



Archdiocese of Gatineau

“A Synodal Church Is A Listening Church”

Pastoral Priorities for 2023-2025

September 2nd, 2023

Presentation

This letter on the pastoral priorities for 2023-2025 in the Archdiocese of Gatineau has two parts. First you will find a reading guide that can also serve as a memory aid. It summarizes the contents of the longer and deeper second part.

This second part takes the form of a working document. It includes more detailed reflections on the themes listed in the reading guide. It proposes questions for personal reflection, group discussion and decision-making.

As a fruit of community discernment, this letter is offered for your own discernment. May it inspire spirits, enlighten minds, spark creativity and energize hearts. May your reading be fruitful!

+ Paul-André Durocher

“A Synodal Church Is A Listening Church”

Pastoral Priorities for 2023-2025

READING GUIDE

At my invitation, a dozen people involved in pastoral work met in July to identify priorities for 2023-2024. The recent synodal consultations in the diocese and around the world inspired our discernment. Establishing these priorities will enable us to collaborate more closely and to unite our strengths by focusing on a selection of themes considered important by those involved in pastoral care in our diocese.

1. Fundamental orientation: synodality

For the next two years, we are maintaining the fundamental orientation that was chosen for 2022-2023: synodality. We will thus be in communion with the work of the Synod of Bishops to be held in Rome in October 2023 and 2024, as we continue to build on the momentum begun last year.

2. Priority value: “Welcome”; privileged practice: “active listening”

Similarly, we propose to maintain welcoming as a priority value. However, we will be taking a closer look at the practice of active listening, which is essential to any genuine welcome. We have identified four areas in which this practice could be developed, and concrete ways of doing so.

Area of practice	Concrete approach
Listening to the Word	Sharing the Gospel in small groups
Listening to the Spirit	Spiritual Conversation
Listening to each other	Clergy-Laity partnership
Listening to the world	The social dimension of the Gospel

3. Practices to be fostered: spiritual conversation and laity-clergy partnership

The diocesan team intends to help pastoral workers understand and practise spiritual conversation and enrich the clergy-laity partnership by organising training sessions and offering various resources.

4. Concrete field of application: the homily

In response to a wish expressed in our diocese as in all regions of the world during the synodal consultation, we propose to apply these tools to the preparation and reception of homilies so that they bear even more fruit in our communities and our individual lives.

5. Launch of the pastoral year in the zones

The launch of the pastoral year will take the form of meetings in each of the diocesan zones in October. These meetings will take the form of regional synodal assemblies using the method of spiritual conversation.

6. Conclusion

To give us time to study these priorities properly and implement them in a meaningful way, they are set for a two-year period extending from September 2023 to June 2025.

I invite you to read the pastoral letter in its entirety and to share it with your communities. It is presented as a working document containing questions for reflection and food for thought and prayer. I encourage you to study these questions in small groups - a synodal way of proceeding. Finally, the whole team hopes that the parishes and movements of the diocese will choose one or another of the suggested avenues to explore over the coming months. The diocesan team is there to support you.

“A synodal Church is a listening Church¹”
Pastoral Priorities from September 2023 to June 2025

WORKING DOCUMENT

September 2, 2023

To all the faithful of the archdiocese of Gatineau,

Last July 23 and 24, I listened to a dozen people involved in pastoral work in our archdiocese: members of the diocesan team and the diocesan pastoral council, parish priests and lay people involved in their communities. We looked back at the 2022–2023 pastoral year in the light of my pastoral letter published a year ago. We discussed the Quebec, Canadian and North American summaries that were drawn up following the worldwide consultation on synodality. We studied the recommendations put forward by the participants at the Quebec meeting on synodality held in Trois-Rivières on 6 and 7 March. We prayed, we shared, we endeavoured to discern the voice of the Spirit.

Today, I confirm the conclusions we drew from our retreat and present them to you for your consideration. I hope that you will receive these proposals with a spirit of openness and welcome, and that they will inspire your personal and community engagements in the months ahead. I pray that they will bear fruit for our parishes, our movements and the diocese as a whole.

Here, then, are the conclusions reached by our group.

1. Let’s keep synodality as our fundamental orientation

In 2015, as he led celebrations to mark the 50th anniversary of the Synod of Bishops, Pope Francis had this to say:

What the Lord asks of us is, in a certain way, already fully contained in the word “Synod.” Walking together—Laity, Pastors, the Bishop of Rome—is an easy concept to express in words, but not so easy to put into practice.

¹ Cf. FRANÇOIS, *Discours pour la commémoration du 50e anniversaire de l’institution du Synode des évêques*, 17 octobre 2015.

A synodal Church is a listening Church, aware that listening is “more than hearing.” It is a reciprocal listening in which all have something to learn.

The faithful people, the episcopal college, the Bishop of Rome, each listening to the others; and all listening to the Holy Spirit, the “Spirit of Truth” (John 2:17 p.m.) to know what the Spirit is saying to the Churches (Revelation 2:7).

