



PROVINCIAL SYNTHESIS — QUEBEC — SYNOD ON SYNODALITY

“ Now Is the
Favourable Time
for the Church’s Renewal
and Continuation ”



Assemblée des
évêques catholiques
du Québec

Now Is the Favourable Time for the Church's Renewal and Continuation

PRESENTATION

The Church in Quebec experienced a beautiful moment in 2021-2022. Responding to Pope Francis's invitation despite the difficulties faced in organizing meetings due to the Covid pandemic, diocesan Churches engaged in the synodal process on synodality. Many occasions for conversation were held as we listened to the Word of God and to each other, in prayer and discernment. All under the Holy Spirit's guidance. Church members took the time to take stock of their "journeying together" at all levels of diocesan and provincial Church life, the better to witness to the Gospel.

Neither consultation nor referendum nor democratic debate, people experienced a type of gathering that was more like a conversation between believers, reviewing their journey together in the Church, allowing themselves to be inspired by the Word of God. "We listened to each other!" – such was the byword of these meetings. And people were enthusiastic about this experience. It's possible to speak and to listen to one other in the Church with freedom and respect for each. Yes, God's call to build the Kingdom and to form the Church can be heard as we take time to speak and to listen to one other. When we take the time, we can hear the Holy Spirit speak to us in various and new ways. This is undoubtedly the great conversion we must learn from this whole process.

We can't live the Gospel individually. Jesus calls his disciples together. We're called to journey together, for it's together that we can detect the signs of the times in the events of our contemporary history. In this way, we listen to the Holy Spirit -- who, like the wind, "blows where it wills, and you can hear the sound it makes, but you do not know where it comes from or where it is going" (Jn 3:8) -- and remain open to the surprises that the Spirit will certainly prepare for us along the way.

We are the people of God, in which all the baptized have a common dignity and mission in the exercise of the diversified and ordered richness of their vocations and ministries. In the event that we lived, we reflected on this "walking together" that allows the Church to proclaim the Gospel according to the mission that has been entrusted to her, and on the further steps that the Spirit invites us to take to grow as a synodal Church.

The words that arose and were shared during the meetings were set down and handed on to a diocesan writing team. Its members also took the time to listen to each other in prayer. The reports did not seek to retain only those elements common to the various statements that were made, but rather to reflect the diversity of perceptions while being attentive to the possible signs of the Spirit. Each diocese submitted its synthesis to the secretariat of the Assembly of Catholic Bishops of Quebec on June 17, 2022.

A provincial writing team then gathered to synthesize the twenty or so documents into a single report for the entire Church in Quebec. I thank all those who contributed to the writing of this synthesis. This team met in prayer and fraternal discussion to surface those elements that would shape a meaningful portrait of the faithful of Quebec. This synthesis was then sent to the secretariat of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops on July 11, 2022, where it was used to draft a Canadian synthesis, reflecting many of its elements.

At every level, our many synodal meetings were moments of grace. Participants recognize that these positive experiences rekindled their sense of belonging to their Church. We can't let these events go unheard. Considering the seriousness with which the synodal process was carried out, and the amount of information gathered, we felt it was necessary to make this Quebec provincial synthesis publicly available. We want the Catholic faithful of Quebec to make it their own so as to discern the conversions to which the Holy Spirit is calling the Church in Quebec. For this synod is destined to become one moment in a broader reflection on the future of the mission. It can't remain without effect. It has set us again on the path of the Gospel's future for today's world. It invites us to important conversions that will allow us to launch our Church anew.

We believe that the Holy Spirit was present as we listened to the Word of God and as we listened to each other, in prayer and discernment. We believe the Spirit is also at work as we read this document, particularly as each believer hears the call to conversion in our common journey as we strive to bring about the Kingdom of God.

May you let yourself be moved by the signs of the Spirit.



