Right Reverend Patrick Joseph McKinney
Bishop of Nottingham

Pastoral Letter appointed to be read at all Sunday Masses celebrated in the Diocese of Nottingham on Saturday 16th and Sunday 17th October 2021
29th Sunday of Ordinary Time

The Opening of the Synodal Process in the Diocese of Nottingham

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

It's so encouraging to see that our churches are beginning to fill up again. My grateful thanks to all of you who continued to serve your parishes and wider communities with such selflessness and creativity during what have been very challenging circumstances. Prior to the pandemic, with all its restrictions, it was easy to take for granted our access to the sacraments. But the experience of the past eighteen months in our parishes, chaplaincies and schools has made us more appreciative of the grace, the help of God in our lives, that comes to us through our active participation in the sacramental life of the Church. It has also encouraged us to consider what we could do better to be a more outward looking, more missionary Church.

Last Sunday in Rome, Pope Francis launched a 'Church-wide listening process'. He has asked that each diocese begins this process today as the first phase of preparation for the Synod of Bishops in 2023, which is entitled, 'For a synodal Church: communion, participation and mission'. The word 'synod' simply means 'journeying together'. Pope Francis is inviting us all, the People of God, to listen to each other, and to others around us, to discern together how God is calling us to be Church in the third millennium. This

synodal process is not to be seen as a burden that competes with our own diocesan priorities, but rather the local circumstances of each diocese are to be the starting point. So I would like to encourage you to see this 'listening process' as something that is very much in harmony with all that we are already trying to do in our diocese; as a means to help support our desire, as Christ's disciples, to be more missionary and outward-looking.

Let's look upon it as an invitation to all of us, the People of God in this diocese, to dream about the Church the Holy Spirit is calling us to become. It is, first and foremost, a spiritual process, and so I invite you to make use of the Prayer-card that has been produced, so that together we may seek to hear and respond to the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Please take one for yourself and another for a non-practising family member, friend or neighbour so that they too can be a part of this 'listening exercise'. The diocesan phase of this process is meant to offer as many people as possible, the lapsed members of our parish communities as well as the poor and the marginalised, an experience of a Church that desires to listen to and to walk alongside people, as guided by the Holy Spirit.

Like every other diocese we are asked to have our reflections ready by next February, so a Timeline (and guidance) for parish, chaplaincy and school participation in this 'listening process' has been produced to enable us to meet this deadline. You will find these details at the back of church and on the parish and diocesan website. As a diocese, we will gather to share together on 22nd February 2022, the Feast of the Chair of Saint Peter, what this first phase of the 'listening process' has produced. Each parish, school, and chaplaincy is then asked to begin implementing the two actions it has decided to take forward. Then, next Pentecost, we will celebrate the movement so far of God's Holy Spirit within our diocese, and then begin afresh to discern where the Holy Spirit continues to lead us, the People of God, in this diocese of Nottingham.

Please do your best to join in this process, in whatever way you can. Your contribution is important. May God bless our efforts to hear and respond to the promptings and guidance of his Holy Spirit.

+ Patrick

Bishop of Nottingham

Synod 2021 2023
For a synodal Church
communion | participation | mission