

6 February 2006

Dear Monsignor/Father/Deacon/Sister/Brother and my dear people
Peace and blessings in the Lord.

After discussion among the clergy of the Archdiocese and with the consent of the Priests' Council, on Thursday 3 November 2005 I formally convoked a Diocesan Synod which will meet on a date and at a venue still to be determined. I further decreed that a Preparatory Commission be established to assist with the preparations and during the holding of the Synod itself. In my letter to the Archdiocese on 24 November 2005 I listed the names of those who will serve on the Preparatory Commission. Others may be co-opted as the need arises.

The Code of Canon Law (n.460) describes the diocesan synod as "an assembly of selected priests and other members of Christ's faithful of a particular church which, for the good of the whole diocesan community, assists the diocesan bishop". The Congregations for Bishops and for the Evangelization of Peoples in an Instruction on Diocesan Synods (1997) situates the diocesan synod within the Church as a communion and sees it as an important instrument in effecting conciliar renewal. The holding of a synod therefore offers the bishop the opportunity of exercising that spirit of communion in co-operation with priests, deacons, consecrated persons, and laity in "building up the Body of Christ".

The Instruction goes on to say: "The synod not only manifests and actualizes ecclesial communion in a diocese, it also builds up and fosters that same unity, especially in its declarations and decrees". The Instruction then continues to further explain the purpose of a diocesan synod by saying that "the synod contributes in shaping the pastoral activities of the particular church ... and will also evaluate the adequacy of pastoral programmes already in place, and with the help of divine grace, propose new pastoral plans where such are deemed desirable".

One could then describe the purpose of holding a synod as that of providing a vision and pastoral plan aimed at the renewal of the Church of Cape Town in the light of the Gospel and the teachings of the Church.

The late Pope John Paul II in his Apostolic Letter of 6 January 2001 states: "Now is the time for each local church to assess its fervour and find fresh enthusiasm for its spiritual and pastoral responsibilities by reflecting on what the Spirit is saying ... for this reason we must set about drawing up an effective post-Jubilee pastoral plan". The Synod Preparatory Commission met on 12 December and 24 January last. I will preside at their next meeting on 28 February. The Commission will now begin its work of initiating extensive consultation throughout the Archdiocese. Hopefully this will take the form of a prayerful exercise of listening, consultation and discussion. Clergy, consecrated persons, laity and all groups/organisations involved in the life and work of the Archdiocese will be consulted. Going on the experience of other dioceses where synods were held, the preparatory stage should take between 12-18 months. The synod itself should last about three days. Each member of the synod receives beforehand a working document (*instrumentum laboris*) containing the results of the consultation, proposed resolutions etc. Once the bishop accepts the synodal declarations and decrees they become canonically binding.

With my blessing
Yours sincerely in Christ

+ Lawrence Henry
Archbishop of Cape Town