+ *Christian Rodembourg*

+ Christian Rodembourg, M.S.A.
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Now Is the Favourable Time for the Church's Renewal and Continuation

PROVINCIAL SYNTHESIS — QUEBEC — SYNOD ON SYNODALITY
July 11th, 2022

For the Church's renewal and continuation in Quebec, the faithful of this region responded to Pope Francis's invitation to organize and participate in a synodal process focused on our "journeying together" in our particular diocesan Churches. This was accomplished by listening to the Word and to each other, by paying attention to the signs of the times, through great freedom of expression, in discernment and prayer, under the Spirit's guidance. Participants dared to speak, hope, dream and walk together. The *sensus fidei fidelium* shone forth. In doing so, people realized that this was a favourable time to welcome the conversions and changes they perceive to be inspired by the Spirit.

In engaging this synod, these faithful men and women thought first of their own Church in Quebec, still hoping to contribute to the reflection of the Churches of Canada and possibly of the Church throughout the world. Each step of the process was truly lived in a spirit of synodality with all the patience this requires, thanks to the help of the Holy Spirit. The same holds true for the writing of this provincial synthesis.

If we don't undertake a true pastoral conversion, the Church will not fulfill its vocation of being a sign of God's Reign God and a leaven in the culture. It could even disappear! This is one of the first obvious conclusions to be drawn from reading the various synthesis reports. For several decades, the Church in Quebec, like many Churches in the West, has been searching for inspiration and vigour in a context of secularization and globalization. Recent events such as the isolation imposed by Covid, the sad reality of residential schools, the sexual abuses committed by members of the Church, the lack of ordained ministers and mandated laity, the financial precariousness of many dioceses and the decline in participation in Sunday celebrations have led to the emergence of a new awareness. In evaluating the present situation, a large number of Christian communities spread throughout Quebec are experiencing a real sense of urgency regarding the future of the proclamation of the Gospel. In fact, some Christian communities have already died out. To what conversions is the Spirit inviting us? What changes does the Spirit inspire in the Church? This sense of urgency appears in various forms following the themes addressed during the synodal meetings.

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**An alarming assessment:
If we change nothing,
the Church will no longer be a
sign of the Gospel for our world.
Well, now is the favourable time!**

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This realization could lead to discouragement or resignation. However, this was not the case during the meetings. All the faithful who participated in the various gatherings recognized that they lived these moments as positive and enriching experiences. They listened to the Word and prayed together. The synodal process freed their speech. They welcomed and listened to others and

were welcomed and heard by them. Numerous conversations allowed them to experiment and to bring to light the beginnings of solutions that appear as signs of the Spirit at work even in these difficult times. A favourable time does seem to be taking shape. It's no longer possible to turn back the clock. The faithful have expressed a great desire for change. This is what we'll explain in the following pages, following the seven themes that came up most often in the diocesan syntheses.

According to the Bishop of Rome, "The purpose of the Synod is not to produce documents, but to plant dreams, draw forth prophecies and visions, allow hope to flourish, inspire trust." The Church in Quebec has allowed itself to do this, in keeping with the missionary challenges of today. It has dreamed of truly human, fraternal, just and egalitarian relationships that awaken the desire and the joy of the Gospel. Whether it's the unconditional welcome of others in their diversity, their youth and their culture; whether it's the primary service of the poor and attention to the poverties of our modern world, the Church in Quebec dreams of exploring off-track roads. From dream to reality, there's but a step! For God, everything is possible if we really allow ourselves be guided and inspired by Him. This is undoubtedly the greatest of the Spirit's graces: to help us take this step by truly receiving one another as Christ's Church.

1 For a more listening and welcoming Church

Listening and welcoming are the two themes that come up most often in the diocesan reports. Associated with these are inclusion, healing and the need to take time.

Listening and welcoming are considered insufficient and deficient in many situations and places. Respondents spoke of youth, families, the sick, Aboriginal people, sexual minorities, people on the edges of society and those wounded by the Church. "The lack of listening or follow-up after committee meetings contributes to volunteers being less and less willing to get involved again." How much listening do people need? In fact, we never listen enough to the people we encounter. We will never welcome them as the Gospel bids us. We are all learners in this field.

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The time has come to cultivate listening with the intimate conviction that it means welcoming the word of the Other.

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At the same time, the participants in the synodal meetings all express, among their first impressions, that of having been heard, thus illustrating that this is possible in the Church.

