



Archdiocese of Winnipeg

Office of the Archbishop

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Brothers and Sisters of the Archdiocese of Winnipeg,

I bring you greetings in Our Lord Jesus Christ and I wish to inform you about the commencement of the 16th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops being held this October, 2023 in Rome. You will recall that in the same month in 2021, Pope Francis mandated a multiyear, worldwide undertaking in which Catholics were asked to submit feedback from their local dioceses on the question: *"What steps does the Spirit invite us to take in order to grow in our journeying together?"* This historically unique process, spanning two years involved the People of God at the diocesan, national and continental levels throughout the world. There will be now two global meetings in Rome, known as General Assemblies of the Synod of Bishops. The first will be held this month, October 4 - 29, 2023, and the second in October 2024. These General Assemblies will involve an unprecedented number of lay people, along with the bishops and the purpose will be to advise the Holy Father on the topic: **"For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, Mission."** In other words, the delegates are to discern and advise Pope Francis on how the Church can truly be a Synodal Church, a term meaning: Walking Together.

As your Archbishop, I had the privilege of participating in the opening of the Synod process in Rome in 2021 and subsequent to that, along with our Synod Coordinator for the Archdiocese, organized a program of consultation with parishioners through Listening Circles and on-line feedback. Our diocesan contribution was joined with the contributions from the western Canadian dioceses and led to a national response which was sent to Rome. Following this, I was asked to participate, along with a group of bishops and lay experts from Canada and the United States for the Continental Stage. The Church is now about to discuss and discern this important feedback at the General Assembly this month in Rome.

With the Holy Father's blessing and encouragement, Cardinal Mario Grech, who serves as the Secretary General of the Global Synod on Synodality, is now asking for a worldwide effort of prayer for the delegates gathered in Rome, starting on Sunday, October 1st, 2023. He states in his letter to bishops: *"The Synod is above all, an event of prayer and listening that involves not only the members of the Synodal Assembly, but every baptised person and every particular Church. Indeed, all of us are called at this time to unite in communion of prayer and insistent invocation of the Holy Spirit to guide us in discerning what the Lord is asking of his Church today."* Pope Francis has also reminded us that, **"Without Prayer there is no Synod"**. By asking the baptized to actively pray for the Synod, starting with parishioners, members of religious orders and Catholic organizations, Pope Francis wishes us to realize that the whole Church will be present, in the power of the Holy Spirit, at the Assembly this October.

When one considers the challenges facing the Faith today one cannot help but see the necessity of strengthening and deepening our ecclesial community and Walking Together in the Faith more than ever. To assist each pastor and parish administrator in organizing a prayer response in support of the Synod, I have distributed a variety of Prayer intentions for both Sundays and Weekdays to be used as seems appropriate. Cardinal Grech has emphasized Sunday, October 1st, as the day to begin this effort at prayer and has supplied a special blessing to be used at the end of Mass.

I have also taken the liberty of including a couple of Prayer Intentions for our own Archdiocesan Synod which closed in 2018. After the two years of the pandemic and restarting our parish life, we have resumed the work of implementing the 42 proposals from our Synod. I am still inspired by the unexpected fruit of our Archdiocesan Synod which articulated the importance of Synodality within our local Church. This enabled me to share with the delegates at the Continental meetings what we have learned in Winnipeg. I am also grateful for the development of our new structure for our implementation process and for all of the volunteers who are sitting on the 8 Implementation Commissions in the Archdiocese. The coordination of this process is now being done through our Pastoral Services of the Archdiocese of Winnipeg. Please remember in your prayers, during the months ahead, our Archdiocesan Synod as well.

As I conclude this letter, I wish to encourage you once again, to grow in the *Prayer of Listening* through Scripture, namely the various kinds of Lectio Divina, especially when groups of the faithful come together. We started this in the Archdiocese following the close of our Synod and I wish to re-emphasize this once again. Resources for Lectio Divina can be found on our Archdiocesan Website under "Synod Updates". Pope Francis reminds us that: "*The Synod offers us the opportunity to become a listening Church, to break out of our routine and pause from our pastoral concerns in order to stop and listen.*" Such prayer need not be long, but it will reorient us in a spiritual way and invite the Holy Spirit to assist us.

I commend to all of you, then, this spiritual work, of praying for the Universal Synod in Rome and for the success of the implementation of our Archdiocesan Synod. I remain,

Yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Richard Gagnon", with a small cross symbol to the left of the first name.

✙Richard Gagnon
Archbishop of Winnipeg