

HOPE

A horizontal sequence of silhouettes representing different stages of life and roles. From left to right: an elderly man with a cane (red), a man carrying a child on his back (orange), a woman in a blue robe with a staff (blue), a woman (purple), a man (green), a woman holding a child's hand (yellow), a small child (orange), a man (green), a man (purple), and a man in a cap (blue). The silhouettes are set against a light, textured background.

‘We want to be a synodal Church, a Church that walks together, a Church that always seeks peace, that always seeks charity, and that always strives to be close, especially to those who suffer.’

Pope Leo



For a synodal Church
communion | participation | mission

TELLING OUR STORY BEING THE CHURCH TODAY



Telling our story: being the Church today in Clifton Diocese

Foreword – Bishop Bosco

The life of the Church has always been a story of people listening for the voice of the Lord and trying faithfully to follow where he leads. That is really what synodality is about: walking together, listening carefully to one another and, above all, listening for the voice of the Holy Spirit.

Here in Clifton Diocese, there are already many signs of the Spirit at work in our parishes, schools and communities. Some are obvious, others only become clear with time. This booklet is an opportunity to notice them, to tell the story of what has been happening among us, and to recognise the seeds that God is planting.

Rooted in prayer and nourished by the Eucharist, we can look to the future with confidence and hope. Every baptised person has a part to play as we seek to worship God, hand on the faith and stay close to those who are poor or in need.

My hope is that this continuing process will help us to listen well, to give thanks for what is bearing fruit, and to encourage those things which will help the life and mission of the Church in our diocese to flourish. 🙏

+ Bosco



A Synodal Church

Pope Leo, in his first public address from the balcony of St Peter's, said: "We want to be a synodal Church, a Church that walks together, a Church that always seeks peace, that always seeks charity, and that always strives to be close, especially to those who suffer."

Pope Francis stated: "Synodality is the path God expects from the Church in the third millennium."

What is Synodality?

When Pope Francis launched the Jubilee Year 2025, he ordered that the Holy Doors be opened. This was not just to welcome people in, but to allow the church to go forth - we are a pilgrim people - taking the light of Jesus Christ into a darkening world.

“Synodality is the walking together of Christians with Christ and towards God’s Kingdom, in union with all humanity.” (Final Document, Synod on Synodality), Synodality is therefore our story and our journey: we are the Church, walking together with Christ towards his Kingdom.

As Pope Leo said: “Synodality is not a campaign. It’s a way of being and a way of being Church. It’s a way of promoting an attitude, which begins with learning to listen to one another.”

Synodality describes, in one word, how we walk together on our journey to God.

The School for Synodality has produced a short three-minute animation explaining what synodality means - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lckg8GSzvc8>

In the worldwide Church

Pope Francis and Pope Leo have committed the whole Church to adopting synodality. It will change the way the Church functions and is a long-term process of conversion. There will be a number of milestones on this journey where the Church will come together to review and celebrate progress.

The first half of 2027 will see diocesan assemblies followed, in the second half, by national assemblies. Continental assemblies will take place in early 2028, with an Ecclesial Assembly of the Catholic Church in Rome in October that year.

In Clifton Diocese

In the coming months, parishes and deaneries are invited to reflect on how synodality is changing parish life. In the New Year, there will be several regional assemblies to begin to gather these insights from across the diocese. This will be followed by a Diocesan Assembly in early summer.

In the parish and deanery

Local people are invited to meet to reflect on how their community is growing and changing: how parish life is flourishing and what can help it to grow still further? What stories do we have to show how this is happening?

The Parable of the Sower may be helpful here. The Spirit sows seeds where it will. These take time to germinate and grow. The fruits may grow in unexpected places. They may face different challenges. How do we recognise and celebrate those that are succeeding?

Anyone can take part in or instigate this process. People can come together specially, or an existing group might be appropriate, such as the pastoral council or another group in the community. When you have collected your reflections together just email them to the Diocesan team at synod@cliftondiocese.com

Drawing on the language of the parable, you might want to consider questions such as: who tilled the field? How was it fertilised? When the birds came down, where did they take the seeds? What happened in the parish to make the crop flourish and what happened that caused the crop to struggle?

It may be that there is not much that is yet apparent. Look for signs of growth, however early they may be, and consider how to help them flourish.

The meetings are opportunities for prayerful reflection rather than debate. It is important that all members of the community are given the ability to contribute.

How do we recognise what is synodal?

The Final Document of the Synod says: “In simple and concise terms, synodality is a path of spiritual renewal and structural reform.” In practice, we could ask ourselves questions like:

- **What are the joys and challenges of the past four years in our parish?**

Example: ‘One of the greatest joys was the arrival of Father So-and-So; one of the biggest challenges was facing up to closing a church and unifying two parishes.’

- **How have we grown as a more listening Church?**

Example: ‘We started a group for those who have been bereaved. We share a light meal and listen to one another, offering support and understanding.’

- **How are we adapting to meet the changing needs of mission in the world?**

Example: ‘The young people in our parish have started a social media account where they share their thoughts and experiences from their faith lives. Our Deacon is also involved to ensure that they are safeguarded. They have followers from all over the country.’

