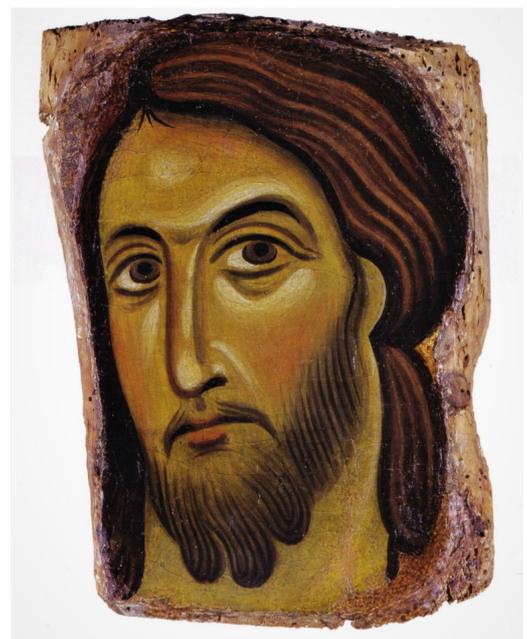


# ST. AIDANS PARISH COULSDON



## SYNOD 2021 2023 LOCAL LISTENING PHASE



## ST. AIDANS PARISH MISSION STATEMENT

We in St. Aidan's Parish share in the mission that Christ gives his disciples. In so doing, we endeavour:

- to bear witness to the Good News of God's kingdom;
- to gather as the family of God in the Eucharist and welcome Christ in everyone we meet;
- united in prayer, to celebrate the sacraments that sustain us, individually and as a parish, through our pilgrimage on earth;
- to be a "Community of All Talents" for the greater glory of God, serving each other with humility and compassion and using our God-given gifts to reach out, within and beyond the parish, to those in need;
- to bring up our children in the life of the Church and support our young people in their journey of Faith.

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# ST. AIDAN'S PARISH, COULSDON

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

Pope Francis has asked the whole Church, from parish level upwards, to participate in a Synod. He reminds us of the original meaning of the word Synod: "journeying together on the way".

In our journey together as the pilgrim church on earth, he wishes us to reflect on "how the Church's teaching can be lived and applied in the changing contexts of our time". In doing this, we are asked to consider the ways in which we belong to the Church, how we participate in its life and what we see to be the Church's and our own mission in the world we live in.

The Synod process is primarily one of listening to the Holy Spirit. It starts with ourselves, listening to what the Holy Spirit says in our hearts, and to what the Holy Spirit says through each other. The outcome of this local listening phase will be reflected on and consolidated at diocesan, national and international level, and finally on to a meeting of bishops from around the world which will take place in Rome in 2023.

The fundamental question that the local listening phase of the Synod seeks to address is this:

*In announcing the Gospel, the Church "journeys together". How is this journeying together happening today in your local Church? What steps does the Spirit invite us to take in order to grow in our "journeying together"?*

Here is the response of our parish to this question.

Antonnette Cabida, Peter Chamberlain, Richard Thurbon  
Parish Synod Delegates  
St. Aidan's Parish, Coulsdon

February 2022

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### 2. THE SYNOD PROCESS AT ST. AIDAN'S PARISH

The Synod was principally carried out through a series of three 2-hour meetings, each focusing on one of the Synod themes of Communion, Participation and Mission.

All parishioners were invited to the meetings, which were publicised across the parish media (Mass announcements, newsletter, mailing lists, Facebook etc.). Leaders of various parish groups also encouraged their members to attend. The meetings were attended by 33 parishioners.

Before each meeting, attendees were asked to consider the list of questions suggested for the meeting, praying and reflecting on those questions that had a particular resonance with them. The standard questions proposed by the Diocese were used.

Each meeting was run broadly on the lines suggested in "Synod Resources 4, Facilitating Local Spiritual Conversations" and followed a set format:

- *Listening to the Word of God:* A relevant scripture reading followed by a period of silent reflection and ending with the Synod prayer.
- *Listening to each other:* each person who wished to was invited in turn to share their thoughts on the theme of the meeting, either in terms of specific questions or more generally. It was stressed that this part of the meeting was about listening, not debating or challenging.
- *Reflecting on what's been said:* reflecting together on things said that made an impression on people, common threads/areas of consensus etc.