The conviction we need to "move from a teaching Church to a listening Church" is becoming clearer and clearer. Our great desire to teach the love of God and to hand on our faith in a particular way has hindered our listening to the desires and needs of people. To journey with people requires listening to them in an unprejudiced way, accepting differences and not trying to convert the other at all costs. "When people ask for a sacrament, they express desires and needs that we must decode in order to develop an appropriate response."

The time has come to cultivate listening with the intimate conviction that it means welcoming the word of the Other. God's

Spirit speaks to us through those who, in Quebec society, aspire to a more human, just and fraternal world. “In the words of others, where the All-Other abides, we can already begin to recognize the signs of the Kingdom of God for our time.” When we listen to others, their words can make their way into our hearts. To be recognized is to be someone for someone, which is the basis of any healing process. To build bridges, it’s important that our words reflect the quality of our listening.

The necessity of listening affords us the opportunity to change our relationship to time. In a world where everything goes fast, listening to others implies slowing down the frantic pace of our activities and taking time. Jesus himself took the time to listen to the people he met. This is how we can become another’s neighbour. Moreover, listeners often confess that they themselves have been positively transformed by their listening experiences.

Listening is not self-evident. “Because of our human weakness and sinfulness, listening with an open heart and without prejudice is a challenge that requires great maturity, kindness and practice.” Many reports call for training to become good and true listeners. It’s also necessary to develop availability, places and activities to encourage listening to people in their own problems and reality.

The importance of listening goes hand in hand with another attitude that is crucial for the renewal of the Church, that of welcome, which the reports always characterize as “unconditional”. “To welcome is to open a space for dialogue and trust. It is important that the community avoid any form of judgment so that each person feels part of the family and welcomed.” Respondents dream that there might be fewer conditions

for welcoming the other, such as in the case of divorcees, people in same-sex relationships, transgender people, etc.

In the context of this first theme, there is little mention in the reports of dialogue initiatives with our sisters and brothers of other Christian denominations. The latter seem to communicate little with each other: “We don’t know each other.” Yet Christians of other denominations could be good companions on the journey and contribute positively to the synodal process.

For meaningful and nourishing celebrations: listening to the Word of God

2

The importance of the Word of God and of prayer emerges from all the reports. “It’s essential that we be gathered spiritually by Christ as brothers and sisters.” The celebration of faith requires that the liturgy be both meaningful and nourishing: a liturgy that introduces people to the sacred with homilies that connect to people’s lived reality. The very way of celebrating the faith contributes to evangelization.

If the liturgy is at the heart of the celebration of faith, several reports point out that the way of celebrating in the Church is too rigid, that on many occasions the homilies are inadequate and uninspiring, disconnected from “real life”. For some, the music and songs are outdated. Celebrations are passive, focused mostly of listening. Several syntheses note that the language of the liturgy is more concerned with faithfulness to the expressions of the past than with reaching out to the present culture. For example, the formula “Blessed are the guests of the wedding banquet of the Lamb,” in the new [French] translation of the Roman Missal, doesn’t speak much to people in 2022...

The faithful are seized by the conviction that Jesus Christ is the Word that unites us and compels us to learn the language of those to whom He sends us. It's important, therefore, that the way we speak in the Church, during celebrations and also in all the circumstances in which we are called to bear witness, truly echoes the concerns and values of our contemporaries. "To counter the risk of delivering sterile words, we could make more use of testimonies that connect with people's experiences."

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**Jesus Christ is the Word
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Groups formed to share the Word of God can help the faithful to understand it, to learn to speak about it and to interpret it in a language that is their own and that speaks for today. The prayerful reception of the Word of God is at the heart of the “solutions” for renewing the liturgy and the Christian life as a whole and making it more attractive.

The faithful ask that lay people be allowed to preach. Then, for example, a feminine perspective might allow for new receptions of the Word to come to light.

Rites are popular. All around us, we witness a proliferation of secular rituals marking births, unions and deaths. This new situation leads us to ask how can our Catholic liturgies be both beautiful and meaningful in the today's world? "It's important to adapt for today the rites and symbols used in the liturgy that are not very accessible for the uninitiated

and difficult to understand for many." Overall, the syntheses call for renewal and creativity to help our celebrations become more alive. Many yearn for the active participation of all.

