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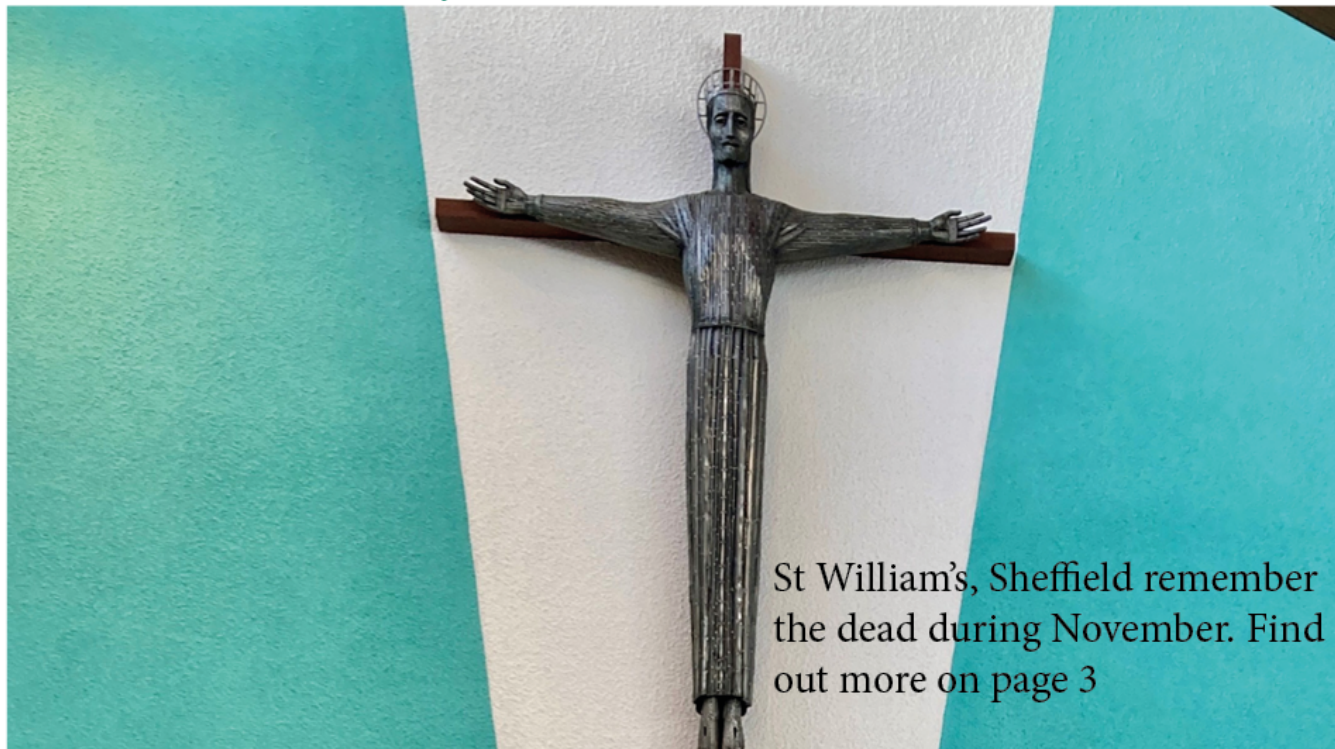
Hallam Bridge



ISSUE
11

November 2023

A Community called to love one another as Christ loves us.



St William's, Sheffield remember the dead during November. Find out more on page 3

Preparing for the Jubilee

Pope Francis writes: "Preparing for the Jubilee Year by taking up the fundamental texts of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council is a task that I ask everyone to welcome as a moment of growth in the faith. Find out more

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Stella Maris will be helping Seafarers

Stella Maris chaplains in ports around the country attempt to make Christmas special for seafarers. Find out what you can do to support seafarers who will be far from home this Christmas.

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READ NICKY'S STORY on page 2



Mgr Peter Kirkham RIP

Read about Fr Peter's ministry on page 2

Caritas Hallam is offering placements to students to train as counsellors.

St Vincent's Furniture Project Sheffield
Thank you for helping people in need. We collect your donated household items and give them to those in need.

