



To All the Faithful of the Archdiocese of Grouard-McLennan  
November 22, 2021

### Call to Participate in the 2023 Synod

Our Holy Father Pope Francis has convoked a Synod of Bishops in Rome for the fall of 2023, on the theme of synodality. This synod or meeting of bishops is to be a reflection on the very practice of synods, the Church's manner of listening to the promptings of the Holy Spirit in the lived experience of the Church, and how we discern the way forward, how to most effectively "journey together" in the third millennium. Leading up to this synod, the Pope has asked all bishops to engage their communities in discerning the prompting of the Holy Spirit as a collective church, to guide them on the path ahead. In our Archdiocese, we are calling this process "listening gatherings"

It is my hope that many of us will take part in one or more "listening gatherings". I anticipate that these events will be the occasions for surprises; we may hear some things that we could never have imagined hearing, and share experiences that we may never have thought of sharing.

The image used for this synod is disciples walking together. Think of the two disciples on their way to Emmaus after the death and burial of Jesus. These two were confused and full of doubts; they had also just heard that Jesus was alive again, risen from the dead. During their journey and their sharing, Jesus came and walked at their side. Before the day was out, their faith was restored, and they headed back to Jerusalem, renewed, with hearts on fire to spread the good news.

The 2023 synod is like this. We gather and share our experiences, discerning how Jesus is with us and prompting us (collectively, the Church) to follow him more truly, more intimately. We have been doing this in many ways in our parishes and dioceses, especially since Vatican II. The added measure now is that Pope Francis wants us to make a deliberate effort to welcome and include others in our sharing and listening, those at the edges, who are not "at the centre" of our Church experience. These persons may have some deep wisdom and perspective to share with us.

Some history on synods and synodality. The first Christian Church "council" is spoken of in Acts of the Apostles, chapter 15. At that time, the issue was how to admit Gentiles (that is, non-Jews) into the Christian community. Over the centuries of the Church's history, Ecumenical Councils were universal synods. Our most recent experience of this was Vatican Council II. At Vatican II, the Pope with all bishops chose to reinstitute periodic synods of bishops in Rome. Every few years, representative bishops from around the world gather to discuss a matter of concern to the universal Church. There have been 15 of these since 1965. The 2023 Synod will be the 16th.

Again, it is my profound hope that many of you will take part in one or more listening gatherings in January, February, March and April. I pray that the Lord surprises us on our pilgrim way!

  
Archbishop Gerard Petipas, C.Ss.R.



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