



OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

October 17, 2021

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

In 2013, Pope Francis published *Evangelii Gaudium*, which focuses on the Church's primary mission of the evangelization of the modern world. What is the meaning of this evangelization? I believe that the simple answer can be found in this brief quote from the document: "I invite all Christians, everywhere, at this very moment, to a renewed personal encounter with Jesus Christ, or at least an openness to letting him encounter them; I ask all of you to do this unfailingly each day" (EG. 3). To evangelize is to proclaim Jesus Christ to the world. How we do this is very important.

Pope Francis states, "I dream of a 'missionary option', that is, a missionary impulse capable of transforming everything, so that the Church's customs, ways of doing things, times and schedules, language and structures can be suitably channeled for the evangelization of today's world rather than for her self-preservation. The renewal of structures demanded by pastoral conversion can only be understood in this light: as part of an effort to make them more mission-oriented, to make ordinary pastoral activity on every level more inclusive and open, to inspire in pastoral workers a constant desire to go forth and in this way to elicit a positive response from all those whom Jesus summons to friendship with himself" (EG. 27).

Pope Francis is calling the Church to a sincere reflection on evangelization, vis-à-vis, the world around us. Are we more focused on a spirit of maintenance rather than mission? Do we form missionary disciples who understand their baptismal call to go forth into the world to proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ?

In 2019 we completed a discernment process that involved gathering and reflecting upon the needs of our diocese. People were asked to consider both the challenges and opportunities in their parishes. From this consultation, we have been able to obtain a great deal of valuable data concerning parish life and our diocese. It is this information that will help us to respond to what Pope Francis is asking of us at this present moment.

Our Holy Father has convoked a synod entitled, "For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, and Mission." It will begin in each diocese today, Sunday, October 17, 2021. Pope Francis is inviting the entire Church to embark on a shared journey of renewal as inspired by the Holy Spirit. This path will lead toward the sixteenth Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, in October 2023 in Rome.

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From a theological perspective, synodality is described as “the action of the Spirit in the communion of the Body of Christ and in the missionary journey of the People of God” (Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church – International Theological Commission, March, 2018). In a very particular way, it provides a structured conversation that is focused on listening to the Holy Spirit and to one another. We try to discern the will of God as we face both challenges and opportunities in the life of our diocese and the Universal Church.

A Preparatory Document has been prepared by the Vatican to help guide dioceses in the first phase of the consultation (October 2021-February 2022). Together with this document, we will use the five themes that emerged from our own diocesan discernment process as an interpretive lens regarding our consultation process. The five themes are:

- The Praying Church – Focus on the Liturgical life of the diocese
- The Serving Church – Focus on the outreach to the poor and marginalized
- The Domestic Church – Focus on youth and family life
- The Teaching Church – Focus on catechesis and faith formation
- The Diocesan Church – Focus on the structures and offices of the diocese

As we face the challenges before us, we are called as a diocesan family not to simply live in the past or adopt the present as a solution. We must return to the source, Jesus Christ. He is alive and He is our hope. This truth will guide us now and in implementing the fruits of this process in the years to come.

You will be receiving more information about how you can be involved in the synodal preparations in the coming weeks. In the meantime, I ask that you begin to pray to the Holy Spirit for inspiration.

I have provided a prayer that I ask each parish to recite on a daily basis during this first stage of the process. There will also be a special petition at Mass today.

I place all of our efforts under the patronage of Our Lady of Guadalupe. Pope St. John Paul named her the Patroness of all America and the star of the first and new evangelization. May the ‘Star of the the New Evangelization’ pray for us and lead us to her Son, Jesus Christ. May she help us to set our diocese and world, on fire with God’s love!

Yours sincerely in Christ,



Most Reverend Gerard Bergie, D.D.
Bishop of St. Catharines