PLEASE DONATE your unwanted items such as:

- Furniture (sofas, chairs, tables, beds)
- Appliances (fridges, freezers, washing machines)
- Electricals (TVs, stereos, hi-fi systems)
- Garden furniture (tables, chairs, barbecues)
- Tools (power tools, hand tools)
- Carpets, curtains, blinds
- Mattresses, pillows, duvets
- Bedding, towels, linens
- Books, records, CDs, DVDs
- Any other household items

0114 270 3890
info@stvincents.org.uk



St Vincent's Book your collection

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/stvincents.org.uk>
Twitter: [@stvincentshallam](https://twitter.com/stvincentshallam)
Email: stvincentshallam@stvincents.org.uk
Phone: 0114 270 3890
Website: www.stvincents.org.uk/shelford-furniture-store

St Vincent's Furniture Store has been helping those in need since 1987 when SVP members came up with the idea of setting up a Furniture Store and Community Shop.

Find out more on page 5



Upcoming Events

2 December Advent Retreat at Hallam Pastoral Centre
 9 & 16 December CCRS at Hallam Pastoral Centre
 9 December Youth Mass at St Peter's Doncaster
 12-14 June 2024 CATHOLIC PARISH SUMMIT- Where is your parish going?
 Harrogate

Upcoming Pilgrimages

Lourdes Pilgrimage 28 June-4 July 2024
 Padley Pilgrimage 7 July 2024

Diocese of Hallam
 FORMATION AND MISSION

**Advent:
 Waiting With
 Attitude**

An opportunity to spend some time in prayerful reflection at the beginning of Advent with Fr Peter Scally SJ

2 December 11:00-4:00

Diocese of Hallam Pastoral Centre
 Saint Charles Street, Sheffield

Bookings are necessary and will open on 1 November the Formation and Mission Events page

Looking back and looking forward

As we move into the colder, darker days of the year, and as the joys of Advent beckon, we are invited to read and reflect on the work of the 2 years of preparation and construction that went to the Synod on Synodality meeting in Rome in October. There is an account of the report that came from that meeting and the link to the document can be found on the Diocesan website. This month's Hallam Bridge celebrates ongoing communication, formation and mission journeys in the diocese; if you like visual presentation summaries, links to many can be found on the Vatican Synod website and a link to a short video of the Hallam synod journey can be found on the Hallam website. Looking forward to what next for the diocese is ongoing work. Increasing the involvement of young people was one of the diocesan synod concerns and priorities, and responding to this, some of the young people of the diocese gathered for a series of workshops and worship; read about that on page 3, with an invitation to get involved from Sue McDonald, the Diocesan Youth Worker. The synodal journey continues at parishes across the diocese; let us know what you are doing. St William's had a shared meal after the special Memorial Mass; Remembering and praying for our loved ones who have died is also part of the reflections of this time of year. Read about a Caritas journey and another invitation, and the ongoing Care for Creation news. Don't forget to check the Hallam website for ongoing news and events you really wouldn't want to miss, and take care of the needs of those who might not be able to access the internet or website easily. Grace and peace, Editor.

The next edition of the Hallam Bridge will be published on 16 December 2023

MGR PETER KIRKHAM RIP

The diocese is sad to announce the death of Rev Monsignor Peter Laurence Kirkham formerly parish priest of St Jude's Parish, Worksop.

Fr Peter was born on 4 April 1942 in Sheffield. He went to school at De la Salle, Sheffield and trained for the priesthood at the Venerable English College in Rome. He was ordained to the priesthood in Rome on 20 February 1966. He returned to the diocese of Leeds and served curacies in English Martyrs, York; St Peter and Paul, Sandal; and St Thomas More, Sheffield. In 1982 he was appointed as parish priest of St Joseph's, Staveley and ten years later to St Michael's, Wombwell. In 1997 he was appointed to St Joseph's, Worksop and, in 2002, he was took responsibility for St Mary's Worksop. In 2012 he was appointed as the first parish priest of the newly founded parish of St Jude which was formed from the former parishes of Worksop, Oldcotes and Harworth. He retired from active ministry in June 2020 and continued to reside at St Joseph's. He died peacefully on the morning of 24 November 2023 at Bassetlaw Hospital.