Being aware of some people's reluctance to attend in person meetings, parishioners were also invited to take part in Zoom meetings, or send in written/email submissions. Two parishioners took part in a Zoom session, and five people submitted comments by email.

It was recognised that some groups of people within the parish were not represented at the meetings. We decided to try and involve two such groups in the process – parents of young families and teenagers of our parish – by issuing short surveys to each group. There was one response to the teenager survey, and no response from the parents of young families.

Section 3 summarises the common threads that ran through our reflections on Communion, Participation and Mission. Summary notes on each topic can be found at Sections 4, 5 and 6, organised around the key themes that emerged in the course of our deliberations. These notes are based primarily on the parish meetings, but supplemented with any additional points from the Zoom sessions and email submissions. The scripture readings used in each of the meetings are set out in the Appendix.

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### 3. COMMON THREADS

Here are the common threads that ran through the parish's reflections on Communion, Participation and Mission.

- 3.1** There is a high level of awareness in the parish of the wider social dimension of its mission, reflected in its concern for issues of social justice and the various outreach projects it is involved in. Of these, the Floating Shelter (a project, undertaken with other local churches, to provide shelter for homeless people over the winter months) is seen by many as a model of communion, participation and mission in action. It brings together various gifts and skills from across the parish, but also gives parishioners on the periphery, even the housebound, the opportunity to express and respond to their own mission. Prayer, and service to others, underpin the project.
- 3.2** The Church is a place of love. There is a strong desire within the parish to be inclusive and unconditional in its welcome. As one parishioner put it, *"People need to be made to feel they have value in terms of where they are in their lives, not in terms of what's expected of them."* However, it was also felt that there were actual or perceived barriers to people's full participation in the life of the church: what is seen as the rigidity of Church rules, or people feeling that their own circumstances preclude them from taking part. We need to find better ways of welcoming and supporting people who might feel themselves to be on the periphery – remarried divorcees, those in same sex relationships etc.
- 3.3** There are aspects of the institution of the Church that many people feel do not accord with what the living body of Christ means to them. There is clearly hurt felt at parish level about issues such as child abuse in the wider church. But, beyond this specific issue, many feel the need for a fundamental re-think of the roles of clergy and laity, which must not preclude considerations such as the possibility of married priests or female clergy. On a practical level, the crisis of vocations to the priesthood makes such reform a necessity.
- 3.4** A recurring theme was the need to provide adults with more opportunity to grow in their understanding of the Faith. This need shows itself in various ways. Parents with a deeper understanding of their own faith are better able to support their children's growth in faith. Sometimes people's self-exclusion from engagement with the Church may be based on their own misunderstandings and a failure to separate out what was learnt as a child from a real comprehension of the Church's teaching. And the laity needs to become more educated about its faith if it is to take on more responsibilities within the liturgical and pastoral life of the Church.
- 3.5** While some people wish for a deeper involvement of the laity, there is also a recognition of the severe time poverty that many people suffer in today's world, for example, parents with young families, which constrains their level of engagement in parish life. This could partly explain the lack of response to the survey from parents with young families, although resurging concerns about the pandemic, and the timing in the run-up to Christmas, probably contributed as well.

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- 3.6** How to better engage young people in the life of the Church is an area of concern. Young people may feel they are not relevant or needed in the Church, or may view it as rule-bound or out of touch. They need to be given more space and responsibility to determine their own form of participation. At the same time, young people have passion and energy which can be tapped through engagement in contemporary causes and by providing opportunities to serve others. Those with experience, for example, of taking young people to Lourdes as helpers have seen the uplifting effect it can have.
- 3.7** The contribution of elderly people in the parish needs to be recognised. Isolated elderly people may not be visible, but they have value in their prayers for others. There is also a wealth of experience that elderly people have that should be tapped.
- 3.8** The pandemic has clearly had an adverse impact on the level of participation in parish life. It has also caused the parish to be more inward-looking as it turns to looking after its own vulnerable members, but this itself is also seen to be of benefit in terms of providing more focus on the needs of such people for ongoing contact and support, irrespective of the pandemic. It was felt that the streaming of Masses has been a lifeline for many, and should be continued beyond the pandemic for those unable to attend Mass.
- 3.9** There is a recognition of the benefits of working with other churches, both Catholic and of other denominations. The Floating Shelter is a project run in conjunction with other local churches; partnership, and the example churches give each other, is very important in fulfilling a shared mission. We have much to learn from other churches, for example in how they get engagement from their community, particularly young people.
- 3.10** Over the course of our meetings, the realisation grew that the local listening phase of the Synod was not just a reporting exercise but an opportunity to act on the outcomes of our reflections, turning our deliberations into positive action.

