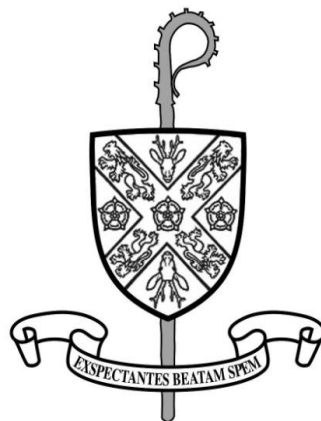


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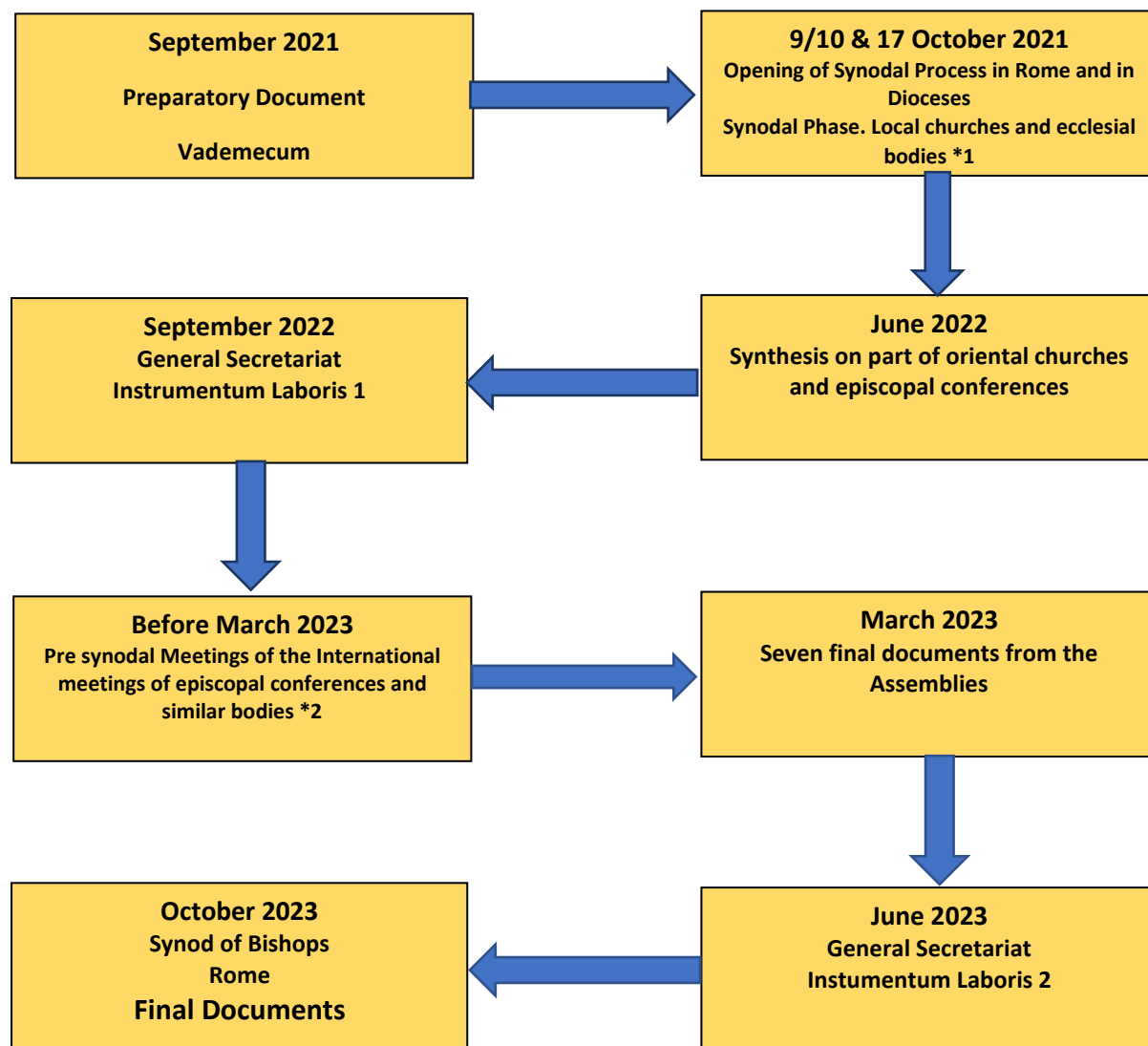
ROMAN CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF
MIDDLESBROUGH

Responding to the Synod of Bishops Questionnaire

The title of the 2023 Synod of Bishops is *“For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, Mission.”*. Pope Francis’ aim through the synodal process is that the Church in today’s world should have a vision of missionary communion orientated to evangelisation.

This document is intended to assist clergy and lay people in the Diocese of Middlesbrough to engage positively in the Synodal process.