- **How do we show hospitality to different groups and people?**

Example: ‘Many of us in this parish grew up in the Syro-Malabar Church and we have our own mass once a month to which everyone is invited. There is an increasing number of people attending from the Latin Church which is lovely as we are all united in the Eucharist.’

Open to all

Baptised in the Spirit, each member of the Church is called to participate in God’s purpose in the world – our individual and collective missions are part of the baptismal mission that we have all accepted and confirmed. Each one of us, through baptism, is entitled to contribute to the life of the Church. Synodality aims to open ways for all to participate and contribute.

Telling our story

What we are trying to do here is to tell the story of our parish or pastoral area since 2022? What has happened on our collective faith journey in the past four years?



More information

You can find out more about synodality, what it means and how you can participate, through the following websites, or contact the Diocesan team at:

synod@cliftondiocese.com

Clifton Diocese - <https://cliftondiocese.com/synod/>

School for Synodality introductory animation:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lckg8GSzvc8>

‘For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, Mission’ (Final Document of the Synod):

https://www.synod.va/content/dam/synod/news/2024-10-26_final-document/ENG---Documento-finale.pdf

School for Synodality: <https://www.schoolforsynodality.org.uk/Synodality>

Vatican website: <https://www.synod.va/en.html>

Appendix

Suggested format for a parish or deanery meeting

It would be helpful for one person to act as a facilitator/leader (more if the meeting is to divide into smaller discussion groups) and someone to draw together a summary of what was discussed and discovered. The summary can then be sent to the Clifton Synod Team at synod@cliftondiocese.com

Welcome

These meetings are opportunities to share our experiences. It is important that everyone present is given the opportunity to contribute. Listening and time in silence are important parts of these times of sharing. Conversations in the Spirit (CiS) is the methodology for this.

Opening Prayer

The ancient Adsumus prayer has been used for centuries to invoke the presence of Holy Spirit at assemblies and synods and was used to open every session of the Second Vatican Council, and at the Rome Assemblies.

- 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.

Lectio Divina

Here, we listen to the Word of God, spend time reflecting on it in silence and then share with others our thoughts and insights.

You may wish to use the Parable of the Sower to focus reflection on the way the Spirit has been working.

That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the sea. And great crowds gathered about him, so that he got into a boat and sat down. And the whole crowd stood on the beach. And he told them many things in parables, saying:

“A sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seeds fell along the path, and the birds came and devoured them. Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they did not have much soil, and immediately they sprang up, since they had no depth of soil, but when the sun rose they were scorched. And since they had no root, they withered away. Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. Other seeds fell on good soil and produced grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. He who has ears, let him hear.”

Matthew 13:1-9

Reflecting on our story

Sharing our experiences of synodality with everyone given the opportunity to contribute. Suitable questions may include:

- What are the joys and challenges of being part of the Church in this place?
- How have we moved/grown as a more listening Church?
- How are we adapting to meet the changing needs of mission in the world?
- How do we show hospitality to different groups and people?

If the session involves more than one smaller group, then these can report back in a concluding plenary group.

Closing Prayer



Important Dates

Introduction to 'Telling our Story – being the Church Today'

Two online *Zoom* sessions to explain how Clifton Diocese is responding to the Final Document of the Synod. Choose the one that suits you.

22 September; 7-8pm - <https://synodalinfosession1.eventbrite.co.uk>

24 September; 7-8pm - <https://synodalinfosession2.eventbrite.co.uk>

Area Training Sessions in CiS and Facilitation

St Dunstan, Keynsham: 26 September; 10am – 12noon

<https://CiSKeynsham.eventbrite.co.uk>

English Martyrs, Chard: 26 September; 2.30pm - 4.30pm

<https://CisChard.eventbrite.co.uk>

English Martyrs, Tuffley: 3 October; 10am - 12noon

<https://cisTuffley.eventbrite.co.uk>

St John, Trowbridge: 3 October; 2.30pm - 4.30pm

<https://CisTrowbridge.eventbrite.co.uk>

Telling our Story - over two evening sessions, participants will be helped understand better the spirituality of synodality, how to run CiS and opportunities to reflect on where we are now. These sessions are available for any Parish or Pastoral Area – To book these evening sessions (7-9pm) please contact:

synod@cliftondiocese.com

Area Assemblies 2027 - Saturday, 9.30am to 4pm

St Patrick, Brockworth: 30 January

St George, Taunton: 20 February

St Bernadette Secondary School, Whitchurch: 27 February

St John the Baptist, Trowbridge: 13 March

Please look out for the registration details for these four dates in 2027.

PRAYER FOR THE SYNOD



Come, Holy Spirit!
You inspire new tongues
and place words of life on our lips:
keep us from becoming a 'museum Church',
beautiful but mute,
with much past and little future.

Come among us,
so that in this synodal experience
we will not lose our enthusiasm,
dilute the power of prophecy,
or descend into useless
and unproductive discussions.

Come, Spirit of love,
open our hearts to hear your voice!
Come, Holy Spirit of holiness,
renew the holy and faithful People of God!
Come, Creator Spirit,
renew the face of the earth! Amen.