You may already have gathered from the Newsletter that this Sunday marks the beginning of a time of opportunity for the parish to reflect more deeply on the 2023 Synod of Bishops; a time for each one of us to engage with the Synodal Process.

In October last year Pope Francis formally opened a two year process called ‘a synod on synodality’ officially known as ‘*Synod 2021-2023: For a Synodal Church*’.

Many of us may find the name “Synod on Synodality” and its purpose puzzling. What is a synod in the first place?

The word derives from an ancient Greek term that gives us an English translation – “making our way together, (walking together along the way, united in Christ, the Way, the Truth and the Life“ ).

Early Christians [developed a custom](https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_cti_20180302_sinodalita_en.html) of local leaders “making their way together ... united in Christ’ by coming together, to pray and make decisions about matters affecting all the Christian communities in a region. They gathered in the faith that their prayers and discussions would reveal God’s will and the way to achieve it.

The most recent ecumenical council of the Church - the Second Vatican Council or “Vatican II” - which met from 1962 to 1965 revitalized the importance of bishops as heads of their local churches and emphasized their cooperation with one another. Pope Paul VI created a permanent structure for a [Synod of Bishops](https://www.vaticannews.va/en/church/news/2019-10/what-is-synod-bishops-faq.html).

Pope Francis has shown special interest in the Synod of Bishops, and has taken steps to create a more “synodal church.” The word "synod,” he reminded us, is about cooperation:. “*A synodal Church is a Church which listens,*” and he has encouraged much wider consultation with members and organizations of the Church at all levels as part of the Synod process – of *walking together*.

The current “[Synod on Synodality](https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/249241/2023-synod-on-synodality-pope-francis-launches-2-year-synodal-path-with-call-to-encounter-listen-and-discern)” is the culmination of all this effort to bring a greater degree of openness, collaboration and mutual listening to the Church. Unlike previous synods, this one officially begins in dioceses all over the world, with opportunities for mutual consultation at every level and among many different Church organizations.

The objective of the Synod is to listen, as the entire People of God, to what the Holy Spirit is saying to the Church. We do so by listening to the Word of God in Scripture and in the worship of the Church, and then by listening to each other.

The purpose of the Synod is not to produce more documents. It is intended, as Pope Francis has said ‘*to inspire people to dream about the church we are called to be, to make people’s hopes flourish, to stimulate trust, to bind up wounds, to weave new and deeper relationships, to learn from one another, to build bridges, to enlighten minds, to warm hearts and restore strength to our hands for our common mission’*

It is then, first and foremost, a spiritual process. It is not a mechanical data-gathering exercise or a series of meetings and debates.

The question has been asked ‘*Is this the best time to do this after all we have experienced in the past months?*’. (But) Pope Francis has called this moment in human history ‘ a time of reckoning’. We might ask ‘*What better time?*’ as we emerge from the pandemic.

Pope Francis wants the church to grow together in three key areas of Communion, Participation and Mission. By growing together in **Communion**, the people of God deepen their **participation** in the life of the church and so become more effective **missionary** disciples in the world.

On the next three Sundays we will reflect a little on each of those three areas of communion, participation and mission. Then we are all invited to take part in a period of prayer, reflection and listening to the Holy Spirit that we may individually and collectively have some sense of how we may travel together as disciples and proclaim the Gospel.

At the end of that process Fr William will write formally to Bishop Mark to report whatever progress we feel we have made.

Let us begin this time of reflection, of *walking together*, by praying together, as we have for the past few months, the Prayer of the Synod, that the Holy Spirit will ‘*teach us the way we must go*’.

**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.

**Thank you for listening.**