The word *Synodality* comes from a Greek word meaning “Walking Together” on a “Particular way”. In this instance the “particular way” has been defined by the synod of Bishops in its process and timeline for the 2023 Synod of Bishops (diagram below).



“The participation of the lay faithful becomes essential. They are the immense majority of the people of God and there is much to be learnt from their participation in the various forms of life and mission of ecclesial communities (Synodality in the life and mission of the Church, para 73)

*1: Dicastries, Consecrated Life (UISG-USG, Unions & Federations, Associations of the Faithful, Institutions of Higher Education)

*2: Africa (SECAM), Oceania (FCBCO), Asia ((FABC), Middle East (CPCO), Europa (CEE), Latin America (CELAM), North-America (USCCB + CCB)

What is meant by *Communion, Participation and Mission*?

Communion: bringing people together as communities in the local Church begins this prayerful insight into the ways of the Holy Spirit. When the Church gathers for the Eucharist, and what flows from it is when the necessary self-understanding of the mission of the Church is best understood. Thus the dialogue at this level is rooted in the life of the ecclesial communities and parishes.

Participation: the reflections that the local Churches are undertaking regarding the past fifteen months of pandemic from the context of how the Church in England and Wales looks forward, not backwards, to revitalising its mission of bringing the Good News to all. The gentle call of invitation to the full practice of Catholic life, with Eucharist at the centre of all the Church does, is an integral part of the “walking together.”

Mission: understanding the local situation will feed necessarily into an overview of the mission in the whole diocese. Like the tesserae of mosaic, the picture is built up of the needs for renewal so that mission to all is firmly rooted in the life of the local community who gather, by gentle invitation by the Lord, to worship him, to be sanctified by him and to exercise both an individual and collective prophetic voice.

The Synodal Process is a pilgrimage of the whole People of God in discerning the way the Church needs to be in its localities and worldwide at this moment in time.

Suggested Ground Rules and Outline for Meetings

It may be that a group in your parish will meet a number of times to discuss the Synod Questionnaire so that you can feed this into the process at diocese level. The following offers some guidance for conducting these meetings.

1. Who to invite?

The meetings should be made open to all parishioners. No one should feel left out or excluded from the process.

2. Where and when to hold the meetings?

You will need to decide if the meetings will take place face to face or online using zoom or some other appropriate platform. It could be by a mixture of both.

3. How long should the meetings last?

It is suggested that meetings should at least be an hour and no more than 90 minutes in length

4. What will we need for the meeting?

- Convenient time and date(s)
- Publicity in parish newsletter and on parish website
- Venue if face to face meeting, taking into consideration the need to maintain some social distancing and possibly wearing of face coverings if that makes people feel at ease.
- Flipchart maybe helpful along with marker pens
- Chairperson and Scribe
- Scripture readings (Some suggestions are given in this document)
- Explanation of Ground rules

5. Basic guiding principles

- The meetings are about opportunities for dialogue. Everyone is to be given the opportunity to speak but they are also encouraged to actively listen to others without necessarily commenting directly on what has been said by someone else.
- We are embarking on a “Walking with others.”

- We are entering a process of discerning what the Holy Spirit is calling us to be.
- It's not about who can shout loudest, nor is it about talking others into submitting to our views.
- We need to dare to allow the process to change us.
- Our discussions are to be rooted in Scripture, Prayer and Faith.
- Make sure people know each other.

Pause for thought

“Synodal dialogue depends on courage both in speaking and in listening. It is not about engaging in a debate where one speaker tries to get the better of others or counters their positions with brusque arguments, but about expressing whatever seems to have been suggested by the Holy Spirit as useful for communal discernment, at the same time being open to accepting whatever has been suggested by the same Spirit in other people's positions, for the general good” (Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church, para111).

6. How many meetings will we need?

The number of meetings you are likely to need depends on a number of things: The size of your group and how talkative people are likely to be, how long the meeting lasts etc.. How many questions are discussed?...

You could for example have a full morning or afternoon meeting or even a meeting from between say 10.00am and 3.00pm. This might enable you to complete the exercise in one go or you may decide to have three or four meetings that each last for an hour and a half. How you approach this is up to you.

7. Meeting outline

Each meeting should follow the outline below

Gather

If you gather a group, welcome everyone. Ask people to introduce themselves, maybe give people a sticky label so they can write their name on it. If you are meeting online, ask each person to let their name show on the screen.

Ground Rules

Remind people that what they hear in this session is privileged sharing and should never be repeated outside of the group.

Everyone is free to speak but listening is every bit as important.

People should not be interrupted unless they are asked for brevity from the Chairperson.

Participants are asked to be considerate of others. Everyone's opinions are valid

Stress the importance of starting and finishing the meeting on time.

Let people know that someone will be acting as Scribe and recording key words or main points and introduce the chair- person.