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### 4. SUMMARY NOTES - COMMUNION

#### 4.1 Many people considered that a big issue for the Church was the lack of young people who remain as practising Catholics. We need to identify why they drift away from communion with the Church.

- Young adults can view the Church as inflexible and rule-bound. It can be seen as out of touch and having rules that exclude certain groups of people.
- Young people may also be made to feel that they are not relevant or needed in the Church, which they may see as an organisation for an older generation.
- Faith is “caught” not “taught”. The example of others is very important. Also, there has to be a relationship of love with the Church. If that relationship does not exist, young people will not miss it if they drift away.
- Young people need their own parents to be committed to their faith if they are to become engaged themselves. Do we provide enough support for parents to deepen their own understanding of the Faith? It would be helpful to provide additional teachings/apostolate for parents so they not only come to church as a requirement for their children’s communion, or confirmation, or letter for secondary school applications. At the same time, we need to apply leverage on the contacts already established to maintain engagement, and have follow through activities.
- Initiatives such as youth clubs need the active support and engagement of the young people’s parents in order to succeed.
- We do wonderful things in the Parish, but we could benefit from more visibility and coordination among different workstreams – for example youth works, clubs, involvement in Croydon Council, etc. It would be good to share news, announcements, etc of the various youth related activities with a wider audience, and identify an effective media to use which will ensure these reach the desired target audience: young people. Perhaps explore partnership with Catholic schools? Or optimise use of the existing Facebook page, and make notice boards, newsletters, announcements etc. more visible.
- There are lessons to be learned from other Christian denominations as they seem to be able to hold on to their young people – the Catholic church needs to listen to its youth.
- Those with experience of taking young people as helpers to Lourdes, for example, see the uplifting effect on young people of their service with sick, disabled and vulnerable persons and the companionship they share with them and with other helpers. This shows living faith in action and communion as it should be. Is there a way of “bottling” the Lourdes spirit and applying it at home?

#### 4.2 We, the Church, are the “Body of Christ”. But a number of people felt that some aspects of the institutional church do not align with what the Body of Christ means for them.

- The Body of Christ is not a figure of speech. We all need to see ourselves as the living body of Christ. This means we must respect each other and realise that we all share equally in the one body.
- Vertical, hierarchical structures can deliver a distorted view of the Body of Christ that undermines this equality, giving the perception of elitism which distances clergy from the laity. As a small but concrete example, why are eucharistic ministers

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- no longer permitted to conduct a communion ceremony in the absence of a priest? Clericalism makes little sense when we are all the body of Christ.
- There is a degree of hurt, of alienation and of exclusion felt at parish level over institutional issues within the Church. Clearly child abuse is the main focus for these feelings, also, to a lesser extent, financial scandals, but issues such as clericalism, mandatory celibacy and the exclusion of women from the clergy also weigh heavily on some people.
  - Overall, there is a tension felt between the old rule-based Church and a church that is trying to change.

#### **4.3 The welcome we give to others, and our support for each other, were seen as key elements in our coming together in communion.**

- We need to be Christ-like in our welcome. We need to welcome people unconditionally.
- We need to welcome and support better those who might feel themselves on the periphery: divorced and remarried persons, those in same sex relationships etc.
- Society has moved on in terms of views around divorce, marriage, etc, but the church does not seem to have moved with the times. Some people feel they are not worthy enough to go to church because of their situation, but in reality, the church should serve as a refuge, where people can come “home” – if they see the church as home, they will stay, and will bring their children into this extended home as well.
- Why does the Church exclude people in what it sees as “irregular” relationships from Communion? “Take this **all** of you and eat it”: we are disallowing people who may be most in need. How can we really welcome people if they are unable to fully participate?
- Mass needs to be celebrated in a less formal way. Its solemnity and terminology can be off-putting.
- As a parish, we need to prioritise our attention on those groups that may be on the margins of parish life: the elderly, the vulnerable, young families, young people.
- For many, the church is a place of love – where the elderly find family with other children of God, all looking to be closer to God, spending time with the Lord. The elderly are stalwarts always praying for everybody, and it will be great to connect this with the youth – so the spiritual energy not only flows but is also strengthened. Let our love for the Lord and for each other shine through.
- Does the Church really understand how difficult marriage and family life can be? This is an important area where support is needed.
- The Parish has a strong social dimension. Without this, the parish would lose an important source of interaction and mutual support.
- We should be proud of our parish, and what we do for it, and celebrate what we achieve together and for others, all in the name of the Lord.