Many deplore that there are few opportunities for the community to gather for prayer outside the Sunday Eucharist. Those that do exist are mainly moments of adoration or praying the rosary.

The need for formation in liturgy to better live one's faith is frequently mentioned. Training in actualizing the Word of God in the homily is particularly highlighted. Apart from the Eucharist, we note little mention of the other sacraments: marriage, reconciliation, confirmation and the anointing of the sick.

For true participation in the life of the communities: small groups and speaking out

3

The reports frequently mention the issue of participation in the life of communities. Most of them respond by highlighting the importance of small groups in the Church.

All the summaries make the same observations: the low level of participation in Sunday celebrations, the very high average age of the assembly (over 75 years old in some parishes), the absence of young people, always the same volunteers and congregations that are often apathetic. However, some tell of initiatives that have already been implemented and that are energizing communities here and there.

Among them, the role of small groups is constantly recalled. Various known as faith-sharing groups or synodal fraternities or Gospel households, these groups encourage prayer and growth in faith by sharing the experience of a personal and

transforming encounter with Jesus Christ. While they have usually been characteristic of various Church movements, something new has been noted: they are now appearing outside the movements. “We are noticing the emergence of small groups that freely choose to walk a part of their faith journey under the impulse of the Holy Spirit.”

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The size of these small groups encourages encourage people to learn to read the Gospel together. They also allow for activities that build social bonds and respond to human and spiritual needs. Large, anonymous groups are not conducive to dialogue. It’s important to form human-scaled communities.

Small groups also allow for the experience of synodality. “The household is the lifestyle that connects us to the first Christian communities in sharing and deepening the Word of God.” The reports recommend that the Church promote these small groups.

Speaking up in the Church is another theme that frequently returns. There’s a major difficulty in speaking freely and authentically. People are afraid of being judged and fear the reactions of others. Small groups encourage speaking out to counteract church/community “drop-out”.

Several reports are willing to wager that by equipping people, they will be better able to articulate their convictions and, consequently, to talk about them with other people in a coherent and substantial way. Reports suggest that biblical events be organized as well as gatherings based on cultural elements—book, film, work of art—and adaptations of catechesis.

All agree on the importance of reaching out to young people. Some report positive experiences in this regard. However, many communities are still searching for the right approach and the means to reach them. We haven’t yet succeeded in this encounter. Still, the transmission of the Gospel for the future depends on it. What if we took the time to listen to young people and ask them how they longed to experience the Church?

For co-responsible governance involving clergy-laity, male-female partnership: decision-making, ordained ministry and the role of women.

4

All the reports affirm the importance of ecclesial governance formulated in terms of co-responsibility of both clergy and laity, men and women.

Much dissatisfaction was expressed on the theme of governance. “The Church is still pyramidal. The ways some bishops operate shows that authority comes from above.” There should be more participation of the faithful in decisions, more communication. The faithful complain about clericalism (priests or bishops who decide alone and exercise subtle abuses of authority), still very present to the detriment of the consideration of the laity and, especially, of women. “There is

a feeling that we don't work together enough, it's every man for himself." On a more specific theme, people report racism against priests from abroad.

In the face of such observations, the synodal experience of recent months has allowed us to see that clericalism can be overcome by the increased participation of many lay people. In addition, the experience of co-responsibility, which has been in place in several dioceses in Quebec for a long time, shows that lay people, including women, can have their place in the leadership and governance of dioceses. This situation allows us to reaffirm a certain number of convictions.

First of all, it is no longer possible to exercise governance in the Church as it has been done for a very long time. People want to see the continuation and further development of Church governance in the form of co-responsibility of ordained ministers and laity, both men and women: "The attitude of many clergy suggests that they don't believe enough in the strength of their priestly ministry and in the baptismal vocation of the laity. The laity are called to an active and rewarding presence in this service." "The Church should be led by men and women. There is clearly a lack of formation to properly exercise the participation of all in the service of authority."

Given recent social innovations, some participants, inspired by corporate culture, speak of democratic governance and the management of cooperative relationships. This new model makes it possible to truly take into account a primordial element: the human factor.

Co-responsibility is sometimes difficult because there is still too much appropriation of power. "Authoritarianism is not limited to clerics. In fact, some lay members conduct their mission by exercising authority over other parishioners and thus weaken the relationship with God and the engagement of all."

