



## Walking together, Seeking All Views

### ADVENT WEEK 1: LISTEN

“The Synod offers us the opportunity to become a Church of closeness, that does not stand aloof from life, but immerses herself in today’s problems and needs, bandaging wounds and healing broken hearts with the balm of God.” - *Pope Francis*

#### Opening Prayer

*Lord Jesus, Master of both the light and the darkness, send your Holy Spirit upon our preparations for Christmas. We who have so much to do and seek quiet spaces to hear your voice each day,  
We who are anxious over many things look forward to your coming among us.  
We who are blessed in so many ways long for the complete joy of your kingdom.  
We whose hearts are heavy seek the joy of your presence.  
We are your people, walking in darkness, yet seeking the light.  
To you we say, “Come Lord Jesus!” Amen - Henri J.M. Nouwen*

#### Jeremiah 33:14-16

See, the days are coming – it is the Lord who speaks – when I am going to fulfil the promise I made to the House of Israel and the House of Judah:

*‘In those days and at that time, I will make a virtuous Branch grow for David, who shall practise honesty and integrity in the land.*

*In those days Judah shall be saved and Israel shall dwell in confidence.*

*And this is the name the city will be called: The-Lord-our-integrity.’*

#### Luke 21:25-28

Jesus said to his disciples “There will be signs in the sun and moon and stars; on earth nations in agony, bewildered by the clamour of the ocean and its waves; men dying of fear as they await what menaces the world, for the powers of heaven will be shaken. And then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. When these things begin to take place, stand erect, hold your heads high, because your liberation is near at hand”.

#### Psalms 24: 4-5

Lord, make me know your ways. Lord, teach me your paths. Make me walk in your truth, and teach me: for you are God my saviour.

#### Reflection

*‘The gift of being a compassionate listener, a gift which requires constant practice, is perhaps the most healing gift anyone can possess, for it allows the other to be, enfolds them in a safe space, does not judge or advise them, accepts them as they are without desiring to change them, and communicates support at a level deeper than words.’ - Gerard W. Hughes SJ in “Cry of Wonder”*

#### THEMES FOR REFLECTION

In exploring the themes below participants are invited to:

- Listen actively and without judgment to the Holy Spirit and to others
- Pay attention not only to the words, but also to the tone and feelings of the speaker
- Listen actively to yourself, mindful of your own thoughts and feelings as you speak

**Opening question** - What has your faith meant to you these past 18 months living with Covid?

#### How do I listen to God? How do I listen to others?

- Who do I listen to?
- Do I listen to minorities, the discarded, and the excluded?
- How do I foster a culture of encounter?

#### How does our parish listen to others? How does our Parish listen to God?

- To whom should our parish be listening? Are there groups we don’t listen to?
- How is everybody in our parish listened to?
- Does our parish talk to believers of other religions and with non-believers? What is their perception of how we listen and worship? 11

#### How do we as a Church listen to others? How do we as a Church listen to those outside the church?

- How do we promote a free and authentic style of communication in the global church?
- How does the wider Church relate to the society of which we are a part?

## ADVENT WEEK 2: MISSION

“There is so much richness in our diocese which we need to be open to encountering and receiving, such diversity but all united together in the power of the Spirit of the Risen Jesus.”

- *Bishop Mark O’Toole*

### Opening prayer

God of hope,  
we cling to you,  
for you renew the face of the earth.  
Through the gift of your Son,  
our Lord Jesus,  
we follow you on the path of dawn.  
Enlightened by your love and wisdom, help us to lead each other  
and all creatures  
back to your open arms.  
Amen. - *Rachel McCarthy/CAFOD*

### Luke 3: 1-6

In the fifteenth year of Tiberius Caesar’s reign, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judaea, Herod, tetrarch of Galilee, his brother Philip, tetrarch of the lands of Ituraea and Trachonitis, Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene, during the pontificate of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah, in the wilderness. He went through the whole Jordan district proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, as it is written in the book of the sayings of the prophet Isaiah:

‘A voice cries in the wilderness:  
Prepare a way for the Lord,  
make his paths straight.’

### Reflection

In his letter, ‘The Joy of the Gospel’, Pope Francis wrote: I dream of a “missionary option”, that is a missionary impulse capable of transforming everything, so that the Church’s customs, ways of doing things, times and schedules, language and structures can be suitably channelled for the evangelisation of today’s world rather than for her self-preservation. We need to regain our missionary spirit so that the call to holiness we heard in our baptism is expressed by a change of direction.

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### What is our mission?

- What do I understand by mission in my own life?
- How am I called to be an active participant in the mission of the Church? What is my role as a disciple in mission?
- What spiritual sustenance and formation do I need to be more committed to the mission of the Church?

### What is the mission of our parish community?

- What does our parish understand by ‘mission’?
- How does our parish support its members committed to service in society (social and political commitment, scientific research and teaching, the promotion of social justice, the protection of human rights, caring for the Common home, etc.)?
- How does our parish identify the goals to be pursued, the way to achieve them, and the steps to be taken?
- How does what our parish is doing relate to the Great Commission of Jesus: “Go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father, and the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matt 28:18-20)?
- What impact is our local parish making in the area? Do we make a difference?

### What is the mission of the whole Church?

- How are we the church as a whole adapting to the changing world and Missionary needs in our society?