Call to Prayer/reflection

Each meeting should begin with some time set aside for scripture and prayer

Introduce questions for discussion

Talk about the questions for discussion within the context of the Synodal process.

How you do this depends largely on how many people are present if there's no more than a dozen people, they may agree to just have one large group on the other hand they may wish to divide into two groups of six. It works best if groups are not smaller than six. However, if there are fewer than six of you, please still have your discussion.

Reflection Making sense of what we've heard and agreeing our priorities for feeding-in to the Synod by sending your discussion points to the Bishop's Synod planning Group who will draft a synthesis of the findings for Bishop Terry to Feed-in to the Council of Bishops in preparation for the Synod of Bishops in Rome.

*People may need to be helped to understand that in the final outcome, that in Pope Francis' discernment of everything that has been shared with him may not include everything that has been highlighted or prioritised by the Bishops.

Summing up

Time should be taken to sum – up the key points made during your meeting and to ask people if they are happy with what has been discussed?

Closing prayer

Finish your meeting with a closing prayer and blessing and remind people of the time and date of the next meeting.



Meeting Template

Welcome: Always begin by welcoming everyone and asking people to briefly say who they are and give a particular welcome to those who we may not know.

Opening Prayer before each session

Call to prayer: invite everyone to quiet themselves and open their hearts to God whose voice echoes in the depths of our being.

Use these or similar words to lead your group in reflective prayer:

+We begin our work and our prayer with the sign of the Cross: In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen

I invite you now to open your heart to Jesus, who is always near you, ready to embrace you. Simply open your heart to him now. **(pause)** We seek to know in this time what God is inviting us to become as his People, the Church. Ask God to give you the grace of hearing his voice as we work together here. **(pause)** What do you need for this work? Patience? Kindness? Discernment? Humility? Insight? Ask God for whatever gift you seek right now. **(pause)**

Now let us take a brief time to share faith stories. **(Don't be tempted to shorten this sharing or skip it. Hearing from each other is a crucial part of the prayer, study, and discernment process.)**

- What has happened in your life in the past day or two? Tell a simple, brief story about an encounter with someone, a phone call, a moment alone, or an event in your life over the past couple of days, whatever jumps to mind is your story.
- When you think about it now, looking back over your shoulder, what invitation from God did you hear in this experience?

Let us pray

Father, we thank you for the love you have shown to us in the gift of Jesus your Son.

We thank you for the gift of the Church, through which you show us that you are always with us and at work in our lives.

May your Holy Spirit be powerfully at work among us. Help us to respond to the challenges of our times in new ways, to bring your love to all our sisters and brothers.

We pray through Jesus, our friend and helper.

Amen.

Let us now begin.



Quote from Scripture

(Ask someone to read it)

Eph 4:29-32

Do not use harmful words in talking. Use only helpful words, the kind that build up and provide what is needed, so that what you say will do good to those who hear you. And do not make God's Holy Spirit sad; for the Spirit is God's mark of ownership on you, a guarantee that the Day will come when God will set you free. Get rid of all bitterness, passion, and anger. No more shouting or insults. No more hateful feelings of any sort. Instead, be kind and tender-hearted to one another, and forgive one another, as God has forgiven you in Christ.

Introduce the questions to be discussed asking people to think about their response to them. Make sure that plenty of time is allowed and try to ensure that everyone who wants to is able to speak.

Give everyone a little time to think about what they have heard and read and then lead -in to the discussion:

- What do you think is important and why?
- How should we respond as a parish group?
- What are our priorities?

Let each person make their points without being interrupted and let their comments stand without debate.

Make sure that someone is recording the main points (if possible, on a flip-chart)

Reflection

Ask people to reflect on what they have heard (Maybe a short period of silence just to think about what has been shared)

Once everyone's initial points have been made, move the discussion forward to; what are our priorities as a parish group? This is where the initial contributions are prioritised and moved from the individual level to the communal. In this part you are seeking a degree of consensus.

Summing up

- If necessary sum-up the key points agreed upon and draw the meeting to its conclusion
- Thank people for giving their time and commitment
- If you are having further meetings let people know how many these are likely to be and that date and time of the next meeting.

Closing prayer and blessing

Offer a short prayer in thanksgiving for all that has been shared and give the participants a blessing.

Format of Future meetings

This format can be used for future meetings but you may want to use other passages of scripture to begin your actual discussion.

Once the scripture reading has been read you should give a brief re-cap of what was agreed at the previous meeting to serve to remind people of where they are up to.

Feeding back synodal discussions to Bishop Terry.

Bishop Terry has asked Canon Derek Turnham to be the Synod Contact in our Diocese. You can feed back the fruits of your discussion to him. A pro forma will be provided to assist you in making your feedback.

Canon Derek can be contacted: derekturnham@rcdmidd.org.uk
Telephone: 01642 292552