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Office of the Bishop

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

On October 10, 2021, Pope Francis inaugurated a 2-year-long synodal process for the universal Church “For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation and Mission”, with a Holy Mass celebrated in Rome’s St. Peter’s Basilica. Dioceses worldwide opened the Synodal process at the local level on October 17, including the Diocese of Saint John, in the 10 a.m. Mass at the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception. I invite you to listen to the homily at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sRkNf24nl2M>.

The diocesan and national listening phases will run until early Spring 2022 and will be followed by a continental phase from September 2022 to March 2023. The final “universal Church phase” will culminate in the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops in October 2023. It is a very involved process of deliberations from around the world to discuss the concept of synodality, which refers to the very essence of the Church, her constitutive reality, oriented towards evangelization. The Church exists to evangelize.

Led by the Holy Spirit through the Gospel and the Eucharist, we are called to raise up disciples who joyfully live out the mission of proclaiming the Good News and making disciples of others. That is our mission. This mission requires the participation of all the baptized in communion with God and with each other, bishops, priests, religious and laity, each according to the gifts and charisms of their vocation. We are called to evangelize in a world that is in desperate need of hearing the Good News of Jesus Christ, but in the context of a plurality of members of the body of Christ, which enriches the Church, and that strives to remain united to Christ the head. Synodality indicates walking together and listening to one another, but above all to the Holy Spirit.

These next few years of deliberations will be a privileged time to walk together as we listen to each other, look at the signs of the times, and ultimately listen to the Holy Spirit to discern what steps the Holy Spirit invites us to take to grow as a Synodal Church. This two-year process will conclude in October 2023 and will notably involve all the faithful at local Churches across the world, promising to listen to all, especially to laypeople.

As we begin this diocesan phase of consultation, which is the preparatory stage for the Synod that will take place in October 2023 in Rome, I am counting on all parishes to do their best to reach out to the faithful so that we can listen and discern together. The goal is to ensure the participation of the greatest number possible, to listen to the living voice of the entire People of God. We need to actively reach out to people where they are at, especially those who are often excluded or not involved in the life of the Church. There must also be a clear focus on the participation of the poor, marginalized, vulnerable and excluded, to listen to their voices and experiences. Above all this process must be simple, accessible, and welcoming to all.

To that end a survey has been created on our diocesan website <https://dioceseofsaintjohn.org/synod-2021-2023> and may be completed and submitted electronically (results submitted via the website will be forwarded to the parish). While the electronic survey is preferable, a PDF version is included with this letter that can be printed and filled out manually if necessary. I have also included two official resources, *For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, and Mission: Preparatory Document* and *Vademecum for the Synod on Synodality Official Handbook for Listening and Discernment in Local Churches*. Both of these will be useful for your parish as you prepare for the consultation process.

Consultation meetings to present the survey can be organized in person (following current COVID-19 protocols), or online, and can be arranged based on the needs of the parish. Each parish should appoint a contact person or team within the parish that will be responsible for coordinating such meetings, recording feedback, collecting, and compiling survey results. Active ministries or apostolates within the parish (including Knights of Columbus, CWL, parish councils and committees, or any group that meets with consistency) may choose to hold their own consultation meetings and forward the results to the parish contact person. It is important to note that not every question must be answered, so long as people are attentive to the Holy Spirit and provide clear and honest feedback to the questions that speak to them. The parish contact person or team is asked to summarize and compile the results into a summary document that will be no longer than ten pages (one page per theme or set of questions) and returned to the diocese no later than January 28, 2022, so as to allow our diocesan staff to compile the results of the surveys for the next regional phase of deliberations.

“A synodal church is a listening church, aware that listening is more than hearing. It is a reciprocal listening in which each one has something to learn.” (Pope Francis, Synod on the Family, October 17, 2015). The objective of this Synodal Process is not to provide a temporary or one-time experience of synodality, but rather to provide an opportunity for the entire People of God to discern together how to move forward on the path towards being a more synodal Church in the long-term. Understanding that the Holy Spirit is the protagonist of the Synod, we come before the Lord as people of faith, opening our hearts to the Holy Spirit and asking him to teach us how to be a Church that listens to one another.

To this end, I invite you to pray the *Adsumus Sancte Spiritus* throughout the Synodal Process and before every gathering to ensure that this process of deliberations is steeped in prayer, and to give God permission to move in power in our diocese.

United in prayer towards communion, participation, and mission in a synodal Church, I remain faithfully yours in Christ,



✠ Christian Riesbeck, CC
Bishop of Saint John

October 19, 2021

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