The picture shows him at the Water Liturgy in Lourdes in July this year. May he rest in peace and rise in glory.

**THRIVING or closing:
 Where is your parish going?**

TUESDAY, 7TH DECEMBER 2023 • 7 PM LONDON

Bishop David Oakley
 Fr. James Mallon

Register today at
catholicparishsummit.org/events

Presented by
 CATHOLIC PARISH SUMMIT
 DIVINE RENOVATION

Where is your parish going?

12-14 June 2024
 Harrogate, UK
catholicparishsummit.com

This is a publication by Hallam Diocese. Please send your articles or feedback to communications@hallam-diocese.com or to Hallam Pastoral Centre St Charles St, Sheffield S9 9WU

CONTACT

You can subscribe to receive the Hallam Bridge when is published here: <https://hallam-diocese.com/bridge/>

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Around the Diocese

Youth – Together Gathering of the People of God



As the Synod of Bishops opened in Rome, young people from our Diocese got together to take part in workshops suggested by Pope Francis for the young of the Church.

We met in St Peter-in- Chains, Doncaster for the afternoon and workshops were held on Together, receiving and caring for the gift of Creation Together, growing in humanity and sharing our gifts and abilities Together announcing Christ Together, reflecting on our faith

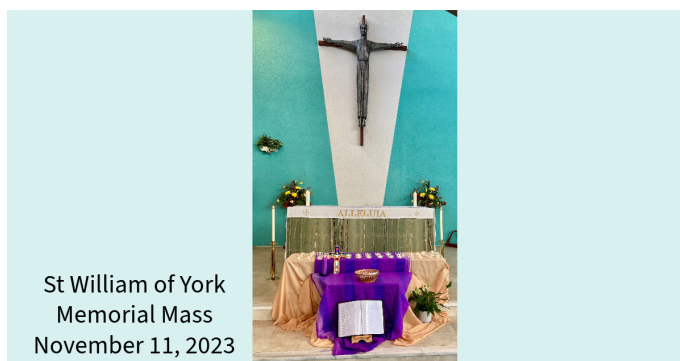
The afternoon was a time to pray and entrust the work of the Synod of Bishops to the Holy Spirit. During the afternoon we had local speakers engaging the young people through activity and reflection on our lives in communion with those on the margins. We spent time learning about sainthood, how to share the scriptures, the marginalised and how we are called to action.

If you would like to get involved either as a young person or to share your gifts with the young please contact youth@hallam-diocese.com Sue McDonald

An Invitation to celebrate with Young People From Across the Diocese



St William of York Memorial Mass November 11, 2023



St William of York Memorial Mass
November 11, 2023

Many people welcomed the opportunity to join the St William of York parish Memorial Mass.

Memorial cards were written and with candles were left before the altar, along with the Parish Memorial record.

As Mass started, the names of deceased family members were read out and brought to mind and prayer. Also prayed for were those who were killed in wars, past St William of York parish priests and those who may be 'forgotten'. Father John reminded us that in Mass we share the communal joy -----of the table of the Word and -----the table of the Eucharist. After Mass we then enjoyed a shared meal in the parish centre.

This Memorial Mass has become a much loved annual event, at this significant memorial time of year, when we pray for the souls of our faithful departed.

November 11th 2023.

Around the Diocese

Preparing for the Jubilee 2025



2023 - Year of the Council

In the letter that Pope Francis wrote in preparation for the Jubilee Year of 2025, he said that “The four Constitutions of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, together with the Magisterium of these recent decades, will continue to provide direction and guidance to God’s holy people, so that it can press forward in its mission of bringing the joyful proclamation of the Gospel to everyone”.

In the light of this request, a series of small, simple volumes called *Council Notebooks*

has been produced in English by the Indian Bishops Conference. These are volumes written in very simple and direct language designed to attract the reader. Therefore, they are not a “comment”, but rather a short and pithy presentation of the richness of Vatican II. Additionally the Bishops' Conference of England and Wales has produced a series of resources on their website.

Pope Francis writes: “Preparing for the Jubilee Year by taking up the fundamental texts of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council is a task that I ask everyone to welcome as a moment of growth in the faith.

