

ARCHDIOCESE OF CALCUTTA

PASTORAL LETTER

To the Clergy, Consecrated Men & Women and Lay Faithful
At the start of the Diocesan Phase of XVth Ordinary Synod of Bishops with the theme
“FOR A SYNODAL CHURCH: Communion, Participation and Mission”

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

1. **Introduction:**

‘Synod’ is a Greek word meaning ‘walking/journeying together’. This was the way the early Church lived its life of witness: coming together, listening to one another, cultivating and nurturing relationships, sharing, journeying together. After the Second Vatican Council, the way of ‘synodality’ was revived by Pope St. Paul VI, and the first Ordinary Synod of Bishops was held in 1974 with the theme “Evangelisation in the Modern world”. Since then, 15 ‘ordinary’ and 3 ‘extraordinary’ Synods have taken place. Pope Francis has taken the theme: “**For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation and Mission**” for the 16th Ordinary Synod of Bishops which will take place in Rome in October 2023.

2. **The logo of the Synod** sums up the inter-related dimensions of a meaningful process: A large tree, full of wisdom and light, reaches for the sky. A sign of deep vitality and hope expresses the Cross of Christ. It carries the Eucharist, which shines like sun. The horizontal branches, opened like hands or wings, suggest, at the same time, the Holy Spirit. The people of God are not static: they are on the move, in direct reference to the etymology of the word ‘synod’, which means “walking together”. The people are united by the same common dynamic that this Tree of Life breathes into them, from which they begin to walk. These 15 silhouettes sum up our entire humanity in its diversity of life situations of generations and origins. This aspect is reinforced by the multiplicity of bright colours which are themselves signs of joy. These people are all on the same footing: young, old, men, women, teenagers, children, lay people, religious, parents, couples, singles, healthy, disabled; the bishop and the nun are not in front of them but among them.

3. **Pope Francis** desires that the whole Church continually lives ‘synodally’ and wants that every baptized person be involved actively in the synod assembly. Hence a long period of preparation for the Synod of Bishops has been announced, starting from the grassroots: Inauguration by Pope Francis on 9-10 October 2021 in the Vatican; October 17, 2021: Inauguration in each Diocese of the world; October 2021- April 2022: Consultation at the Diocesan level; April 2022- September 2022: National Conference level; September 2022-April 2023: Continental level; October 2023: Bishops’ Synod in Rome.

4. As part of our **preparation** for the Synod, the following Team has been formed:

Contact Persons : Fr. Michael Biswas & Fr. Franklin Menezes.

Team members: Fr. Dominic Gomes (VG); Fr. Robert Johnson; Fr. Gilbert Choondal SDB; Mr. Dilip Rozario (laity); Mrs. Sandhya Vincent (women); Mr. Ajoy Chowhury (SCC); Mrs. Roseline D’Cruze (Catechetics); Mr. Farrell Shah (Social Communications); Sr. Sophia FSP & Sr. Sumona Biswas DSA (Consecrated women); Miss Mary Margaret Anthony (youth); Mr. Leo Kundu (youth); Miss Isabella Patrao (student); Mr. Franklin Lakra (JTM/TOB); Mrs. Jose Francis (SVP); Miss Anancia Fernandes (Youth Animator).

5. **Preparatory meetings:**

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- a. **Before October 17, 2021:** Awareness building, animation, training sessions: for Diocesan Commissions members; October 6, 2021; for Priests & Religious in all the four deaneries: October 11-16, 2021.
- b. **After October 17, 2021: Consultation at the Zonal and Parish levels**

6. **Solemn Opening of the Synod in the Dioceses worldwide on 17th October 2021:** In the Archdiocese of Calcutta, the solemn opening of the synod will take place with the Solemn Holy Eucharist at **10:00 a.m.** presided over by the Archbishop and concelebrated by priest representatives. Due to pandemic restrictions in force, **participation will be by invitation only.** For the benefit of others, **the entire Solemn Inaugural Holy Mass will be live-streamed from the Cathedral.** I invite all of you to unite yourselves to this celebration with deep faith and joy.