The members of our diocese who participated in our synodal process from 2018 to 2021 and in the synodal consultation of 2022 embraced the Pope’s vision in affirming that we must develop synodality in our local Church. The Roman synodal assemblies to be held in October 2023 and 2024 will focus on this theme, the importance of which was confirmed by last year’s worldwide consultation. In communion with Pope Francis and the universal Church, we want to continue to explore this theme in greater depth, to better understand it and, above all, to put it into practice more effectively. Let’s take to heart the theme proposed for the assembly soon to be held in Rome: “For a synodal Church: communion, participation, mission.” Let’s try to make synodality the *modus vivendi*—the lifestyle—of our Church here in Gatineau.

Questions for reflection and discussion: What does the expression “synodality” evoke for me? How would a more “synodal” Church be different? How can I foster the practice of synodality in my family, in my community, in my parish, in my movement?

2. Let’s continue developing “welcome” as a primary value, by focusing on “active listening” as a privileged practice.

At the diocesan synod assembly on 28 May 2023, one word was on everyone’s lips, “welcome.” A broad consensus emerged: to develop synodality in our diocesan Church, we need to focus on welcome. Over the last pastoral year, we have tried to deepen this value in our personal and community lives. Our reflection group believes that it would be important to stay the course on this fundamental value while focusing on an essential element of any welcome: listening.

The experience of listening and being listened to in this way serves not only a practical function but also has a theological and ecclesial depth because it follows the example of how Jesus listened to the people he met. This style of listening is necessary to mark and transform all the relationships that the Christian community

establishes among its members as well as with other faith communities and with society as a whole, especially towards those whose voice is most often ignored.²

Recently, I heard this important question: “Do we listen to understand or to respond?” I think we all know which kind of listening is needed in a synodal Church.

Here are four particular areas where we could put listening into action.

i. Listening to the Word and sharing the Gospel in small groups

As Christians men and women, disciples of Jesus, we must always find in the Word of God the source of our wisdom, of our decisions and of our actions.

- When we meet as Church committee or gather for other reasons, why not begin by reading a passage from the Bible, meditating on it for a few moments and sharing our reflections as we listen to the Word together?
- Why not form a small group with a few other believers to listen to the Word on a regular basis? The members of the diocesan team will be happy to help you get started.
- To prepare a homily properly, ordained ministers would do well to take a moment to listen to the biblical texts planned for the liturgy with a small group of parishioners. This would be a win-win situation!

ii. Listening to the Spirit and the method of spiritual conversation

The consultative process that was engaged on every continent in preparation for the synodal assemblies to be held in Rome has introduced us to a very interesting exercise: spiritual conversation. Thanks to this method, groups of believers have been able to discern the voice of the Spirit by listening to each other. All the continental reports confirm that this method, developed and refined in the school of Ignatian spirituality, is a real gift for the whole Church.

Bearing in mind the significance of conversation in the Spirit to animate the lived experience of the synodal Church, formation in this method, and in particular of facilitators capable of accompanying communities in practising it, is perceived as a priority at all levels of ecclesial life and for all the Baptised, starting with ordained Ministers in a spirit of co-responsibility and openness to different ecclesial vocations. Formation for conversation in the Spirit is formation to be a synodal Church.³

² *XVI General Ordinary Assembly of the Synod of Bishops. Instrumentum laboris for the first session.* (October 2023), #22

³ *Ibid.*, #42

iii. Listening to others and the partnership between clergy and laity

Last year, we identified partnership as a means to be favoured in our community action, especially partnership with community groups, partnership between parishes and partnership between parishes and the diocesan team.

While continuing this effort, we believe that we need to work in a special way on the partnership between pastors and the faithful, between clerics and lay people. We are all co-responsible for the Church's mission, while respecting each other's charisms and roles. The partnership between ordained and non-ordained ministers depends on people listening to each other and allowing each other to express themselves in confidence. We will not always agree, but the solution will not lie in imposing a rule or in one person dominating the other. Together, we need to discern the way of the Spirit, calling on a third person if necessary to help us discover that way.

iv. Listening to the world and the social dimension of the Gospel

A year ago, we published a summary of the diocesan synodal consultation. It highlighted six convergent statements, the first of which was the importance of commitment and service. It quoted several reports from small discussion groups:

“Be attentive to the realities of your environment... Help people in distress, the poor, the isolated... Know how to guide and encourage the young ... and the not-so-young... Dare to renew yourself... Be a place of hope, by discerning what in our world is a source of hope.” “Be present to your neighbour.” “Everyone committed to the Christian mission, as well as to family, parish or community involvement.”

The history of our diocese is marked by a particular attention to the social dimension of the Gospel. Today, new social issues are facing us: climate change, medical aid in dying, sexual and gender identity and the integration of immigrants. What concerns are we hearing from our fellow citizens as they grapple with these issues? How can we discern the signs of the times? What Gospel-based perspective should we take when considering them? The answers to these questions are far from self-evident, but we need to give ourselves the means to reflect on them and the avenues to get involved.

Questions for reflection and discussion: Which of the four areas listed seems to be a priority for me personally? Which do I think is a priority for my Christian community? What action could I pursue in these areas to develop my ability to listen? What personal attitudes do I need to develop in order to be a better listener?