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**4.4 Isolation is the opposite of communion. We need to be particularly aware of those who are by necessity isolated in our community, especially the elderly.**

- As a result of the pandemic and the lockdowns to contain it, many more people now know what it feels like to be isolated.
- A positive aspect of the pandemic, however, is that it has also given rise to neighbourliness and care for the elderly/vulnerable in the parish through regular contact.
- The streaming of Masses is clearly a lifeline for many people who are unable to come to Mass. Is there a possible concern, however, that people may now be reluctant to return to Mass? At the same time, it is important to continue this facility for those unable to come to Mass, such as the housebound.
- Many isolated elderly people are invisible in our community, but it is important to recognise the great value they have. There is a love there that people do not see. They may be isolated, but they still pray for others.

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**5. SUMMARY NOTES – PARTICIPATION**

**5.1 The Floating Shelter is an excellent example of participation at work in the parish, and in the wider community.....**

- Many different skills are involved in running the Floating Shelter. It is an excellent example of how gifts can be shared to achieve a common good.
- Listening, underpinned by prayer, is an important gift in the Shelter, and is part of accepting vulnerable people for who they are.
- Helpers' involvement in the Shelter has both a practical and spiritual side: a combination of prayer and service to others.

**5.2 ..... But in a wider context we may not always recognise the gifts that others have to offer, or are already putting into practice in our community**

- Sometimes it's easy to see the givers, but not the gifts. We must not judge others because their gifts may be different to ours, or invisible to us.
- Everyone has a gift, and these gifts all come from the same Holy Spirit. It's not something which originates from us on our own. Each gift has an intended purpose, hence there is no higher nor lesser gift. There is need to "commune" with the Lord via the Holy Spirit to discern our gifts and how the Lord would like us to use them.
- We must always be aware of the "quiet saints" in our parish, who may not be very visible: those who "Simply get on with doing their business, visiting the sick, the aged and the lonely, a shoulder to cry on, a listening ear and the reassurance of one who cares."

**5.3 Why might people feel excluded or unable to participate in the life of the Church?**

- People might perceive barriers to their participation in Church, feeling that their own circumstances preclude them from taking part as somehow "unworthy" of participation.
- Sometimes this self-exclusion is based on a misunderstanding of what the Church's true teaching is. We need to separate out what we might have been taught as a child from a real understanding of the Church's teaching.
- People can be put off by what they see as the rigidity of church rules, for example around sexuality.
- How do we encourage people who started with the faith, but drifted off later in life as a result of circumstances which are considered not acceptable in the church – for example, being divorced, or living with a partner outside of marriage, or in a same sex relationship; or simply as a result of challenges in meeting the demands of daily life?
- There seems to have been a trend in recent years of diminishing participation in parish life. This has clearly been exacerbated by the concerns of the pandemic, and also perhaps because many people in the current climate find themselves in family caring roles that leave less time for parish participation.

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**5.4 How do we encourage people to participate in the life of the Church?**

- At gatherings like this we only see the people we know. Where are the people we don't know? How do we reach them?
- Sitting in church, do we know who is the person beside us or across from us? How do we utilise better the mechanisms already in place for people to get to know each other – perhaps those already active in church should make a bit more effort to extend a welcoming hand to new faces.
- If we are to grow as a community, we need to meet people where they are. People need to be made to feel they have value in terms of where they are in their lives, not in terms of what's expected of them.
- The church is not a physical building – so it may be the case that if people don't go to the physical church, that we (being the church) can go to people's homes just like the early apostles did. If each of us could bring one other person back into the church, then it will grow again. Sometimes it is as simple as asking people, as very often they will step up.
- People will only feel part of a community if they feel able to participate. We shouldn't be afraid of asking people who might not be particularly active in the parish to take on certain roles or tasks: sometimes the act of asking might give a person the confidence, sense of self-worth and belief in their own gifts to respond positively. But, having done so, we must give them the support to carry out what we ask of them.
- Perhaps monthly bible study might be helpful in bringing people together to learn more about their faith. Possibly with rotating "leaders", and different groups for parents, young people etc.
- We should do more to harness social media platforms to reach out to people.