7. The Synod Secretariat in Rome has proposed **10 (ten) themes** with accompanying questions to be used as a starting point for consultation: listening, dialogue, participation. The themes are: i) Companions on the journey ii) Listening iii) Speaking out iv) celebration v) Sharing responsibility for our common mission vi) Dialogue in Church and Society vii) Ecumenism viii) Authority and participation ix) Discerning and deciding x) Forming ourselves in synodality.

In the months of **November & December 2021 and January 2022**, these themes and associated questions adapted and made relevant to the local situation, will be discussed at the **zonal levels** (cluster of 3-4 parishes) in deaneries and in Parishes with the Parish Pastoral Councils, Associations, Cells, in schools and religious communities, Seminaries and Houses of formation etc. so that **ALL** are involved in the **Process of this Synodality**. The Archdiocesan Synod Team under the overall leadership of the contact persons, assisted by the Deans, Parish Priests, Religious, and Participatory structures in the Parishes, heads of Parish Associations.. will be available to make this entire synodal process easy, practical and fruitful.

8. **The Pre-synodal meeting at the diocesan level will be held on 14th & 15th of January 2022 (Friday & Saturday)** just as we had the Diocesan Synod in September 2017. The discussion, suggestions at the Pre-synodal meeting will be collated and a 10-page report will be sent to the CCBI Secretariat by **20th January 2022**.

However, the Synodal Process continues. At every level, the experience of all the People of God, priests and religious, together with the Archbishop during the Diocesan phase of the Synod, **must continue:** to listen, dialogue, discern and decide under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

9. **Communion, participation and mission:** These are to be actualised realities. **Communion** is about common sharing, fellowship with all, excluding no one! It is the grace to transcend our narrowness, selfishness, exclusiveness – to reach out to others specially the lost, least and last. It is the openness to realise that all are my sisters and brothers!

Participation is about realising that you are an indispensable piece of a jigsaw puzzle. The picture is never complete without 'me' and you'! True participation takes place only when others are given the opportunity to enter.

Mission: is going forth and also to send: It is a journey we are all to undertake. To go out of ourselves: our security, divisiveness, discriminatory attitudes, arrogance, aggressiveness, hate and violence. We are called to go forth: to build bridges rather than walls, to heal and not to wound, to love and not to hate! Mission is about journeying together for a common home in which justice, liberty, equality, fraternity, love, joy and peace are the rights of all. The journey will have difficulties but one must continue walking it – till our pilgrimage here in earth is ended!

10. **Conclusion:** The fundamental question that guides this Consultation of the People of God, is: “A synodal Church, in announcing the Gospel, ‘journeying together’: “**How is this ‘journeying together’ happening today in our Archdiocese? What steps does the Holy Spirit invite us to take in order to grow in our ‘journeying together’?**” May the dream of our Holy Father for a Synodal Church become a reality in all our families, Parishes and in the Archdiocese as we begin the process of ‘journeying together’. May Mary, Mother of the Church accompany us on this journey.

11. Let us remember that we must listen to the Holy Spirit in prayer and silence. I request that **from 18th October 2021 till the end of January 2022**, the following Prayer for the Synod be recited in every family, religious community. Let us support the Synod also by Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, Praying of the Holy Rosary etc.

We stand before You, Holy Spirit /As we gather together in your name./ With You alone to guide us, /Make Yourself at home in our hearts;/ Teach us the way we must go/ And how we are to pursue it./ WE are weak and sinful; /Do not let us promote disorder;/ Do not let ignorance lead us down the wrong path / Nor partiality influence our actions./ Let us find in You our unity/ So that we may journey together to eternal life/ And not stray from the way of truth/And what is right./ All this we ask of You,/ Who are at work in every place and time,/ In the communion of the Father and the Son/ Forever and ever. AMEN.

N.B. This Pastoral Letter (or its summary) will be read out in all Parish Churches during all the Masses on 17th October 2021.

Archbishop's House
32, Mother Teresa Sarani
Kolkata – 700 016
09 October 2021

+ Thomas D'Souza
Archbishop of Calcutta