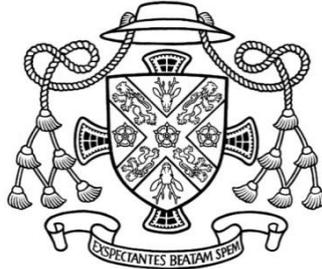


Pastoral Letter
Of
Terence Patrick Drainey



Bishop of Middlesbrough

The Synod of Bishops

Dear sisters and brothers

During the pandemic, among many of the phrases which have frequently been employed, the fact that *we are all in it together*, stands out. Pope Francis has convened the Synod of Bishops to take place in 2023. The title is “For a Synodal Church: communion, participation, and mission.” And he asks us all to prepare for it. So, what on earth is a Synod? Well, *we are all in it together*, or at least, *we are all journeying together, we are all on the road together*.

To clarify the matter, we can turn to Pope Francis himself. In 2015, on the 50th Anniversary of the Institution of the Synod of Bishops he explained what he meant by “Synod” and “Synodality” very clearly. *What the Lord is asking of us is already in some sense present in the very word “synod”. Journeying together — laity, pastors, the Bishop of Rome — is an easy concept to put into words, but not so easy to put into practice. A synodal Church is a Church which listens, which realises that listening is more than simply hearing. It is a mutual listening in which everyone has something to learn.....: all listening to each other, and all listening to the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of truth, in order to know what he says to the Churches.*

The Synod process begins by listening to the people of God, which shares also in Christ’s prophetic office. The Synod process then continues by listening to the pastors (and) culminates in listening to the Bishop of Rome, who is called to speak as pastor and teacher of all Christians.

The first level of the exercise of synodality begins in the particular Churches. Only to the extent that these organisations keep connected to the base and start from people and their daily problems, can a synodal Church begin to take shape: these means, even when they prove wearisome, must be valued as an opportunity for listening and sharing.

The second level is that of Ecclesiastical Provinces and Ecclesiastical Regions, Particular Councils and, in a special way, Conferences of Bishops. In a synodal Church, as I have said, it is not advisable for the Pope to take the place of local Bishops in the discernment of every issue which arises in their territory. In this sense, I am conscious of the need to promote a sound decentralisation.

So now, I set out our timetable for the Particular Church of the Diocese of Middlesbrough. Firstly, I have nominated the person who will be the facilitator of the process and gather a small group together to help. Canon Derek Turnham has agreed to take on this role. We await a questionnaire to come from Rome, which I hope and pray will have arrived by the time you receive this Pastoral Letter.

However, a template to contextualise the questionnaire has been prepared in advance. In this way there will be no delay in getting it out to the parishes, apostolic organisations and religious houses within the diocese.

The Preamble to the Synod of Bishops opens in October (weekend of 9/10) in Rome and then a week later in the diocese (17th Opening Mass at the Cathedral 10 am.). By this time, I hope that the questionnaires will have created a forum for discussion. It is my expectation that each parish, apostolic organisation, and religious house will elect one representative to come together to share, under the Holy Spirit, whatever has been discerned. This can then be shared with all the representatives and with me, the Bishop of this Local Church, as we listen to what is being said through prayer and the inspiration of the Spirit. Again, as Bishop, I will then begin the process of discernment as to what, in the Spirit and through prayer, should be carried forward to the national level. All this so that eventually the Synod of Bishops as such is able to discern with Peter and under Peter what the Spirit is saying to us now and into the future.

It is important to understand that the Synod, albeit a form of governance in the Church, can only be effective in as much as it is the result of prayerful listening and reflection under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. It is not about “agendas”, personal or otherwise. It is about discerning the voice and directions of the Holy Spirit. So, please ask the Spirit to guide us all as we prepare to journey together.

Yours in blessed hope,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Lawrence Patrick".

Bishop of Middlesbrough

To be read and made available on the Weekend of 4/5 September 2021 in all churches and chapels of the Diocese