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We must review our decision-making processes in the light of a synodal mode of operation that allows us to listen decisively to the Spirit who speaks through all members of the Church community. "Discernment must take place more in personal and community prayer. The Spirit who makes it possible to discern passes through events and persons to whom we must be particularly attentive." "Through prayer, we foster a climate of mutual trust and openness." In addition, each person's attitude is important since it's necessary from the start, "to be inhabited by the desire to put our ideas in common without being attached to them, for the good of the whole community". It's important to accompany and encourage people in leadership roles.

Diocesan gatherings, echoed in various reports, often propose that "access to ordained ministries (access to women, access to married men, etc.) be re-examined

and that the equality of men and women in the Church be promoted in the roles and responsibilities that are formally entrusted to them". "The question of ministries constantly returns as a thorn."

In this section on governance, we include the many calls to consider the place and role of women in the Church and be open to evolve on this issue. We should note at the outset that the Churches in Quebec have a great tradition of integrating women into all functions and levels of church life. As one participant said, "The presence of women in diocesan structures is now part of the genetic heritage of the Church in Quebec."

Despite this state of affairs, Christians desire a Church that is more attentive to women. "It's important that they have a greater visibility in leadership and formation. The access of women to all ecclesial functions is continually demanded." "The discrimination they face in the Catholic Church in general rings a sour note in our society where equality between men and women is a priority." "The place of women in the Church is a crucial issue for the Church's future in a society like ours." "The Church would show more empathy if women held real responsibilities in it." The ecclesial body is impoverished at this time.

The frequency with which demands are made concerning the place and role of women in leadership leads us to highlight one change that is constantly requested: that women have access to ordained church ministries. "Women should have the same access to ordained ministry as men, if that is their call." "Clearly, there's a serious urgency to make ordained ministries accessible to women, beginning with the permanent diaconate." "A wife could receive diaconal ordination the

same way her spouse does, if she has received the call." The recent opportunity opened to women in instituted ministries of lectorate and acolyte pales in comparison. At this time, these ministries do not create much enthusiasm.

For a true dialogue between Church and Society dialogue: means of communication

5

Here is another major theme that frequently recurs in the diocesan reports: the Church's lack of dialogue with the contemporary world. "The Church is very often self-referential and does not always show openness to the world." The difficulty in communicating between the two also comes from the negative image of society that the Church conveys and the negative image of the Church conveyed by society.

Much of this problem is due to abuses of power, sex scandals caused by church members and abuse in residential schools. "The credibility of the Canadian and local church has been severely questioned as a result of various real and publicized scandals. This context, for clergy, religious and laity alike, makes dialogue with our society difficult." If the Church loses its credibility, how can it be a sign of the Kingdom?

Fortunately, the Church's reactions to these events indicate that we have reached a turning point: we now see requests for forgiveness, proposals for reconciliation, various forms of compensation, etc. The establishment of a program for the prevention of abuse of minors and vulnerable persons is a step in the right direction, although there is still some way to go. "Calling on professionals (psychologists, sexual assault workers and other competent people) can be an asset for the Church."

The Church is invited to listen to and serve God's will for His people here, a people God entrusts to the Church. What are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the women, men, children and youth of Quebec today? This is how the Church will begin a dialogue with our world.

"Causes" denounced by the legitimate indignation of our contemporaries should be more embraced by the Church. "We think of environmental and social causes, of women's rights everywhere, of the plight of members of LGBTQ+ communities who are too often subjected to exclusion and harassment, if not more serious violence." "If the Church does not lead the way, how can it remain credible? Isn't it time for us to walk the talk?"

Several reports point to the problem of the Church's language. It's often not very accessible, often distant from people's daily lives. The Church should opt for a simple, clear and understandable language in communicating with all those who wish to approach it, without this language losing its zest and its challenging dynamism.

Syntheses point out that the Church is too discreet in its relationship with the world. It needs to make its social contributions of all kinds better known.

During the pandemic, various initiatives in the communications sector have emerged including broadcasts of celebrations, Gospel commentaries on Facebook, etc. The Church has much to gain from developing its own means of communication, on top of being more present in the media: "Being on Zoom, TikTok, Facebook, texting, etc." "Let's not be afraid to develop communication in a more professional way in order to make it more attractive and, also, to reach the distant and the new generations."

