



OFFICE OF THE BISHOP
November 8, 2021

Prot. No. B 117/21

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Holy Father Pope Francis recently convened the XVI Ordinary Assembly of the Synod of Bishops to be held in Rome in October 2023 to reflect on “For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, and Mission.” The Holy Father has asked all of the dioceses across the world to contribute to this worldwide Synod by engaging in broad consultations with all of their members. The goal is to engage the whole People of God in the synodal process to “journey together, in order to experience a Church that receives and lives this gift of unity, and is open to the voice of the Spirit.”¹

In particular, the Pope is asking us to reflect together on the theme of the Synod, summed up in three words: communion, mission, and participation.

Communion.

What does communion mean? We are called to communion with God and with each other, just as the Lord prayed: “that they may all be one, as you, Father, are in me and I in you, that they also may be in us, that the world may believe that you sent me” (John 17:21-22). We accomplish this through the Church, where Jesus Christ encounters and transforms us today, just as He encountered and transformed the disciples 2,000 years ago.² The Church is not a social group or a club, but a community of people of faith who have been touched and called by the Lord.³ And as the Trinity is the mystery of the union between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, by attracting us unto Himself, the Lord makes an otherwise impossible unity emerge among those who follow Him.⁴

¹ Pope Francis, “Address for the Opening of the Synod,” October 9, 2021.

² Cf. *Deus Caritas Est*, no. 17.

³ Cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 32.

⁴ Cf. Galatians 3:25-28.

Mission.

What is our mission, the mission of the Church? The Apostle Paul teaches us that “the love of Christ impels us” (2 Cor 5:14). God calls us through our Baptism “to bring the light of Christ to all men.”⁵ The Lord forms us into a community of missionary disciples called to announce the Gospel of salvation to all people. As the Holy Father reminds us, everyone has an important role to play in this mission: “the new evangelization calls for personal involvement on the part of each of the baptized. Every Christian is challenged, here and now, to be actively engaged in evangelization.”⁶

Participation.

How are each of us called to participate in this mission? To build up the Body of Christ, which is the Church, the Holy Spirit distributes various gifts, charisms, and ministries among the People of God so that all of us might contribute to the Church’s missionary call.⁷ According to our particular vocations, we all participate in Jesus’ great commission to go and “make disciples of all nations.”⁸ For these reasons, the Church is always called to forge a concrete style “of communion and participation directed to mission,”⁹ so that each member of the People of God might contribute to serving God’s kingdom.¹⁰

The Holy Father wants all of us to reflect prayerfully on these three words to discover their importance in our lives and the life of the Church, to testify to each other the way the Lord is calling us to embody them at the present moment, and to consider the challenges and struggles that we face in living out the Gospel missionary mandate – both individually and as a Church. Accordingly, I ask all the members of our diocese to use the coming months to consider the following questions:

What is your experience of ecclesial communion, mission, and participation in your life? How does the Church help you in living them out? What challenges or struggles are you facing as you try to embody them? What steps is the Holy Spirit suggesting to call us to live our vocation as a pilgrim people that journeys together toward salvation more fully?

I invite you to join me in participating intentionally in the synodal path the Holy Father has called us to, for I am certain it will bear much fruit in the life of our diocese. In particular, the Synod offers us three opportunities.

First, the Synod is an opportunity to encounter the Lord and what He is calling us to – both as individuals and as a Church. This means keeping our eyes focused on the Lord and resisting the divisiveness that characterizes much of our public discourse in society and would tempt us to turn the Synod into a power struggle to affirm our ideas or positions. Instead, the Holy Father is

⁵ *Lumen Gentium*, no. 1.

⁶ *Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 120.

⁷ Cf. *Lumen Gentium*, no. 7.

⁸ Matthew 28:19, cf. *Lumen Gentium*, no. 32.

⁹ Pope Francis, “Address for the Opening of the Synod,” October 9, 2021.

¹⁰ Cf. *Lumen Gentium*, no. 36.

encouraging us to foster an authentic dialogue characterized by prayer, humility, and openness to what the Holy Spirit is doing in our midst.

Second, the Synod is an opportunity to learn that the Lord uses all circumstances in our lives to summon us to closer unity with Him. Even the struggles we face and the questions we discover in ourselves are ways God uses to invite us into ever-growing unity with Him. This means we need to resist the temptations of complacency or defensiveness and look instead with honesty at both the joys and the obstacles we experience in trying to live as His disciples.

Third, the Synod is an opportunity to discover that “the other” is a gift for our journey of faith. We are all brothers and sisters in Christ, the pilgrim People of God who walks together, sustaining each other with our prayers and witness. This means resisting the culture of enmity that reduces “the other” to the sum total of the things we disagree about or lets political ideologies and disagreements completely determine how we look at each other and the world. Instead, our common Baptism must inform the way we think of and speak with each other, with mutual respect as members of Christ’s Body.

To help with the Synod’s organization and ensure that it might be for all of us an occasion of “mutual listening” that allows us to “hear God’s voice, to sense His presence, to witness His passage and His breath of life,”¹¹ I have appointed Dr. Alessandro Rovati from Belmont Abbey College as the diocesan Contact Person for the Synod. In the coming months, he will contact on my behalf all the diocesan groups (parishes, schools, auxiliary groups, lay movements, third orders, charitable ministries, religious communities, migrant communities, and more) to help them organize gatherings to share and reflect on the Synod’s questions. The goal is for the fruits of these local conversations to be shared at a common gathering with representatives from the different diocesan groups on June 11, 2022. The diocese has also set up a page dedicated to the Synod on its website with resources and more information. While it will be possible to send in individual reflections and contributions, I strongly encourage you to take part in these local gatherings that will happen across the diocese. The goal of the Synod, in fact, is not to take surveys and produce documents¹² but to foster “a lived experience of discernment, participation, and co-responsibility, where a diversity of gifts is brought together for the Church’s mission in the world.”¹³

It is my heartfelt desire for the Synod to allow us to grow in unity with one another and with the Lord. To this end, I ask you to keep our diocesan journey in your prayers. Please entrust our efforts to Our Lady by praying the Holy Rosary often, individually or with your family or parish community. I also encourage you to find time for more frequent Eucharistic Adoration. May our devotion to the Lord’s Presence in the Sacrament of the Eucharist make us more attentive to His Presence in our midst and the many ways in which the Holy Spirit is calling us to conversion.

¹¹ Pope Francis, “Address to the Faithful of the Diocese of Rome,” September 18, 2021.

¹² *Preparatory Document for the Synod*, p. 22.

¹³ *Vademecum for the Synod*, p. 11.

May the Lord bless you as we journey together as a diocesan family to greater communion, mission, and participation – deepening our relationship with Him and with each other, and sharing His transformative love.

Sincerely yours in Christ Jesus,

+ *Peter J. Jugis*

Most Reverend Peter J. Jugis
Bishop of Charlotte

