

Dear sisters and brothers of the archdiocese,

In one of his books Fr Tony de Mello tells the story of the frog's prayer.

Br Bruno, a pious and holy monk, was deep in prayer one evening when he was disturbed by the croaking of a bullfrog. He shouted angrily from his window: "Quiet! I'm at my prayers". Now every creature knew that Br Bruno was a holy person, so his command was instantly obeyed. The monk returned to his prayers, but a voice from within said to him: "Maybe God is as pleased with the croaking of that frog as he is with your prayers". Bruno, immediately sorry for his outburst, leaned out of his window and gave the order, "Sing!". The bullfrog's measured croaking filled the air to the accompaniment of all the frogs in the vicinity. And as Bruno listened to the sound, their voices ceased to jar for he discovered that, if he stopped resisting them, they actually enriched the silence of the night.

Now I'm not for one moment suggesting that all of us in the archdiocese have voices like frogs! But the moral of the story is clear. God has created us: we are precious to him; he loves each one of us in our own unique giftedness. He listens with equal love to our prayers: he respects the cries of our hearts. In the same way, as God's creatures, we are called to listen respectfully to one another's prayers, opinions and ideas. For when they rise together like some great symphony before God's throne, they enrich and beautify his Church and give him glory.

A Synod was once described as "the local Church listening together to the Holy Spirit". In the first weeks of October, eight deanery "listening/consultation" sessions took place throughout the archdiocese. The booklet, Emerging Themes, containing the major topics identified in replies to the June questionnaire, was distributed to parishes. We thank those who attended the deanery sessions for their welcome, hospitality and co-operation. We have asked PPCs and other parish groups to revisit these themes and forward us their comments, suggestions or proposals by the 8th December this year. Some have expressed the concern that because October and November are busy months in more ways than one, that an extension beyond 8th December should be considered. Having "listened" carefully to this request at a recent (24 October) meeting of the Synod Preparatory Commission, we would still urge parishes, organisations and individuals to make every effort to have their replies in by the 8th December. The task of collating and analysing the feedback will be a huge one. We would like to begin that work as soon as possible after the date specified. If, because of circumstances replies come later, they will of course be welcomed and receive our full attention.

The next step in the process of preparing for next year's Synod assembly will be the compilation of what's called a "working document"(WD). The WD will bring together, in thematic form, the replies/proposals received from the consultation taking place at present. Early next year we would hope to bring the first WD draft back to deaneries/parishes for further comment as an essential part of a process leading up to the Synod assembly itself.

On Sunday 22 October we celebrated Mission Sunday. I'm sure we were told in homilies that each one of us is a missionary for Jesus. The other side of the coin is that every parish, as a community, is called to witness to God who is love. A parish community is necessarily part of the local Church(in our case, the archdiocese) and through the bishop, united with Pope Benedict IX and the universal Church. The teaching of Vatican 2 therefore reminds us that parish communities have a responsibility towards the universal Church in general, and towards the local Church of Cape Town in particular. We can only exist and work as parishes in communion with our sisters and brothers of this local Church. A parish cannot exist and operate in isolation. Hence the reason why all the parishes of the Archdiocese have been invited, indeed are expected, to be part of the process of "listening together to the Holy Spirit", of planning together for the future of our local Church and for the effectiveness of its work of evangelisation in the years ahead.

Sincerely in the Lord

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Chairperson, Synod Preparatory Commission