**5.5 Specifically, how do we encourage the participation of older teenagers and young adults in the life of the Church?**

- Young people should be given the opportunity to own how they would like to participate in the church. Let them lead this initiative: we need to give young people more space and responsibility for determining their own form of participation and worship.
- Perhaps we should identify and ask young people already attending church to suggest and recommend other young people to bring back into the church.
- We need to give young people more space and responsibility for determining their own form of participation and worship.
- Music is a good channel for the involvement of young people. Perhaps give confirmation candidates the task of preparing their own going forth Mass? Youth Masses? We can learn from what happens in other churches, including other denominations.
- Initiatives such as the Night Fever movement should be explored.
- Young people have passion and energy – you can see this, for example, in their concern for the environment. We need to tap this energy, for example by providing opportunities for service to others.
- Perhaps we can mobilize young people using causes which are current and relevant in these times: climate change, pandemic, migrants, war casualties, human rights, etc – and progress these causes with guidance from the Holy Spirit.

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- Many young adults (20s/30s) fall away from the church. Can we survey those who do, in a completely neutral way, to gain insight into the reasons why?

**5.6 At the other end of the spectrum, we need to recognise the contribution that elderly members of the parish make.**

- The ways that people participate in parish life will change over their lifespan.
- Elderly members of the parish have a wealth of experience. How best can we tap it?

**5.7 The Church faces a crisis of vocations to the priesthood. When talking of Participation, the question must be on the table of how the roles of clergy and laity need to change in the future.**

- The relationship between laity and hierarchy needs fundamental reform, particularly with the worsening shortage of priests that the Church faces. Traditional divisions between clergy and laity may no longer be valid and the roles of each of them need to be re-thought, including the possibility of married priests and female clergy. Sometimes we are embarrassed to look at issues within the church. However, the laity has responsibility to raise issues, and this is one of them.
- The laity needs to take on more responsibility for the life of the Church – could this be the work of the Holy Spirit?
- For the laity to take on more responsibility, there is need for them to have the opportunities to become more educated about their faith and be supported in this task – it cannot just be left to the Clergy.

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**6. SUMMARY NOTES – MISSION**

**6.1 Mission, at an individual and parish level, is about witness and example; the Holy Spirit works through the witness we give**

- Some Catholics may have lost a sense of pride in their faith, and may be reluctant to bear witness to it too overtly. People need more support to grow and become educated in their faith.
- It is very difficult to give an exposition of our faith to someone who has no concept of faith. One cannot convince by argument; one needs to show by example what it's like to be a Catholic and link people's need for fulfilment to what the Church can offer.
- At a personal level, we need to take small steps: where is the Holy Spirit leading me, what is it asking me to consider or do, and with whom do I share this?

**6.2 Mission has a wider social dimension, reaching out to the world beyond our immediate circle**

- Jesus met people where they were; we need to welcome people with the needs they have.
- We cannot detach our mission from the culture we live in. We move in a fractured society where we need to be as inclusive as we can in our mission. This is particularly relevant to younger people.
- The scripture reading we listened to told of Jesus giving "sight to the blind". Social justice is a key element of the Church's mission.
- The Church needs to challenge, injustice, unfairness, corruption and racism in our society. Sometimes the Church can appear to be a passive observer, rather than state its position in areas of conflict.
- The Floating Shelter is one of the outreach projects run by the parish. The pandemic has seriously affected its direction and caused it to adapt, but the core rationale for the work remains the same as expressed in the Gospel words, 'It is your love for one another that will prove to the world that you are my disciples'.
- How do we make our love for others be more felt? On a parish level, we can demonstrate our willingness to help people in need: the poor, the dispossessed....