“I place these simple and incisive aids into the hands of all Christians, especially young people, that they may retrace the fundamental themes of the four Conciliar Constitutions.

“I hope that they will attract a wide readership and bear good fruit for the renewal of our communities. I entrust them especially to bishops, priests, catechists, and families so that they may find the best ways of making the teachings of the Council Fathers known and

relevant in people’s lives, in preparation for the upcoming Jubilee 2025”.

Caritas News



Excellent experience!

Are you aware that Caritas Caring Service offers placements for students looking to qualify as counsellors?

We currently have 12 students within the organisation and offer 100 hours of counselling in the areas of Vulnerable Adults, Children, Family Therapy, and couples counselling.

Here is what Nicky has to say about his experience with Caritas.

“I have been fortunate enough to spend the last two years as a placement student for Caritas, learning, developing, emoting and having the huge privilege of sharing counselling sessions with incredible people that I feel very lucky to have known at depth.

The setting of my placement, Carmel Care, is a building that ‘provides a supportive and comfortable space in which people can, individually and together, experience spiritual and emotional growth through sharing their life experiences’. From my very first time arriving at Carmel, the volunteers and attendees there put me at ease. Whilst the counselling sessions took place in a private room, clients did pass through the building and the environment provided a safe, warm and welcoming start to any session.

I had support throughout my placement and was also granted a lot of autonomy in order to build the therapeutic relationships I developed. The minimum requirement in order to become qualified is 100 counselling hours during

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placement, but such were the opportunities and love I had for the work, that I had completed over 200 hours by the time I graduated.

I will always be grateful to Caritas for giving me this opportunity to work with a variety of unique and wonderful clients. This has developed not just my counselling skills, but also furthered my appreciation and understanding of the world and the impact on each other of the extraordinary people in it”.

CARMEL CARE

In partnership with SAVTE (Sheffield Association for Voluntary Teaching of English) Carmel Care is hosting a English Conversation Group every Monday from 10.30 - 12.00.

We want to support people to develop English Language skills so that they can gain in confidence become independent and feel safe in a friendly and supportive environment. .

The sessions are informative, relaxed and fun. Each week the session is followed with a hot lunch for anyone who would like to stay.

For more information please contact Janet Kent 07927657462

St Vincent’s Furniture Store Sheffield – 36 Years and Counting

St Vincent's Furniture Project Sheffield
Thank you
 for helping people in need
 We collect your unwanted household items and give them to those in need

PLEASE DONATE
 your unwanted items such as

- Bedspreads, duvets, pillows, blankets, quilts
- Mattresses, sofas, chairs, tables
- Bedding, curtains, carpets, rugs
- Washing machines, fridges, freezers, ovens
- Cookers, dishwashers, microwaves, toasters
- Small electrical items, kettles, toasters
- Small furniture, garden furniture, tools, building materials

0114 270 3990
 info@stvincentsheffield.org.uk

Book your collection

www.svp.org.uk/sheffield-furniture-store
 0114 270 3990
 info@stvincentsheffield.org.uk



For many years, the SVP often encountered individuals and families who needed essential household items such as beds etc. In parallel, the SVP was often offered household items. Unfortunately there was nowhere to house the donated items if there wasn't an immediate need.

Then, nearly 40 years ago, a number of SVP members in Hallam had an idea

The Furniture Store was established in 1987 when SVP members came up with the idea of setting up a Furniture Store and Community Shop. This meant that donated goods could be stored and passed on to those in need, while some items could be sold in the Community Shop to raise funds to assist the Furniture Store.

Activity continued (and grew) from there until 2010 when the Furniture Store moved into new premises on Queens Road.

The Work of the Furniture Store

St. Vincent's Furniture Store works with over 150 referral agencies throughout Sheffield, including the City Council, in addition to many charities. Those helped by the Furniture Store include the homeless, victims of abuse or domestic violence, people coming out of drug rehabilitation, ex-offenders with nowhere to go and people coming out of hospital who find themselves without accommodation. In addition we help asylum seekers and refugees and families in dire financial need. We also help single parent families, pregnant teenagers, the elderly and infirm, disabled people and people who are seeking help because their properties have been burgled, vandalised or fire damaged.

