

19th April 2006

Dear Sister/Brother of the Archdiocese

On 3rd November 2005 Archbishop Henry convoked a synod. A Preparatory Commission was formed with his approval. There are fifteen members: nine lay people, two religious sisters, one permanent deacon and three priests. So far we've had five meetings; the last was held on 18 April. As you can well imagine, the first few meetings were about getting to know one another, and trying to clarify in our own minds what a synod is all about! After all, it will be the first one to be held in the Church of Cape Town. In that sense, when it comes to synods, we're still learners! However, we've been in contact with dioceses in South Africa where synods have already been held, e.g., Pretoria, Durban and Port Elizabeth. We in Cape Town hope to benefit from their experience and mistakes!

The Catholic Church, especially since the Second Vatican Council (1962-65), encourages each diocese to hold a synod. A synod is a gathering (usually for about three days) of representatives of the laity, religious and clergy. The purpose of such gatherings is to assist the local bishop in assessing the present situation in the diocese, to identify its most urgent needs, and to make concrete proposals as we plan together for the work of evangelisation in the years ahead.

But the holding of a three day synod must be carefully prepared. I like a word that's in common use in the USA – 'awesome'. Since we've started the work of preparation, we (on the Commission) realise more and more what an awesome task it's going to be. Individual Catholics, groups/organisations, parish pastoral councils, deacons, religious and of course the priests, will be asked either individually or as a group, by means of questionnaires, to voice their concerns, and make concrete suggestions/proposals as we walk together into the future. It will be our task, together, to plan for the Church of tomorrow, the Church in which our children and young people can take their rightful place. A synod has been described as a diocese "listening to the Spirit". Prayer, intense and continuous, will be an essential part of our preparations. From the experience of other dioceses, the period of preparation should last from between 12 to 18 months, at least.

The Commission has composed a prayer to be said as we prepare for our synod. We've also designed posters and will publish an explanatory pamphlet. These, together with the first questionnaire, will be distributed throughout the Archdiocese as soon as possible.

The decision to hold a synod provides us Catholics here in Cape Town with the opportunity to dream a little, to have a vision of Church which we would hope to pass on to our children. That dream, or vision, has already been outlined for us in the Gospels and in the teachings of the Church, particularly in Vatican 2. Allow me to mention some of the more important elements of that vision:

- A Church built on one's personal relationship with Christ
- Church whose nature it is to be a communion (of sisters and brothers)
- Church imbued with a spirit of humble service
- Church committed to evangelisation

- Church rooted in collaborative ministry
- Church which values the family
- Church which recognises the unique role of young people
- Church which fosters justice and peace
- Church which promotes unity among the followers of Jesus and an outreach to other faiths/religions

As members of the Preparatory Commission we're committed to listening deep – prayerful listening to the voices and concerns of Catholics in the Archdiocese. We pray that the process of preparing for the synod will teach us, as a Church, to listen to what the Spirit is saying, and help us to discern which road to take as we walk together into the future.

Sincerely in the Risen Lord

Fr Sean Cahill OFM Cap
Chairperson of Synod Preparatory Commission