

# Bishop's letter marks start of Synodal Church process

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***Bishop Alan Hopes has written a Pastoral Letter to everyone across the Diocese of East Anglia to mark the start of the worldwide Synodal Church process – in which the least as well as the greatest has the opportunity to be heard.***

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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Some of you at Mass today will remember the Second Vatican Council, convened by Pope John XXIII which lasted from 1962 until 1965. All the bishops of the world came together to look at almost every area of the life and faith of the Church.

These Councils are quite rare. The Holy Father, therefore, still needs to meet on a regular basis with representative bishops from all the Bishops' Conferences in the world. So, every few years, what is called a Synod – an assembly – meets to focus with him on a particular topic. This is always a significant event in the life of the Church.

The next Synod of representative bishops will take place in Rome in 2023. In preparation for this, the Holy Father has asked the whole Church – lay people and religious, clergy and bishops – the entire Holy People of God – to participate in the preparations for that Assembly.

The Synod has been given the title, "For a Synodal Church: communion, participation and mission."

That word Synodal is really a new word in our language. It is the Holy Father's way of describing the Church journeying together along the paths of history, towards the encounter with Christ the Lord. It is a way of recognising that we Christians, in our calling to follow Jesus Christ, never do so alone. We travel with Christ and with one another. The Synodal way is an invitation to journey with open hearts, to listen to the prompting of the Holy Spirit, and to the needs of God's people and those of the world.

In many ways, it is something which I hope we already do in our parishes at meetings, on committees and pastoral councils – and in our Diocese through our Commissions and larger gatherings of the faithful. For in all these gatherings we have much to learn and much to offer. Together we draw on the gifts and graces of our own unique vocation, each in our different way. It is putting into action – at every level of the Church – St Paul's teaching that we are members of one Body, with different gifts to offer.

As the successor to Peter, the Holy Father has a special role in the journey of the Church. He is the head of today's Apostles, the bishops, and the Chief Pastor of the Church. Like Peter, he is the rock on which the Church is built, and the one who must confirm his sisters and brothers in the faith. This building was not made by human hands. It is a structure given to us by Jesus himself, not for the exercise of power, but in order to offer service. The first shall be last and the

last shall be first. And in the Gospel for today he commands his apostles to make themselves last of all and servants of all.

A Synodal Church is one in which the least as well as the greatest has the opportunity to be heard.

Pope Francis also asks us to recognise that this way is unique to the Church and is not to be confused with a secular way of governing. It is not democracy. It is not about communities and individuals with different agendas competing with and opposing one another. It is about consensus – being of a common mind – and is not dependent upon majority voting.

Nor is it a means for changing or challenging the teaching authority of the Church or its doctrine, which has been handed down by Jesus to his Church and safeguarded by successive Popes. Rather, it is about fostering communion and participation, in gentleness and charity – journeying together, listening to each other, learning from each other.

This Pastoral Letter marks the start of this process for our Diocese. I am therefore, inviting you all, as the local Church of East Anglia, to take a full part in these preparations for the Synod.

How can we do this?

First, in communion with the whole church, the Diocesan process will begin on October 17 with Mass in St John's Cathedral at 11am. All who will be involved practically in the process in parish and diocese will be commissioned.

Second, a Diocesan team has already been formed to serve as a point of contact for this synodal consultation. It consists of the members of our Commission for Catechesis and Formation. It will be led by a lay person (Mrs Angela Wilson), a deacon (Huw Williams) and a priest (Fr Andrew Eburne).

Third, within the next few weeks every parish will be invited to take part in this consultation process. Guidance will be provided to assist you in this process. I would ask every parish to appoint, as soon as possible, a lead person or a team to facilitate this consultation in your local Community. They will then send your responses to the Diocesan team who will compile a Diocesan response, which will go to the Bishops' Conference. Our national response will then be sent to Rome, where it will assist those who will be drawing up the agenda for the Synod in 2023. In this way – from the grass roots to the head – we have the chance to co-operate with one another and the Holy Spirit.

St James, in his wonderfully clear and direct way, speaks in today's second reading of the fruits of this collaboration. He tells us that the wisdom of the Holy Spirit, which comes from above, is pure, kindly, considerate and makes for peace. Whenever we collaborate with the Holy Spirit, and one another, we sow those seeds of the Spirit which bear fruit in holiness and integrity for our world.

So together we pray that the Holy Spirit will guide this synodal way forward in our Diocese and in the Universal Church. We ask the prayers of Our Lady of Walsingham and those of St Felix that we will make our journey one of faithful and attentive discernment. We pray above all, that the fruits of this journey for our Diocese and the whole Church will take us forward in our mission to live and proclaim the Gospel more faithfully.

With prayerful good wishes, yours devotedly in Christ,

**+Alan Bishop of East Anglia**

To be read at all Masses during the weekend of September 18/19, 2021

<https://www.rcdea.org.uk/bishops-letter-marks-start-of-synodal-church-process/>