During the last year we have helped over 2,000 disadvantaged people including approximately 1,000 children. We supplied more than 7,000 items of furniture, particularly beds and bedding, cookers, tables and chairs, carpets, curtains and many more items including crockery and cutlery. We collect donated goods which include small electrical items such as toasters, kettles and microwaves. These electrical items are tested before being either given to our clients or sent for resale to the Community Shop on Abbeydale Road.

We are proud of the fact that we are the only organisation within the City of Sheffield that still gives items of furniture to people free of charge. In addition to the goods supplied to those in need, the Furniture Store provides a further service by saving items from going to landfill – 350 tonnes last year.

The Future

We aim to continue and build on the work of the last 36 years, reaching out to those in need -

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those that Pope Francis has referred to as suffering and being victims of the “globalisation of indifference”. However we need your support. We urgently need beds, furniture and household equipment such as crockery, and bedding that is clean and in reasonable condition. In the longer term might you be able to help us by volunteering which ranges from helping with administrative tasks in the office, to working in our depot, or collecting and delivering household items on one of our vans. Many volunteers give one day a week which helps enormously. You may be able to help with a regular standing order donation - every financial donation helps. You can donate by text (text the word SVPSheff to 70025 to donate £5 - the donor will then receive another text automatically asking about Gift Aid). Alternatively use the QR code or request a Standing Order donation form from the Furniture Store.

Please remember the work of the Furniture Store in your prayers. You can make all the difference. Can you help? Reach us on 0114 270 3990 and

www.svp.org.uk/sheffield-furniture-store

Thank you!

Kevin McCready Sheffield Furniture Store

Synod on Synodality From the Bishops' Conference: Plenary Resolution



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. 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

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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 Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales:

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

Beyond the Diocese

Cedar Tree gifted by Pope Francis to Queen Elizabeth II formally handed over to King Charles III



On Friday 10 November 2023, His Majesty King Charles III welcomed Cardinal Vincent Nichols, Archbishop of Westminster, and Archbishop Miguel Maury Buendía, the Apostolic Nuncio, to the grounds of Windsor Castle for the formal handing over of a Cedar of Lebanon tree.

The tree was a gift to Queen Elizabeth II from Pope Francis. In a letter to Her late Majesty, written in March 2022, the Holy Father wrote:

“May this tree, which in the Bible symbolises the flourishing of fortitude, justice and prosperity, be a pledge of abundant divine blessings on your realm.”

Blessing

The Nuncio conveyed the greetings of the Holy Father to The King, and Cardinal Nichols offered a prayer of blessing. The tree was sprinkled with holy water. His Majesty expressed his appreciation for the gift, and the Cardinal assured The King of the prayers of the Catholic community.

Recalling the visit, Cardinal Nichols said:

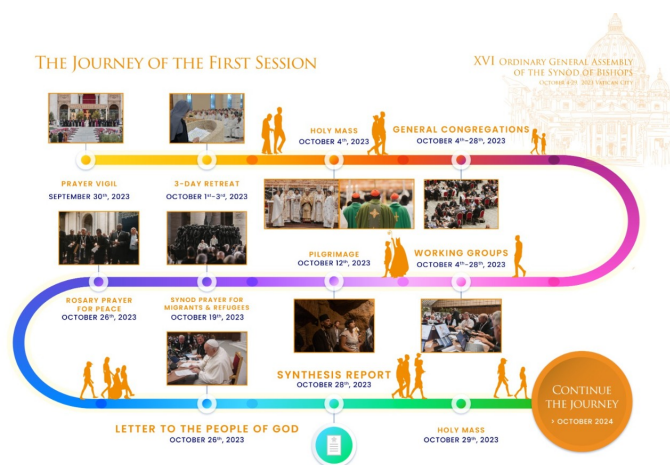
“We waited at the young tree, a Cedar of Lebanon, in a beautiful position, looking across open grassland in Windsor Great Park. Then His Majesty arrived. Greetings were exchanged. The tree was blessed. It was a wonderful moment remembering, with His Majesty, our beloved Queen Elizabeth II, and reflecting on the warmth of the greeting from Pope Francis.”

