

**The 2022-2023 pastoral year -**

**In All Things, Welcome!**

*Welcome one another, therefore  
as Christ welcomed you  
for the glory of God (Rom 15:7)*

**Two synodal processes in four years**

**1. The diocesan synodal process**

On October 15, 2018, the Archdiocese of Gatineau embarked on a synodal process under the theme: "Christ, Us, Our Communities, Our Neighbourhoods." On May 25, 2021, I published a pastoral letter entitled: "Our Project - Christ's Mission; Our Path - Synodality." In it I outlined the main conclusions of our deliberations - hampered as they were by the pandemic - and proposed priorities for our diocesan pastoral plan.

Let us recall these priorities:

- i. keeping Christ's mission at the heart of our thoughts and activities;
- ii. focusing on synodality as our way we living together
- iii. being especially concerned about older people who are lonely...
- iv. and young families, particularly immigrant ones;
- v. fostering partnerships...
- vi. and the proper use of modern means of communication to further our projects.

**2. The consultative phase of the Synod of Bishops**

As I was putting the finishing touches to this pastoral letter, Pope Francis surprised the Catholic world. He called on the universal Church to engage in a broad consultative phase in preparation for the 2023 Synod of Bishops, which would have as its theme: "For a synodal Church: communion, participation and mission." For us, this was providential: such a consultation would help us reflect on the second priority we had just identified and deepen our understanding of how to live synodality.

And so, on the 17<sup>th</sup> of October 2021, in the context of a Eucharistic celebration at St Joseph's Cathedral, we launched a second synodal process along the lines proposed by the Holy Father. On May 28<sup>th</sup>, we concluded this process with a diocesan assembly that brought together more than 150 people at St-Alexandre College. We received the synthesis of the reports of the dialogue groups of the various parishes, movements and communities; we identified some of the salient points and ratified its content. This synthesis, like those of the 3,000 dioceses of the world, is slowly making its way to Rome where it will contribute to the animation of the Bishops' assembly in October 2023.

What emerged from the *consultative phase* in our diocese? Our diocesan synthesis team discerned six points of convergence:

- i. commitment to the service of the world;
- ii. the value of small groups for discussion and dialogue;
- iii. the importance of welcome in our Christian communities;
- iv. the primordial role of Sunday celebrations, that we need to prepare with greater care;
- v. the Word of God (the Bible) as the foundation and strength of personal and community life;
- vi. training and accompaniment to promote collaborative leadership.

It's worth noting that at the assembly on May 28, the third point of convergence concerning welcome resounded clearly and repeatedly.

### **Why these processes?**

To reap the fruits of these two processes and to ensure their follow-up in our archdiocese, we need to be clear about why we undertook them. Was it simply a public relations exercise that would have no real impact on our community lives? Were we endeavouring to find THE method that would bring people back to the Church and ensure the sustainability of our parishes? Were we looking to modernise the Church by adapting it to so-called progressive social values? It seems to me that we would be on the wrong track if we adopted such perspectives.

In my opinion, the essential question that should motivate these processes and provide the needed foundation for their implementation is this: "*What does God want for his Church and what does he expect of us as the Son's disciples?*"

The aim of these processes is to open ourselves to God's will; to seek it together; and, having discerned it, to commit ourselves to its realisation. We want to help each other to live the Gospel so as to shine in the world as a sign of hope. It's about being faithful to who we are, to who we are called to be.

## Welcome as a lens for reflection and action

I truly believe that the Holy Spirit spoke loudly on May 28<sup>th</sup> when, from all the discussion groups, the same desire emerged: to cultivate welcome as a fundamental attitude in our communities.

The verse from Saint Paul quoted at the beginning of this letter reminds us that it is Christ himself who first welcomed us. He came to walk on our roads, to share our lives, to learn our language and to reveal the unconditional love of the Father for all his children. He spoke to the Samaritan woman, touched the leper, dined with prostitutes and tax collectors and visited the Gentiles. Think about it, even Judas was not rejected. He left on his own.

We should seek to imitate Jesus in the quality of our welcome for others. Jesus calls us to out to them (Mk 6:7-14); to invite the poor and strangers to our celebrations (Lk 14:13); to welcome the little ones and the humble (Mt 18:6); to open ourselves to the pain of the abandoned (Mt 25:35-36). For a Christian, loving one's neighbours starts by welcoming them!

We can re-read the conclusions of our *diocesan synodal process* in the light of this conviction. This helps us focus the paths for action that emerged from the process.

- i. To become a more missionary Church, we have to learn again how to welcome others as they are, to integrate them into our communities and to accompany them.
- ii. Synodality requires welcoming the other's point of view, their experiences and convictions.
- iii. Our concern for isolated seniors is expressed first of all in a generous, caring and compassionate welcome.
- iv. Our concern for young families, especially immigrant families, must be manifested in a genuine welcome that is open to their concerns and hopes, accepting of their cultures and enabling them to exercise their talents among us.
- v. Fostering partnerships with other parishes, movements and community organizations begins with a frank and generous welcome of their realities and gifts.
- vi. To make good use of modern means of communication, we must welcome new ways of doing things and learn from the younger generations.

In similar way, we can re-read the convergences that emerged from the *consultative phase of the Synod of Bishops* and notice the welcoming dimension that is embodied in them.

- i. We cannot be at the service of others without truly encountering them, welcoming them as we listen and give of ourselves.

- ii. The quality of dialogue in a small group depends on the authenticity of our welcome of those who make up the group and on our ability to forget ourselves and to centre ourselves on them.
- iii. Newcomers to our communities long for an experience of belonging: this depends mainly on the welcome that parish “regulars” will give them. Even among these “regulars”, we should examine the quality of the mutual welcome which alone can make community life dynamic.
- iv. A welcoming and inclusive liturgy can be forgiven many faults. As the proverb says: "Better is a bean dish cooked with love than veal stew simmered in resentment." (Pr 15:17) Let us practice welcome in our celebrations, not only at the front door, but throughout our celebrations: they will become warmer, more meaningful and fruitful.
- v. How can we faithfully respond to God's will without first welcoming God's own Word? God reveals himself and offers himself to us as a source of strength, light and joy.
- vi. Finally, collaborative leadership requires the continual practice of welcoming: welcoming the opinions and ideas of others, welcoming their gifts and talents, welcoming their anxieties and hopes, welcoming consensus.

Yes, the Spirit of Jesus invites us to embrace the path of welcome ever more radically and intentionally. For us, this is the way forward.

### **Our dream**

The diocesan team does not want to impose an agenda on parishes and movements, but it does want to inspire a vision and to give people the desire to commit themselves to it. Our dream is that all parish committees and teams will look at the avenues we have just mentioned and study them together; that they will not be satisfied with simple adjustments but will accept a real questioning of acquired habits; that they will identify concrete actions to be taken individually and together; that we, as a diocesan team, will be there to help and accompany you in this process. Will you share our dream?

On behalf of the diocesan team,

+ Paul-André Durocher

Gatineau, September 10<sup>th</sup>, 2022