



Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

At a meeting of our Diocesan Pastoral Council in September 2019, I put forward my wish to initiate a listening process that would enable all the faithful to assist in preparing for the future mission of our diocese. The key concept of that 'listening' or 'synodal' process is found in the Greek origin of the word 'synod', comprising 'syn' (with or together with) and 'odos' (path or way), meaning 'journeying together along the same path'. Consideration was then given about what form this path might take for our diocese. Despite the challenges which emerged in March 2020 from the Covid-19 pandemic, the preparatory work for that process has continued since.

The diocesan process is called '*From Parish to Mission*'¹. Shortly after I presented this to the clergy for discussion at the beginning of May 2021, Pope Francis also published on 20th May his mandate for the Universal Church to engage in the preparatory work for a Synod of Bishops in Rome, 2023. This Synod, which is titled '*For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, Mission*', flows from the Holy Father's call for the Church to be a 'missionary communion'² oriented to evangelisation: in other words, the missionary impulse we should share as Catholics to make known to the world the person of Our Lord Jesus Christ and His Gospel. The first stage of the preparation for the Synod will take place in the 'local Church', that is in each diocese, and will include prayer and a listening process based on questions given by the Synod Office³. The *Preparatory Document* for the Synod, which was published last Tuesday, 7th September, together with other information about the Synodal and diocesan process is available to read on the Diocese of Leeds website.

As this first stage of the Synod of Bishops' process now coincides with our own diocesan process, there is a clear synergy between the two and, therefore, in our diocese they will be organised as a single process. I have commissioned a Diocesan Synodal Team made up of clergy and lay faithful from the diocese to organise a listening process which is rooted in meditation on Sacred Scripture, the liturgy, and prayer. Only in this way can our journey of truly listening to one another throughout the diocese be an authentic experience of discerning the voice of the Holy Spirit.

The first phase of the Synod of Bishops will commence at a local level with a Mass celebrated by each diocesan bishop in his Cathedral on Sunday 17th of this coming October and the listening process will conclude at the end of January 2022. Then, at the beginning of February, the local bishop will submit to the national Bishops' Conference the response from their diocese to the Synod's questions. The Bishop's Conference must then gather in Plenary Assembly in March 2022 to prepare a synthesis of all the diocesan responses and submit this to the General Secretary for the Synod of Bishops before April 2022.

To enact this timetable, during the Mass in Leeds Cathedral for the opening of the diocesan phase of the Synod of Bishops in October, I will commission a group of specially trained coordinators to act as facilitators for the Synodal consultation meetings in our parishes. These coordinators will then visit each parish in the diocese between the end of October and mid-December 2021 to assist parishioners and clergy in discussing the synodal questions and to record the responses: *your* responses.

¹ *The Discernment of a Pastoral Plan for the Diocese of Leeds*, Bishop Marcus, 4th May 2021

² *Evangelii Gaudium* §30-31, Apostolic Exhortation, Pope Francis, 24th November 2013

³ *Preparatory Document*, Synod of Bishops, 7th September 2021

I have appointed Fr Martin Kelly and Jessica Wilkinson to be the diocesan contacts and jointly to lead the Diocesan Synodal Team. The members of this Team will form the steering group for both the Synodal and the diocesan listening processes.

It is important for all voices to be heard. Therefore, there will be a parallel listening process taking place in our schools and with the various pastoral organisations in the diocese, as well as more focused and in-depth consultations with various groupings within our diocesan family such as young people, the housebound and elderly, parents, persons living with special needs, and the lapsed. As part of our diocesan listening process, these consultations will continue into the Spring of 2022.

As we prepare to take part in this Synodal process, first and foremost, I ask all the lay faithful, consecrated religious men and women, and clergy to pray that Almighty God will grant us the Spirit of Wisdom to discern His will for the Church in this diocese and to understand how we can serve Him more completely in the work of evangelisation. Please pray for our Holy Father Pope Francis and for all the bishops of the Church as they prepare for the Synod in 2023. I hope and pray that all the members of our diocesan family will participate positively in the Synodal process and maintain a spirit of mutual trust, common faith, and a shared purpose.

**✠ Marcus
Bishop of Leeds**

Given at Leeds on 8th September 2021, and appointed to be read at celebrations of Mass, published through parish electronic distribution systems and websites, and made available to be taken away from the churches and chapels of the Diocese on the weekend of 11th and 12th September 2021.

More information about the Synodal and the diocesan listening processes will be available (from 12:00 Noon on Saturday 11th September) on the diocesan website: www.dioceseofleeds.org.uk

A diocesan prayer card will be distributed in due course to all parishes and religious communities.

Prayer for the Synod: *Adsumus Sancte Spiritus*

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.