



Diocese of Plymouth
From the Office of the Bishop

**Pastoral Message to be read in all Churches and Chapels of the Diocese on
the weekend of 9/10 October.**

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

This weekend, the Holy Father will open a two-year synodal journey of consultations and discernment in order that the Church can engage everyone in being more missionary. There are three phases - diocesan, continental, universal - which will culminate with a gathering in Rome in October 2023. I want to share some reflections on the diocesan phase of this process.

“Synod” (from Greek *Synodos*) literally means “walking together”. This dimension of our Church life asks, “How is this ‘journeying together’ happening in our situation? What steps does the Holy Spirit invite us to take to grow in this journeying together so that we can reach out to our brothers and sisters more effectively, that they, too, may be part of this journey with us? As the Lord reminds us in today’s Gospel, “Everything is possible for God”. All else in life fades away, knowing that we are accompanied by Our Lord and Saviour. He desires that we find the path to His kingdom and that we assist one another along the way. To be focused on Him is our main priority. We want others, who do not know Him, to join us on this journey with Him, and to His kingdom.

Our Diocese has already started its synodal journey through some discussions and individual and parish submissions made through ‘A Precious Place of God’s Grace’ (<https://www.plymouth-diocese.org.uk/a-precious-place-of-gods-grace/>). This remains a key point of reference for us. We will dovetail what is being asked of us by Rome with listening carefully to what is needed locally. The Holy See encourages this.

A listening phase of the Synodal journey will take place during Advent. Each parish will receive resources to facilitate this listening in our local communities, so that everyone has an opportunity for their voice to be heard.

The aim is to foster as broad a consultation as possible, reaching out to integrate the voice of the poor and the excluded, as well as engaging those who have any role or responsibility within the local parish. There will be both in-person and online opportunities to gather and reflect, as well as opportunities to make personal contributions through our dedicated email (Synodfeedback@prcdtr.org.uk). The process will culminate in a Diocesan pre-synodal meeting, or perhaps a couple of meetings in different parts of the Diocese, early in 2022.

I recognise that the timelines seem tight, but this will give us an opportunity to listen very deeply to one another, in an ongoing process of consultation and discernment about our own future. This has already begun. It now needs fuller reflection, considering our local situations, as well as the ongoing realities of living with COVID and all it means for our life of faith and witness.

I will launch this listening phase of our “walking together”, with a time of prayer in the Cathedral at 4pm on Sunday 17th October. Anyone is welcome to attend.

I encourage you to fully engage with this important process in the life of the Church, locally and universally, so that we can all be more effective missionary disciples. Very important is our prayer to the Holy Spirit so that we listen to what God is saying to us, as well as listening deeply to what we are saying to one another. May the Holy Spirit guide us on this journey together and give us a share in God’s wisdom and understanding.

Pray for me.

Yours devotedly,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "+ Mark O'Toole". The signature is written in a cursive style with a cross at the beginning.

Rt Rev Mark O'Toole
Bishop of Plymouth

Prayer for the Synod: *We stand before you Holy Spirit.*

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