final events in God's divine plan. It is concerned with the ultimate destiny of the individual soul and that of the whole of creation.
- **Final Document:** The outcome document of the Synod process, reflecting discernments and directions for the Church.
- **Formation:** The spiritual, theological, and practical preparation of Christians for ministry and service.
- **Lay Apostolate:** The role and responsibility of lay people in the mission of the Church.
- **Lectio Divina:** An ancient prayer practice involving reading and meditating on Scripture.
- **Margins / Marginalised:** People or groups who are excluded or overlooked in Church and society.

- **Magisterium:** The official teaching of the Catholic Church.
- **Mission:** The Church's purpose to share the Gospel and serve the world.
- **Missionary Discipleship:** The vocation of every Christian to follow Jesus and actively share the Gospel.
- **Participation:** The active engagement of all members of the Church in its life and decision-making.
- **Pilgrim People of God:** A Vatican II term emphasizing the Church as a community on a journey of faith.
- **Pluriformity:** The harmonious diversity of expressions within the unity of the Church.
- **Prophetic Voice:** Speaking truth and offering hope in response to societal injustices, inspired by the Holy Spirit.
- **Social Prophecy:** The Church's witness to justice, peace, and fellowship in society.
- **Spiritual Accompaniment:** Guiding others in their spiritual growth and discernment.
- **Spiritual Dispositions:** Inner attitudes like humility, patience, and openness necessary for discernment and synodality.
- **Structural Reform:** Changes in Church structures and practices to better align with the vision of synodality.
- **Structural Renewal:** The process of updating Church systems to reflect more inclusive and participatory models.
- **Synod/Synodality:** From Greek *synodos*, meaning "to walk together." Refers to a way of being Church marked by communal discernment, dialogue, and shared mission.





Diocese of Westminster

AGENCY FOR EVANGELISATION