**6.3 At a parish level, participation with other Churches is an important part of our mission**

- Many projects can be run jointly, the prime example being the Floating Shelter.
- Participation in mission with other churches is like the intertwining rings of the Olympic logo: it is about taking part, not winning, in partnership with each other.
- The example ours and other churches give to each other is important. The Church is less insular than it used to be.
- We have much to learn from other churches about how they carry out their mission.

**6.4 As a parish, are we inward or outward looking?**

- We may convey the impression of being inward-looking and inaccessible, but we don't mean to be that way.
- Certainly the pandemic has forced us to some extent to be more inward looking, for example by keeping contact with more vulnerable members of the parish.

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- There is always a tension between “maintenance” and “mission”. It is human nature to deal with what needs doing immediately. Our focus, therefore, is often on maintenance, but the challenge is to ring fence time and effort to spend on the wider strategic picture. How do we harness the skills that exist in the parish to work on “Mission” and extend participation beyond just the core group?

#### **6.5 How might we work more effectively in fulfilling our mission?**

- How do we get our voices heard more – how can we proclaim, witness, hear more? We already have contact through the sacraments of baptism, communion, confirmation, marriage, as well as funerals, schools, etc – how do we leverage these “tools” to grow the church, and embed spirituality into these activities? Perhaps we need to call upon the Holy Spirit in each of these activities so that their true meanings are not lost?
- We need to work more collectively. We could encourage parish mission groups to share good practice. We could also reach out to the mission groups of other churches, Catholic or otherwise.
- A project such as the Floating Shelter gives parishioners on the periphery, even the housebound, the opportunity to express and respond to their own mission, either through practical work or prayer.
- Today’s modes of communication have evolved with technology and the wide use of social media. We need to move with the times, and see how to utilize these tools in an impactful way, which young people, parents, working people will find interesting and relevant to read. At the same time, we must acknowledge that the elderly may not necessarily have moved away from traditional way of communicating, so it is not the case of finding a “one size fits all” solution, but providing bespoke modes of communication.

#### **6.6 There are specific issues to do with supporting parents with young families, both in meeting their needs and facilitating their participation in church life**

- It is very difficult to get young parents into active roles within the parish. This is not for lack of invitation, but young people now lead very different lives from previous generations and suffer from severe time poverty. With the guidance of the Holy Spirit, we need to find new ways of reaching out and persuading them to give a small slice of their time.
- Families have very busy lives. For some, the Sunday obligation can be a deterrent.
- Young families are vital for succession in the parish. What do we offer that is good for their children? The answer is a foundation and formation that needs to be embedded in their lifestyle.

#### **6.7 There is an opportunity for us as a parish to act on the fruits of this discussion**

- We need to come up with a mechanism for carrying forward the outcomes of the discussion, identifying, prioritising and assigning ownership to actions.
- We are not starting with a blank sheet. We have a mission statement, for example, and we can build on what we have already. There are a number of active outward-facing groups in the parish, but they need the participation of more people in order to grow.

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**APPENDIX – SCRIPTURE READINGS USED TO INTRODUCE EACH PARISH  
SYNOD MEETING**

**COMMUNION**

**Gospel of John. Chapter 15**

Jesus said to his disciples:

Make your home in me, as I make mine in you.

As a branch cannot bear fruit all by itself, but must remain part of the vine, neither can you unless you remain in me.

**I am the vine, you are the branches.**

Whoever remains in me, with me in them, bears fruit in plenty; for cut off from me you can do nothing.

Anyone who does not remain in me is like a branch that has been thrown away – they wither; If you remain in me and my words remain in you, you may ask what you will and you shall get it.

It is to the glory of my Father that you should bear much fruit, and then you will be my disciple.

**PARTICIPATION**

**First Letter of St. Paul to the Corinthians. Chapter 12**

Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.

For to one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom,  
and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit,  
to another faith by the same Spirit,  
to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit,  
to another the working of miracles,  
to another prophecy,  
to another the ability to distinguish between spirits,  
to another various kinds of tongues,  
to another the interpretation of tongues.

All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills.

**MISSION**

**Gospel of Luke. Chapter 4**

Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee. And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up. And as was his custom, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and he stood up to read. And the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written,

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,  
because he has anointed me  
to proclaim good news to the poor.

He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives  
and recovering of sight to the blind,  
to set at liberty those who are oppressed,  
to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour.”

And he rolled up the scroll and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. And he began to say to them, “Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.”