Image

His Majesty King Charles III and Cardinal Nichols look on as the Nuncio, Archbishop Miguel Maury Buendía conveys the Pope’s greeting. With thanks

to Buckingham Palace.

Synthesis-Report of the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops



Read the final document of the synod meeting which took place in Rome during October 2023
2023.10.28-ENG-Synthesis-Report_IMPDownload

Synod Report: A Church that involves everyone and is close to world’s wounds

The Synthesis Report at the conclusion of the 16th General Assembly of the Synod on Synodality is published. Looking ahead to the second session in 2024, the text offers reflections and proposals on topics such as the role of women and the laity, the ministry of bishops, priesthood and the diaconate, the importance of the poor and migrants, digital mission, ecumenism, and abuse.

By Salvatore Cernuzio

Source: www.vaticannews.va

The document of some forty pages is the result of the work of the assembly that took place “while wars both old and new have raged in the world, with dramatic consequences that are impacting upon countless victims.” The report continues, “The cry of the poor resounded among us, of those forced to migrate and of those suffering violence and the devastating

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consequences of climate change. We heard their cry not only through the media, but also through the voices of many present, who were personally involved in these tragic events whether through their families or their people" (Foreword).

To this challenge and many others, the universal Church has tried to offer a response in the Small Circles and in the interventions. Everything came together in the Synthesis Report, which is divided into a preface and three parts, and which traces the path for the work to be done in the second session in 2024.

Listening to all, beginning with victims of abuse

As in the Letter to the People of God, the synod assembly reaffirms an "openness to listening and accompanying all, including those who have suffered abuse and hurt in the Church", which "addressing the structural conditions that abetted such abuse, remains before us, and requires concrete gestures of penitence".

The face of a synodal Church

Synodality is a first step. It is a term that the participants in the Synod themselves admit is "a term unfamiliar to many members of the People of God, causing some people confusion and concern" (1 f), including fears of a departure from tradition, a debasement of the hierarchical nature of the Church (1 g), a loss of power or, on the contrary, immobility and a lack of courage for change. "Synodal" and "synodality" are instead terms that "speak of a mode of being Church that integrates communion, mission, and participation". So they indicate a way of living the Church, valuing differences and developing the active involvement of all. This begins with deacons, priests, and bishops: "A synodal Church cannot do without their voices" (1 n), we read. "We need an understanding of the reasons for resistance to synodality by some of them".

Mission

The document continues explaining that synodality goes hand in hand with mission. Hence, it is necessary that "Christian communities are to enter into solidarity with those of other religions, convictions and cultures, thus avoiding, on the one hand, the

risk of self-referentiality and self-preservation, and on the other hand the risk of loss of identity" (2 e). In this new "pastoral style", it would seem important to many to make "liturgical language more accessible to the faithful and more embodied in the diversity of cultures" (3 l).

The poor at the centre

"The Assembly hears the cry of the 'new poor', produced by wars and terrorism that plague many countries on several continents, and the assembly condemns the corrupt political and economic systems that cause such strife".

The most vulnerable of the vulnerable, for whom constant advocacy is needed, are the children in the womb and their mothers," reads the text of the Assembly, which says it is "aware of the cry of the 'new poor' produced by wars and terrorism also caused by 'corrupt political and economic systems'".

Commitment of believers in the field of politics and for the common good

In this sense, the Church is urged to be committed both to the "public denunciation of the injustices" perpetrated by individuals, governments, and companies; and to active engagement in politics, associations, trade unions, popular movements (4f and 4g). At the same time, the consolidated action of the Church in the fields of education, health, and social assistance, "without any discrimination or the exclusion of anyone", must not be neglected (4 k).

the full article is available on our website

Beyond the Diocese

SVP's Response to the Chancellor's Autumn Statement



Today's Budget announced by Chancellor Jeremy Hunt comes at a time of increasing need, and against a backdrop of an ongoing Cost of Living crisis. Although inflation is now starting to come down, record numbers of people, including children, are experiencing deep and persistent levels of poverty.

