



CATHOLIC DIOCESE
of
BATON ROUGE
Office of the Bishop

12 December 2021

The Third Sunday of Advent

Dear Brothers and Sisters:

Recently, Pope Francis called for the entire Church to engage in a synodal process officially entitled *Toward a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, Mission*. While many dioceses began this consultation process in October, our Diocese was still recovering from Hurricane Ida. Now, though, is an opportune time for us to heed the Holy Father's call.

To understand "synodality," it is important to understand the concept of a "synod." Simply stated, a synod is a meeting or assembly of church leaders. Such gatherings are rooted in Scripture (Acts of the Apostles 15) and can take place locally, on a regional level, nationally, or internationally. Such opportunities for gathering and dialogue have often been used to raise important issues and seek consensus in the Church's history. "Synodality" refers to the way in which decisions are made that involves listening to a broad range of the faithful and discussing issues that impact the Church and the world, constantly open to the Holy Spirit's call for direction and action. Conversations are meant to be had with *parrhesia*, a Greek word that appears in the New Testament that can be translated as "frankness" or "boldness." After such discussions, documents are drafted, and these documents assist Church leaders in decision making.

Pope Francis believes that the Church should best practice synodality, first beginning on a local level. To assist in our diocesan process, I have appointed one of my Vicars, Fr. Jamin David, and two members of the faithful, to lead this process in Baton Rouge. Over the next months, synodal sessions will be held in every deanery in the Diocese of Baton Rouge as orchestrated by our Deans. After these dialogues, reports from every diocese in the United States will be submitted to the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) for to assist with a "continental phase" of dialogue in late 2022/early 2023. A final phase of dialogue will conclude on a universal level at the Holy See in October 2023. The reasonable expectation of these sessions will likely be an apostolic exhortation from the Holy Father with ideas and decisions to grow ecclesial life.

I ask all of the faithful of our local Church to consider participating in a dialogue session if not in your own deanery then at another location in the Diocese. A schedule of these sessions will be forthcoming. Should parish dialogue sessions be tenable, we will schedule these as well. If you are unable to participate in person, an online form will be created for you to submit ideas directly to our diocesan offices which will aid in creation of a diocesan report.

While this process might be unusual for many, Pope Francis' aim is for the church to "walk together," and while there may be disagreement, I know the process will encourage listening with humility to the needs of our Church and the world.

Hope in the Lord,

Most Reverend Michael G. Duca
Bishop of Baton Rouge