



Neil Turner/Lambeth Palace

Over 40 Anglican and Catholic bishops convened in Norwich this week (January 30 and 31) in a joint meeting for services and group discussions about the ways in which the two denominations can work together more closely, as well as understanding each other better.

The 42 bishops, including the Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby and the Archbishop of Westminster, Cardinal Vincent Nichols, met at St John's Cathedral in the [Roman Catholic Diocese of East Anglia](#) for Midday Prayers on Tuesday, January 30, followed by lunch in the Cathedral Narthex.

From there they visited the St Julian Shrine on Rouen Road where they heard from Fr Richard Stanton, the Shrine's Priest Director. A fraternal walk through the streets of Norwich followed to the Anglican Cathedral of the Holy and Undivided Trinity in The Close.

The opening session of the meeting, which is only held once every two years, in the Cathedral's Weston Room was an opportunity to hear from some of those involved in the coronation of HM King Charles III. The Coronation, a service rooted in tradition and Christian symbolism, was led by the Archbishop Welby, who offered a reflection on the historic event. Cardinal Nichols, the first Catholic archbishop to have a formal role in a coronation service for 400 years, also gave a personal reflection.

Choral Evensong in the Cathedral was followed by a drinks reception and dinner at Bishop's House, hosted by the Bishop of Norwich the Rt Rev Graham Usher.

The second session looked at the Synodal journey in the Catholic Church. Short reflections were offered by three attendees who travelled to Rome for last October's Synod: Archbishop John Wilson of Southwark, National Ecumenical Officer, Fr Jan Nowotnik, and Bishop Martin Warner of Chichester, the Church of England representative.

The final session focused on the Catholic Church's newest English saint, John Henry Newman – a lecture on the Victorian educationalist was offered by theologian and renowned Newman scholar Monsignor Roderick Strange, Rector of Mater Ecclesiae College.

Bishop of East Anglia, the Rt Rev Peter Collins, was due to be co-hosting the meeting with Bishop Graham as the lead, but was unwell and unable to attend.

Speaking just before the meeting started, Bishop Graham said: "A lot of our visible unity is through social action, through our life of prayer, through our sense of being together.

"Archbishop Justin and Pope Francis have been together in Rome over the last few days, along with East Anglia's Bishop Peter, commissioning bishops to be evangelists in their communities in pairs – an Anglican bishop with a Catholic one. I have a very strong working relationship with Bishop Peter on many different levels.

“To mark the 650th anniversary of Julian of Norwich’s Shewings, Pope Francis wrote a reflection which looks at what Mother Julian says to our current age of war, famine, pandemic and ecological disaster. In her own age she knew three waves of the Black Death in this city and she probably saw two thirds of the population die,” said Bishop Graham.

“Mother Julian said that God is Lord of the Church so that we don’t have to be and that in God all things will be well, all manner of things shall be well. I hope that as the bishops meet in this fine city that has a long history of hospitality that they will be inspired by our time of prayer, pilgrimage and study together.

“God’s Holy Spirit will inspire us and out of that will come incredible new ways of serving God’s church and serving Christ in our midst and you cannot predict what that will be but God has a way of always surprising us.

St John’s Cathedral Dean, Fr Alan Hodgson, said: “Since becoming a diocese we have become more closely allied with the Anglican Cathedral in Norwich and it is always a great joy to us to meet at ecumenical events in both cathedrals. There is a great spirit of cohesion and we always work towards that. Getting the logistics right for a meeting such as this is quite complex and takes a lot of co-ordination.”

This was the seventh joint meeting since 2006, with previous meetings in Birmingham, Leeds, London, Leicester and Liverpool. These meetings aim to foster spiritual communion and to identify and develop programmes of joint witness and mission in this country, both regionally and nationally.

Photos from the gathering are available on the Catholic Church England and Wales' [Flickr](#) account

Article written by Keith Morris, Diocese of East Anglia

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