

BISHOPS' CONFERENCE OF ENGLAND AND WALES

Autumn 2023 Plenary meeting

Item 8 Conflict in Gaza

As Bishops of England and Wales we deplore and condemn the barbaric terrorist attacks perpetrated in Israel on 7th October 2023. We weep for the innocent victims of violence, especially the children, whose lives are traumatised by the escalation of violence in the region.

We pray earnestly that the regional instabilities created will not lead to a wider conflict, fuelled by anti-Semitism, xenophobia and terrorism.

We call on all in England and Wales to find the good in others. No one should live in fear in their community, or school, or workplace because of their faith or because of events taking place in this conflict. Our support for one another will be our strength both in these difficult times and in the future.

We pray that the violence will cease. As we approach the Holy Season of Advent, we pray that Christ the Prince of Peace will guide all devastated by this conflict into the ways of truth, reconciliation, and respectful co-existence.

We echo the appeal of a First World War veteran who, at the age of 100, said that “In war nobody wins. You might as well talk first. You have to in the end.”

Item 7: The Synod on Synodality: Steps Towards Renewal

Called and guided by Pope Francis, the first Synod on Synodality took place in Rome throughout the month of October. In his homily for the closing Mass of the Synod, the Holy Father recalled the Synod's ultimate goal: ‘The Lord will guide us and help us to be a more synodal and missionary Church, a Church that adores God and serves the women and men of our time, going forth to bring everyone the consoling joy of the Gospel.’ During our Bishops' Conference plenary meeting we listened to the personal reflections of those, from among our number, who experienced the Synod first-hand. (*See below for a list of the participants*) We share with you here the fruit of our consideration and the response that followed.

The Synod members, bishops, priests and deacons, male and female laity, and consecrated men and women, some younger, others older, came to Rome from every continent. We heard of the joy that characterised the encounters between the representatives gathered from our world-wide Catholic Church. The synodal process was long and demanding but manifested a communal desire to listen attentively to the prompting of the Holy Spirit. Convergence in faith was honoured and divergence was explored without rancour.

At the heart of the synodal process of renewal stands the person of Jesus Christ and his Gospel of Salvation. The Lord ‘pitched his tent among us.’ (see Jn 1:14) He is constantly in our midst, guiding, teaching, consoling, and nourishing us in every circumstance. The renewal we seek has Christ as our unchanging key point of departure and reference.

We considered how the synodal process might be taken forward in our communities, here and now, in England and Wales. Some initial guidance came from further words spoken by Pope Francis in his homily for the closing Mass of the Synod:

'It is important to look at the "principle and foundation" from which everything begins ever anew: by loving. Loving God with our whole life and loving our neighbour as ourselves. Not our strategies, our human calculations, the ways of the world, but love of God and neighbour: that is the heart of everything. And how do we channel this momentum of love? I would propose two verbs, two movements of the heart, on which I would like to reflect: to adore and to serve. We love God through adoration and service.'

The prayer of adoration keeps us centred on Christ, freeing us from other preoccupations which serve only to limit and imprison us. Christ himself calls us to find our home in him and promises to make his home in us. (see Jn 15:1-8) Pope Francis linked our adoring love for God with our servant-love for others, all in the context of synodal renewal:

'In the great commandment, Christ binds God and neighbour together so that they will never be disconnected. There can be no true religious experience that is deaf to the cry of the world. There is no love of God without care and concern for our neighbour; otherwise, we risk becoming pharisaic. We may have plenty of good ideas on how to reform the Church but let us remember: to adore God and to love our brothers and sisters with his love, that is the great and perennial reform.'

Echoing our Holy Father's sentiments, we invite every parish, school, and community to look anew at how the adoration of the Lord, not least through Eucharistic Adoration, and the service of the Lord in people in need, can be better connected and reinvigorated. This deeper relationship with the Lord will enable us to embrace what emerges from the second part of the Synod Assembly taking place in October 2024.

All renewal in the Church is the work of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit of Truth draws us into the unity of faith, into communion with Christ, with the Church, and with each other. Renewal requires ongoing conversion, personally and in our communities. In discerning how this might be undertaken, we keep in mind the guiding themes of the synodal journey, namely communion, participation, and mission. These help us to formulate some important questions:

- How can we create and promote space and time for prayer, for spiritual communion, for adoring God, and for listening and responding to God?
- How can we deepen and broaden opportunities for people to participate in the prayer of adoration, linking this to the service of others?
- How do we encourage greater participation in the synodal process at the local level, including further reflection on the Synodal Synthesis?
- How can our experiences of prayer, of thirsting and longing for God, and of gratitude and wonder, give a missionary witness and invitation that is attractive to others?
- How can the person of Christ be clearly seen at the heart of the service we offer?
- How can our service to people in need be framed and shaped to increase the widest possible participation?

Following Pope Francis's invitation, we invite Catholics in England and Wales to consider these questions as an intermediate step towards taking an active part in the synodal renewal. With the Lord Jesus at the centre, our pathway is one of joyful faith which seeks to bring the Gospel alive in daily life.

Participants who voted in the Synod on Synodality from the Bishops' Conference of England and Wales were:

- *Archbishop John Wilson, Archbishop of Southwark*
- *Bishop Marcus Stock, Bishop of Leeds*
- *Bishop Nicholas Hudson, Auxiliary Bishop of Westminster*
- *Rev Dr Jan Nowotnik, Director of Mission and National Ecumenical Officer, Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales*