



Archdiocese of Winnipeg  
*Office of the Archbishop*

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**A Pastoral Letter from Archbishop Gagnon on the  
XVI General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops**



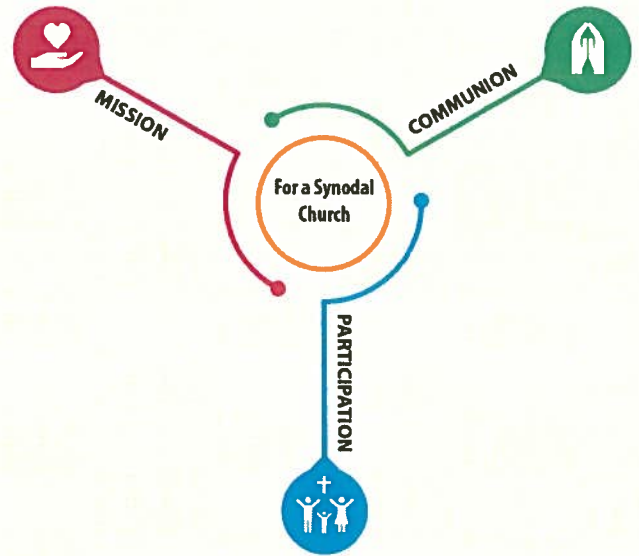
Dear Reverend Fathers, Deacons, Religious and Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

*May God our Father give you grace and peace. We always give thanks to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, in our prayers for you because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and by the love you bear towards the saints... Colossians 1:2-6*

It is with joy that I announce to you that recently the Holy Father convoked the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops. This particular Synod is unique for at least two reasons. First, it marks the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the establishment of the Synod of Bishops following the Second Vatican Council, by St. Pope Paul VI, and second, it will fully involve every diocese in the world as part of the synodal process.

The theme of the Synod is, *For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation and Mission*. It will take place, starting with the Preparatory Phase in 2021-2022 and proceed to the formal celebration of the Synod in October 2023. The implementation stage will follow, and dioceses around the world will be invited to participate. In the **Preparatory Document** for the Synod, we hear these words: "Pope Francis invites the entire Church to reflect on a theme that is decisive for its life and mission. It is exactly this path of Synodality which God expects of the Church of the third millennium."

Synodality, perhaps most simply understood as a “journeying together”, is, in fact, what most effectively enacts and manifests the nature of the Church as the pilgrim and missionary People of God – two themes which were very prominent in the Second Vatican Council. Journeying together is an important part of renewal and is both a gift and a task. Speaking of this ancient way, Pope Francis reminds us that by, “...journeying together and reflecting together on the journey that has been made, the Church will be able to learn through Her experience which processes can help Her to live communion, to achieve participation, and open Herself to mission.”



Every Synod, including our own Archdiocesan Synod, seeks to answer a question. The XVI Synod of Bishops asks the following questions: “How does this journeying together, which takes place today on different levels (from the local level to the universal one), allow the Church to proclaim the Gospel in accordance with the mission entrusted to Her; and what steps does the Spirit invite us to take in order to grow as a synodal Church?”

**Our experience in the Archdiocese of Winnipeg**

This experience might sound a little familiar to many of us as we have recently experienced our own Synod in the Archdiocese of Winnipeg. We began our Synod on Pentecost Sunday, 2016, and ended the formal sessions on Pentecost Sunday, 2018. The 42 Proposals, stemming from our Synod, are found in our Post-Synodal Proclamation, entitled: *Disciples on the Way*. (cf. [www.archwinnipeg.ca/main.php?p=151](http://www.archwinnipeg.ca/main.php?p=151))

The implementation of these 42 proposals began in earnest with a strong emphasis on learning the way of listening to the Holy Spirit and to one another. We advocated praying with Scripture through *Lectio Divina*, hosting listening sessions at the parish level to develop parish pastoral plans, augmenting the process of adult formation through on-line formation programs, and enhancing our abilities in social media. Perhaps one of the more surprising developments during our Synod was the realisation that we are called to be a more Synodal Church. This encouraged us to begin developing the principles of Synodality we had learned through our own experience. Our recently updated Norms for Parish Pastoral Councils effectively reflect a synodal approach to parish life.

Our Synod implementation was adversely affected over the past two years by COVID-19. Despite the pandemic, we were, like many dioceses and parishes, able to develop a much greater capacity to use social media for Evangelization. It must also be acknowledged, however, that our parish life has been a real struggle over these two years, but we have gained a greater

appreciation for our faith, for our Christian family life and for the vulnerable around us which led us to find creative ways to reach out to one another.

Our Archdiocesan Synod tried to answer the question: *How can we live out our Missionary Discipleship under the conditions of the times in which we now live?* From this we developed our Synod theme: **Disciples: Established, Anointed and Sent in Christ**. This tells us that we are a people called into discipleship. We have heard this call and have chosen to follow the Lord and therefore we are **established** by faith in Christ; we are a people **anointed** in the Holy Spirit and configured to Christ through Baptism and Confirmation; and we are a people **sent** into the world, fortified by Christ in the Eucharist, and charged to bring the Good News to others. In other words, we are called to be **Missionary Disciples**.

It is with this background that we can participate in the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops. This, in turn, will serve as a renewal of our own Synod and give us even greater spiritual motivation to build Synodality within our community serving Communion, Participation and Mission.