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It's also imperative to make connections with the values of Quebec's current culture, including feminism, equality and inclusion.

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It's important to continue to transform an inward-focused Church into an outward-bound Church to ask ourselves what people need. It's also imperative to make connections with the values of Quebec's current culture, including feminism, equality and inclusion.

For a Church at the service of the poor and excluded

6

Improving dialogue with society begins with attention to the poorest and most excluded. "It is imperative to walk with and be close to those who are wounded by life and suffering. "There is a crisis of credibility with regard to the Church, a deficit of trust, and many people no longer expect anything from it. It is by turning towards the excluded and the poor, as Pope Francis asks, that she will regain her credibility, not by taking over everything, but as a partner of already existing organisations."

The frequency of this type of comment in diocesan syntheses deserves to be highlighted among the most frequently recurring themes. The primacy of charity and service at the heart of the Church's life is a fundamental challenge for the rebirth of faith communities. Evangelisation cannot be carried out without espousing the preferential option for the excluded in a concern for justice and the dignity of the person.

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Since the beginning of the Church's presence in America, commitment to the poorest and most excluded has been one of her great strengths. The Church still does this to a considerable extent everywhere in Quebec. One thinks spontaneously of the Saint-Vincent-de-Paul conferences present in almost every parish. But we cannot forget all the charitable works developed and still carried out by many religious communities and all types of committed Christian groups. It would be good for the Church to make its contributions more publicly known.

are “shaped” by so many other witnesses to the Gospel along the way.

The faithful feel the need for training in Scripture, theology (especially in the face of current issues) and liturgy. Professional training is also needed in the humanities in order to develop skills in deep listening, communication, leadership and teamwork. Not to mention training in life skills and know-how.

“The feeling of incompetence in the face of the responsibilities entrusted to them is often due to a lack of training, or to shortcomings in the accompaniment of people in the development of their charisms.” Training should be offered to the laity to facilitate their participation so that they can continue to be of service and to journey together in living Church differently. Online training programs already exist that should be suggested, used and accompanied. Moreover, self-training among peers represents a richness to be considered in any ongoing training project.

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In answer to the many needs for training

Almost all the reports express in one way or another the need for serious and professional training to answer all the challenges facing the Church. However, here and there, we see resistance on the part of pastors and the faithful. “The training of the baptized and of leaders is necessary if we want to see real change in the Church.” To commit to the Church is first to commit to training in Christ. We learn from each other, we

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We learn together to listen and discern in an authentic desire to meet the other.

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In order to live all aspects of ecclesial life, training must be based on a synodal culture. Listening and welcoming will be credible among missionary disciples if we learn together to listen and discern in an authentic desire to meet the other. Training is not only for others. It concerns all of us.

CONCLUSION

The consultations and the various diocesan meetings have shown that it is possible to speak out in the Church. The Church in Quebec has spoken out, frankly, with its ardour and youthfulness. These moments of reflection on how we “journey together” and of discerning the signs of the Spirit were positive experiences for the participants. If the current situation presents serious challenges, the faithful are aware that they are living in a favourable moment. Beginnings of solutions were identified. Participants expressed real hope that the Church can renew itself and continue to proclaim the Gospel of the God’s Reign for our world today.

The people want to see some follow-up to the process through which we’ve just come. The implementation of various renewal projects at the diocesan level is already one such element. A further synodal process is planned in the near future for the whole province, focusing this time on mission.

In the course of this major process, a new conviction has emerged: the importance of functioning in synodality. The multiplication of synodal meetings has brought about greater trust, complementarity and a spirit of mutual aid between the faithful and among parishes. Pope Francis affirms that synodality is the missionary challenge of the third millennium. While it’s easy to talk about, it’s very difficult to put it into practice, because we are weak and sinful. We remember that the Spirit is our guides. Synodality is a spiritual matter of flair, of discernment, of a sense of faith and of the Church that helps bring forth the Kingdom. Small steps forward are possible. Things have changed. Going back is no longer an option.

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POPE FRANCIS



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