The Cost of Living crisis continues to affect millions of households, many of whom are being supported by members of the St Vincent de Paul Society (SVP) and St Vincent's centres across England and Wales. Over the past year we have provided over 126,000 meals through our regional centres and foodbanks and have given over £91,000 in grants to individuals and families in need through our Cost of Living emergency fund.

A recent report by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF) shows a shocking 2 million households have been forced to switch off their fridge or freezer to save money¹. The JRF found that four out of five households on universal credit are currently going without food or heating, and not replacing worn-out clothing.

Against this backdrop, we strongly welcome today's announcement by the Chancellor to increase Universal Credit and other benefits by 6.7% in line with the September inflation figure. This will offer a welcome respite for households in need. However, many households are still struggling to make ends meet, and we are therefore continuing to call for an Essentials Guarantee to help individuals and families meet their essentials.

We welcome the increase in the national living wage to £11.44 an hour, a measure we have

been calling for.

We also welcome the announcement to return local housing allowance to 30% of local market rents, which will help many households, but there is still more to do to ensure people with low incomes are able to access decent housing in the private rented sector.

Through our frontline services we are seeing a steep rise in demand for our help across the country and we know that without the support of the SVP, tens of thousands of families would fall into poverty and be denied the help they need to survive and the empowerment to pull themselves out of poverty and regain their dignity.

We are therefore worried by today's announcements around the 'back to work' plan. While we support efforts to ramp up employment support and moves to help people get back into work, we are extremely concerned about today's announcement of a tougher sanction regime for people receiving social security payments. We support moves to help people back into work but urge the Government to revise its plan to create a punitive welfare system that risks leaving millions behind. The SVP has highlighted over the past years the rise in the level of poverty faced by millions of households.

The 'back to work plan' announced today will make changes to social security payments and could leave many at risk of falling into debt and destitution. A welfare system increasingly reliant on sanctions will leave already vulnerable households at risk of falling into poverty. We are concerned about today's announcement to reform the work capability assessment and changes to sanctions for people with the 'no work search' requirements. These will affect people in long-term unemployment and will require them to face mandatory work experience should they not find a job within 18 months.

Today's Budget delivered some welcome measures, primarily the increase in social security benefits and the increase of the national living wage. We have called for this and are pleased the Chancellor has listened.

Beyond the Diocese

However, today's announcement was also a missed opportunity to provide the urgent and necessary support to households across the country, and a worrying move towards a more punitive welfare system. As demand for our services continues to increase, we need urgent Government action to provide a strong welfare net that can support people who fall on hard times.

Christmas Away from Home



Many of us want to be at home at Christmas, surrounded by family and friends. But if you are a seafarer, you're likely to find yourself in a port somewhere in a foreign land. Or at sea on a ship, heading to your next port of call.

This can serve to enhance the loneliness and isolation many seafarers already experience when they are thousands of miles away from their families.

Even on the largest container ships, such as the MSC Irina, which is 400 metres long and can carry 24,000 metal containers, a crew might just consist of up to 25 seafarers. Working on such a huge ship with so few other seafarers can be a lonely experience and exhausting work.

When we are doing our Christmas shopping we might not be aware that an estimated 90 per cent of all the food and other goods imported into the UK arrive by ship. This includes fridges, computers, cars, oranges, and coffee, to name just a few items.

If it wasn't for the seafarers who work on these ships, then many of the shelves in our shops would be empty - and children everywhere would be disappointed when they got up on Christmas morning.

Not being able to be at home with their families at Christmas is hard for seafarers. It is not uncommon to hear from a seafarer that he or she has not spent a Christmas at home for many years.

That's why Stella Maris chaplains and volunteer ship visitors in this Diocese and around the coast of Britain, try to bring some of the Christmas message to the ships they visit.

They take Christmas parcels to seafarers. These contain items such as socks, woolly hats, chocolates, and toiletries; many of these are donated by generous supporters and parishioners in the Diocese.

Through small gestures Stella Maris chaplains in ports around the country attempt to make Christmas special for seafarers. And they know just how important these small gestures are.

If readers would like to find out more about helping a seafarer this Christmas, the work of Stella Maris and opportunities to volunteer or donate to support it, go to www.stellamaris.org.uk Let us also pray for seafarers and their families at this special time of the year. Greg Watts Stella Maris