## ADVENT WEEK 3: CELEBRATE

*"The Synod offers us the opportunity to become a listening Church, to break out of our routine and pause from our pastoral concerns in order to stop and listen." - Pope Francis*

### Advent Week 3 Opening Prayer

*Lord we pray,*

*May our synodal preparations inspire people to dream about the church we are called to be,*

*to make hopes flourish, stimulate trust,*

*to bind up wounds, to weave new and deeper relationships,*

*to learn from one another, to build bridges,*

*to enlighten minds and restore strength to our hands for our common mission.*

*We trust in your Spirit who journeys with us.*

### Philippians 4: 4-7

I want you to be happy, always happy in the Lord; I repeat, what I want is your happiness. Let your tolerance be evident to everyone; the Lord is very near. There is no need to worry; but if there is anything you need, pray for it, asking God for it with prayer and thanksgiving, and that peace of God, which is so much greater than we can understand, will guard your hearts and your thoughts in Christ Jesus.

### Psalm 119:105

Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path.

### Reflection

*"The Lord walks with us! How often we forget this fundamental truth of being a disciple. The Lord does not stand aloof. He is completely present to them. He is open to encounter. Nothing leaves Jesus indifferent; everything is of concern to him. Encountering faces, meeting eyes, sharing each person's history. That is the closeness that Jesus embodies. He knows that someone's life can be changed by a single encounter. Jesus did not hurry along or keep looking at his watch to get things over. He was always at the service of the person he was with, listening to what he or she had to say. We too are called to take time to encounter the Lord and one another." - Bishop Mark O'Toole*

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### How do I celebrate the presence of God in His Word and in the Sacraments?

- How do the Word and the Sacraments inspire my most important decisions?
- Does the liturgy of the Church inspire a deeper encounter with the risen Lord?

### How does our parish celebrate the Word?

- How do prayer and liturgical celebrations inspire and direct our parish "journeying together"?
- How does our parish support a full Catholic life and Mission – evangelization, catechesis, formation, liturgy and social action?

### How does the Church celebrate journeying together?

- How does the wider Church promote everyone's active participation?

## ADVENT WEEK 4: LET US DREAM

*"In his freedom, the Holy Spirit knows no borders, nor does He allow Himself to be limited by memberships. If the parish is home to all in the neighbourhood, not an exclusive club, I recommend: leave the doors and windows open...Allow all to enter..." - Pope Francis*

**Opening Prayer** (used with permission [www.ionabooks.com](http://www.ionabooks.com))

*Mary, pondering  
What is this seed that God has planted,  
unasked, uncompromised, unseen?  
Unknown to everyone but angels  
this gift has been.*

*And who am I to be the mother,  
to give my womb at heaven's behest,  
to let my body be the hospice  
and God the guest?*

*Oh, what a risk in such a nation,*

*in such a place, at such a time,  
to come to people in transition  
and yet in prime.*

*What if the baby I embody  
should enter life deformed or strange,  
unable to be known as normal,  
to thrive or change?*

*What if the baby I embody  
should enter life deformed or strange,  
unable to be known as normal,*

*to thrive or change?*

*What if the world, for spite, ignores him,  
and friends keep back and parents scorn,  
and every fear of every woman  
in me is born?*

*Still, I will want to love and hold him,  
his cry attend, his smile applaud.*

*I'll mother him as any mortal, and just like  
God.*

### Luke 1: 39-45

Mary set out and went as quickly as she could to a town in the hill country of Judah. She went into Zechariah's house and greeted Elizabeth. Now as soon as Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leapt in her womb and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. She gave a loud cry and said, 'Of all women you are the most blessed, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. Why should I be honoured with a visit from the mother of my Lord? For the moment our greeting reached my ears, the child in my womb leaped for joy. Yes, blessed is she who believed that the promise made her by the Lord would be fulfilled.'

### Acts 2:17

In the days to come - it is the Lord who speaks - I will pour out my spirit on all mankind. Their sons and daughters shall prophesy, your young men shall see visions, your old men shall dream dreams.

### Reflection

*"Jesus in the power of His Spirit wants us to help one another along the road, to find our home in Him, and to find new ways, new models, new pathways which will help us to reach out, to invite others in our world to join us on the road. For the Lord desires so very deeply that they too find their home in Him. May the Holy Spirit help us to encounter one another, to listen deeply to one another, to show us the direction the Spirit wants us to travel, so that we can be more effective witnesses of Jesus to those who do not know Him." - Bishop Mark O'Toole*

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#### What is God's dream for me?

- How am I called to serve?
- How might I reach out to serve others and share the Faith?

#### What is God's dream for our Parish?

- How might our parish 'walk better together'?
- How do we form people, especially those who hold roles of responsibility within the Christian community, to make them more capable of "journeying together," listening to one another and engaging in dialogue?
- How might our pastoral provision look in the future?

#### What is God's dream for the church / world?

- What fruits can the wider church draw from this "journeying together"?
- How can our global church foster a missionary spirit adapted to the constantly changing environment?

**Closing question** – In the light of the last 18 months living with Covid and your reflections on the four themes, what are you most looking for from the Church/Diocese moving forward?

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**The next step will be for the facilitator/scribe to share the group's reflections with the Synodal working group. But this process doesn't end there. This listening process will become part of a longer-term shift in the way we walk together as Christians and helps us grow in faith as individuals and as a Church.**