3. Let's learn two new practices

Last year, we proposed that Christian communities encourage two practices: partnerships between communities and the use of the Internet for hybrid pastoral care. Several communities have taken concrete steps in this direction. The Novatio Foundation has also subsidized parish and regional projects along these lines. We should continue mastering and using these tools in our pastoral work.

The diocesan team proposes two other practices to be developed:

i. Spiritual conversation

In the appendix to this letter, you will find a summary of the spiritual conversation method and an infographic illustrating it. We invite all members of the diocese to read this appendix and study it. The diocesan team will be proposing training courses to help you make the most of it. We will seek to use it in our meetings and assemblies, because practice makes perfect! We invite parishes and movements to do the same.

ii. Training in clergy-secular partnership and co-responsibility

Several priests have attended leadership sessions over the last few months where this partnership has been discussed. The diocesan team proposes to continue along this path by opening up the training to others and deepening it in our concrete practice. Parishes and movements could take advantage of this opportunity to evaluate the concrete exercise of the clergy-secular partnership in their own environments and identify ways of making it ever more fruitful.

Questions for reflection and discussion: Do I want to deepen my ability to engage in spiritual conversation or to live out the clergy-secular partnership? What motivates or demotivates me? How can I support the efforts of the diocesan team in these formation projects?

4. Let's add another concrete field of application: the homily

Last year, we proposed two concrete areas to apply the value of welcoming: elderly people suffering from loneliness and young families, especially recent immigrants. We realize that people belonging to the latter category are not very present in our rural parishes: their challenge lies in welcoming newcomers who choose to settle in the region. Accompanying the elderly and welcoming newcomers, whether they come from elsewhere

in the country or elsewhere in the world, remain two areas of application that will continue to preoccupy us and motivate our commitments.

We are suggesting a third area be added this year: the homily. Summaries from the various continents unanimously emphasized the importance of homilies both for the liturgy and for the daily lives of Christians. People everywhere want homilies to be equal to their task. This desire was also strongly expressed during our own diocesan consultation. That's why, at our July retreat, we decided to add this concrete field of application where many of the reflections already mentioned overlap.

Here are a few questions to ponder.

- What would be the characteristics of a more synodal homily?
- Could listening to the Word, the Spirit, others and the world enrich homilies?
- Could training in spiritual conversation and clergy-secular partnership have a positive impact on the quality of homilies?

On the other hand, homilies require a particular quality of listening on the part of the faithful to whom they are addressed. What attitudes should I adopt as I prepare to listen to a homily?

Together, as homilists and members of the congregation, we need to look for ways to make homilies sources of inspiration, hope and wisdom for everyday life.

5. Let's launch the pastoral year by holding regional synodal assemblies

Participants greatly appreciated last year's launch of the 2022–2023 pastoral year on the theme of welcome. There were two editions, one in French and one in English.

On the strength of this experience, we have decided to launch the 2023–2024 pastoral year with a series of five gatherings in our various zones. The diocesan pastoral team will tour the diocese to lead these meetings, which will take the form of regional synodal assemblies. We'll be looking in particular at the theme I've just mentioned: the homily. And we'll be doing so using the method of spiritual conversation, so that the process can be replicated in our parishes and movements, wherever we want to involve more people in this reflection.

The dates and places will be announced soon. We can already inform you that the first of these meetings will be held on 11 October in the Petite-Nation region, on the feast of our diocesan patron saint, Mary, Mother of the Church.

6. A personal decision

Finally, as I studied the insights of the group that met in our think tank last July, I realized that the content of the proposals selected was so rich that it would be worth giving ourselves a full two years to explore them and start implementing them. That's why, after consulting my closest collaborators, I have decided to set these priorities for a two-year period extending from September 2023 to June 2025.

Given the richness of the banquet on offer, one might well wonder which course to start with. Here is what I suggest as a starter.

- i. **Let's share information:** Everyone should be informed and aware of this pastoral plan. Let's talk about it with others so that as many parishioners as possible are aware of its broad outlines.
- ii. **Let's think about this seriously:** Individuals should take the time to reflect on the framed questions in the text. These times of reflection are best spent in prayer, as you discern what the Spirit is saying to your heart.
- iii. **Let's talk about this together:** Perhaps some of you (all priests, I hope) will gather a few other believers to read the letter together and discuss the framed questions. This simple act would already be a concrete way of living the synodal Church.
- iv. **Let's choose a few concrete actions:** Finally, I hope that all the parishes and movements will choose at least one path to explore during this pastoral year. It would be wonderful to share your choice with the diocesan team to tell of the actions you will take. In any case, the members of the team will be happy to help you in any way they can.

Having thus started our festive banquet, we'll be able to attack the main courses that set before us. Let's take time to taste, to share with others and to celebrate together all along the way that opens ahead of us. *Bon appétit!* And have a great journey!

+ Paul-André Durocher

Archbishop of Gatineau

The Conversation in the Spirit

A dynamic of discernment in the synodal Church