## **How will the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of Bishops on the theme of Synodality work within the Dioceses of Canada?**

The Synodal path leading to the General Synod in 2023 will be composed of three phases:

1) **Phase One:** This phase began with Opening Celebrations in Rome on October 9 and 10, 2021. I was privileged to participate in this event as one of five people representing the Catholic Church in Canada. This First Phase is to be marked by a broad consultation among the People of God throughout the world beginning at the diocesan level. It will be based on the **Preparatory Document**, accompanied by a Questionnaire and a more detailed document called a **Vademecum**. These are provided by the General Secretariat of the Synod to the bishops of each country (The said documents are available at [www.archwinnipeg.ca/main.php?p=168](http://www.archwinnipeg.ca/main.php?p=168)). During Phase One, each bishop is asked to undertake a consultation process within his diocese. This phase will last from October 2021 to August 2022. It will conclude with a “Pre-Synodal Meeting” of every Episcopal Conference, which will produce a synthesis of the diocesan consultations for each country. These efforts will contribute towards the production of a *Instrumentum Laboris* (working document) in 2022.

2) **Phase Two:** This Phase is termed the Continental Phase. It will commence in September 2022, with the purpose of engaging the *Instrumentum Laboris* at the continental level. At the conclusion of their deliberations each continental grouping (e.g., Canada and the U.S.A.) will draft a final document to be sent to the General Secretariat of the Synod in Rome by March 2023. The Secretariat will then draft a second *Instrumentum Laboris* based on the responses received and, in turn this will be used for the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops in the fall of 2023.

3) **Phase Three:** This final Phase of the Synodal Journey will take place in October 2023, with the celebration of the Assembly of Bishops in Rome. The Synod sessions in Rome will last for one month followed by the publication of the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation of the Holy Father on Synodality, which will include world-wide plans for implementation.



## How will we proceed with Phase One in the Archdiocese of Winnipeg?

We will follow as closely as possible, the general phases as outlined above. In Canada, because of the size of our country and the practice of having regular Regional Assemblies (Western Canada, Ontario, Quebec, and Atlantic Canada), there will be an extra step to the Synodal process. This step will see the Regional Assemblies each receive the diocesan feedback and synthesize this information before sending it to the national Episcopal Conference (CCCB).

For the Archdiocese of Winnipeg, we have an advantage in already having a structure in place with our Archdiocesan Synod Coordinator and our list of Parish Synod Delegates. It makes sense to make use of the experience of these Delegates along with our various Pastoral Councils. In general, our pastors are already familiar with our own Synodal process, so their support is key to the success of our participation in the Preparatory stage. Finally, the great amount of feedback that formed part of our Synod in the Archdiocese, as well as a number of parish listening sessions already organized in the recent past, will greatly assist in our response to this new project. Additional feedback will be added to this and sent on to the Assembly of Western Catholic Bishops (AWCB) in February 2022.

## What will be our Archdiocesan process for Phase One?

Pastoral Services of the Archdiocese of Winnipeg will work with the Synod Coordinator and the Office of Communications to collate and simplify the questions we are seeking to ask parishioners this fall. Here are the steps that will follow:

1. Parishes will be asked to hold listening sessions encompassing their Parish Pastoral Councils and as wide an array of participants as possible to respond to certain selected Synod questions. These Listening Sessions can be in-person, virtually, or a combination of both. Our Listening Sessions manual is being updated for this purpose. **Note: Pastors are asked to identify key individuals who could help organize these parish Listening Sessions and forward their names and email address to [lchiupka@archwinnipeg.ca](mailto:lchiupka@archwinnipeg.ca) by November 9<sup>th</sup>.** This will anticipate a ZOOM training session for the individual facilitators during the week of November 15<sup>th</sup>.
2. On Saturday, November 20<sup>th</sup>, from 10:30-1:00pm, there will be an Archdiocesan Synod Conference, by ZOOM, to include the already existing Synod delegates, clergy, and Parish Council members. Attendees will be asked to discuss and respond to a greater variety of Synod questions.
3. Parish Listening Sessions (usually only one in number) are to be organized at a convenient time following November 20<sup>th</sup>. The deadline for submission of the Parish Listening Sessions results will be January 14, 2022. The results should be sent to [lchiupka@archwinnipeg.ca](mailto:lchiupka@archwinnipeg.ca).
4. The Archdiocese will then synthesize and collate these results and prepare them for submission to the AWCB at their February meeting.

## In Conclusion

There can be no doubt that the past two years have been a very real challenge for the Church and for our country. Yet we know that the Cross leads to new life in Christ. The Holy Father has counselled us to remain focused on Christ and his Gospel regardless of the hardships that are present. His great interest in this 'ancient way', we call Synodality, is something to be activated today with new vigor; it is the way to build communion, participation, and missionary discipleship.

## ENCOUNTER LISTEN DISCERN

"Celebrating a Synod means walking on the same road, walking together. Let us look at Jesus. First, he encounters the rich man on the road; he then listens to his questions, and finally he helps him discern what he must do to inherit eternal life. Encounter, listen and discern. I would like to reflect on these three verbs that characterize the Synod."

Walk together as a people of missionary pilgrims.  
Learn and practice synodality.

## LEARNING BY DOING

Let me quote, once again, Pope Francis, as he speaks to us about trusting in God's abiding providence:

"God is eternal newness. He impels us constantly to set out anew, to pass beyond what is familiar, to the fringes and beyond. He takes us to where humanity is most wounded, where men and women, beneath the appearance of shallow conformity, continue to seek an answer to the question of life's meaning. God is not afraid! He is fearless! He is always greater than our plans and schemes" (*Gaudete et Exultate*, #135).

Yours in Christ,



✠Richard Gagnon  
Archbishop of Winnipeg