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Letter about the Synod and the Synodal Process in the Archdiocese of Southwark

1 October 2021
Feast of St Therese of Lisieux,
Patroness of the Missions

Dear Brothers in Christ

Grace and peace to you in the Lord Jesus Christ.

As you will be aware, the Holy Father has set in motion a process of worldwide consultation leading towards the Synod of Bishops in 2023. An invitation is extended to 'all of the baptised' to contribute on three principal themes: Communion, Participation and Mission. A diocesan phase, moves to a national and regional phase, each in turn feeding into the Synod in Rome. From more information see Synod Resources 1 – About the Synod and CBCEW Synod FAQ, both attached with this letter.

As Covid restrictions are lifted, and as we get a sense of how the coming months may unfold, the Synodal process provides us with the opportunity to hear the thoughts and concerns of the Church across the Archdiocese of Southwark. By listening always first to the Lord, and then sharing with each other, we seek to strengthen our collective witness to the Lord Jesus, the Way, the Truth, the Life.

With this letter there are various resources and documents to help with the first phase of diocesan listening and reflection. These include:

- Materials from the Synod Office in Rome – also available at www.synod.va/en.html and in different languages, together with other resources
- Material from the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales – also available at www.cbcew.org.uk/synodal-church/ together with other resources
- Material produced by our Agency for Evangelisation and Catechesis in the Archdiocese of Southwark. These will also become available, together with other resources, on the Agency website - <https://aec.rcaos.org.uk/> - and also on the new Archdiocesan website to be launched on 18 October.

The following timetable allows for as wide a consultation as possible in the short time we have been allotted. I would like each parish to **nominate two members of the**

parish as delegates who can be invited to organise opportunities for listening and discernment in the parish (with the help of resources provided). This will, of course, include the parish clergy and will, hopefully, enable as great a participation as possible. There is an accompanying resource (Synod Resource 2 – Selecting Parish Delegates) to help with the appointment of parish delegates.

Once the parish delegates have been selected, please can you, with their permission, send their names and contact email addresses to synod@rcaos.org.uk.

The parish delegates will be invited to participate in:

- An online session at 4pm on Sunday 17 October where I will introduce the process with a time of *Lectio Divina*.
- One of the three diocesan listening meetings later in the year: on Wednesday 24 November or Wednesday 8 December or Friday 10 December.

Southwark Synodal Timetable

Here is the timetable for how the parish and diocesan Synodal process will unfold in our Archdiocese:

1. **Sunday 17 October 2021** – Opening Mass at St George’s Cathedral (livestreamed) to launch the Synodal process in the diocese with a launch in every parish. A **Pastoral Letter** will be provided to be read at every Mass and the parish delegates nominated to serve the process can be introduced at your weekend Masses. Prayer cards will be provided for your parishioners. In the afternoon of Sunday 17 October at 4pm an online session will be held for the delegates where I will introduce the process with a time of *Lectio Divina*.
2. **18 October** – a Synod ‘portal’ on the new diocesan website will be published, featuring resources for parishes and other institutions, and providing a place for individual and corporate submissions to the process. The can be made via synod@rcaos.org.uk or via post to Synod Submissions, c/o Archbishop’s House, 150 St George’s Road, SE1 6HX.
3. **From 18 October to 19 November** – local listening phase (i.e. parishes, and including schools where possible) which can comprise online or in-person gatherings as the organisers see fit. Resources for these meetings, including the questions for discussion are available in an attachment with this letter. (Synod Resources 3, 4 & 5)
4. **From 24 November to 10 December** – three meetings with me (online) one for each area of the diocese to which parish delegates and clergy will be invited to contribute what has been heard in the local listening phase.
5. **7 January 2022** – Deadline for online submissions via the diocesan website which will contribute to the diocesan ‘synthetic’ document.

6. **January 2022** – A representative group of clergy, religious and lay people will meet to prayerfully distil the contents of the local meetings and the postal and online submissions to the Synod process into a ‘synthetic’ document.
7. **Early February 2022** – a further meeting will be convened to share the draft ‘synthetic’ document with participants in the process; inaccuracies in the document will be amended in advance of its submission to the Bishops’ Conference for the next stage of the Synod process.
8. **March 2022** – Event to mark the conclusion of the diocesan phase.

Noting that the duration of the process is short, the online ‘portal’ for submissions will remain open until the summer (though submissions after 7 January will not feature in the document offered to the Bishops’ Conference). Postal submissions, likewise, will continue to be welcomed. The website will also feature any further documents, so that people can follow something of the process in the coming months. More resources will be made available to continue prayerful discernment into Lent 2022.

Please do all you can to support this process as we ‘journey together’, respectfully hearing and exploring how the perennial teaching of the Church can be applied and lived today. As Pope Francis reminds us: *“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.”* (*Let us Dream: the Path to a Better Future*, Simon and Schuster, London, 2020, page 84-85)

I offer this short passage from the Synod Vademecum by way of a prayer and conclusion:

May the Blessed Virgin Mary, Queen of the Apostles and Mother of the Church, intercede for us as we journey together on the path that God sets before us. As in the Upper Room at Pentecost, may her maternal care and intercession accompany us as we build up our communion with one another and carry out our mission in the world. With her, we say together as the People of God: ‘Let it be with me according to your word’ (Lk 1:38).

Please keep the Synodal process in your prayers.

With every blessing and the assurance of prayers

Yours sincerely in Christ

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a cross symbol followed by a stylized, cursive name that appears to be 'John Wilson'. There is a horizontal line underneath the signature.

The Most Rev John Wilson
Metropolitan Archbishop of Southwark