

Bishop Gainer Issues Letter on the Synod as Diocese Opens Local Process

Praying that the Holy Spirit will guide us through the process, Bishop Ronald Gainer celebrated Mass on Sunday, October 17 for the Diocesan Opening of the Synod of the People of God.

Celebrated at St. Patrick Cathedral in Harrisburg, the Mass opened the synodal process for the Diocese, a reflection on the very nature of what it means to be the Church.

Initiated by Pope Francis, the Synod on Synodality is a two-year, worldwide process during which Catholics will be given the opportunity to submit feedback to their local diocese. A synod is a meeting of bishops gathered to discuss theological or pastoral topics in order to provide feedback to the pope. Pope Francis has invited the universal Church to reflect on communion, participation and mission throughout the two-year process.

The Diocesan phase will take place through April 2022, using a preparatory document and questionnaire to guide discussion from the Holy See.

A continental phase will follow from May 2022 to March 2023, with the worldwide Synod of Bishops set for October 2023.

Bishop Gainer's Letter

In conjunction with the start of the synodal process, Bishop Gainer released this letter on October 21:

“Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

On October 10, Pope Francis inaugurated in the Universal Church a two-year synodal process leading us toward the Synod of the People of God scheduled to take place in October 2023. The following Sunday, this synodal process was inaugurated at our cathedral church as I invoked the aid of God the Holy Spirit to guide us toward a deeper fidelity to the Gospel of Jesus Christ as we walk together in the communion of the Church.

“Synod” comes from two Greek words that mean “together on the way.” We have to admit that the words “synod”, “synodal”, and “synodality” are not familiar to us in the ordinary experience of the Church today. Yet, they find their foundations in the ancient Church itself. Synods have been held locally and universally throughout the history of the Church. It was Pope Paul VI who established a permanent structure, an office, in Rome for the Synod of Bishops. And, through that office, the popes in the last sixty years have used that structure to consult the bishops throughout the world about various concerns facing the Church.

Pope Francis is hoping that this process of “journeying together” might be expanded to include all the baptized members of the Church. At its core, this synodal process is an exercise in

listening, not only to each other in the Church, but most especially to the voice of the Lord speaking to us through the Sacred Scriptures, the grace of the Sacraments, and the movement of the Holy Spirit in our hearts.

For those who follow Catholic news, you might look at the word “synod” with some skepticism because of what is happening in the Catholic Church in Germany. The reports about the synodal path chosen by the German bishops has been controversial and, by what is reported, even dangerous. Pope Francis, in his address to the local Diocese of Rome, explained clearly that a synodal path is not about “gathering opinions” but “listening to the Holy Spirit.” He goes on to say that this is not a survey that is employed to change the Church’s doctrines or disciplines according to popular opinions, but to call the Church to ongoing conversion and deeper communion with each other and with God.

It is with this in mind that we embark on the synodal process for the Diocese of Harrisburg, gathering together in prayerful listening to the voice of the Lord. Throughout the coming months, each parish will be engaged through their pastoral councils and other Catholic organizations to “journey together” as we seek to follow the Gospel faithfully. We will ask questions about our personal experience of the Church and how the Church lives its mission to proclaim Christ in our parishes and our diocese. Our goal is not to achieve consensus in thought or to arrive at specific action points for change, but to be transformed by the process itself and adopt a new style of “synodality ... that qualifies the life and mission of the Church, expressing her nature as the People of God journeying together and gathering in assembly, summoned by the Lord Jesus in the power of the Holy Spirit to proclaim the Gospel. Synodality ought to be expressed in the Church’s ordinary way of living and working (International Theological Commission, Synodality in the life and mission of the Church).”

Guided by the Holy Spirit, may the Lord lead us closer to communion with the Blessed Trinity and with each other in the Church as we ‘journey together’ toward our eternal home.”

Prayers for a Listening Church

During the Mass on October 17, the bishop introduced the Diocese’s three co-leaders in the synodal process and gave them a special blessing. The ambassadors are Karen Hurley, parishioner of the Cathedral Parish and Pastoral Council member; Deacon Gregory Amarante, newly-appointed Diocesan Secretary for Catholic Life and Evangelization; and Father Joshua Brommer, pastor of the Cathedral Parish of St. Patrick and Director of the Diocesan Office of Divine Worship.

In his homily, Bishop Gainer asked the faithful to pray for the success of the synod, “that we might truly be a listening Church” and “speak from our hearts as we respond to the Holy Father’s request.”

“Let us pray that during our synodal process we will be attuned to the voice of the Lord,” he said, “that our minds and hearts will be opened to listen to Jesus speak to us in His word, in the

firm teachings of our Church, and in the voices of one another as He guides us on this road of the synodal process in our Diocese.”

As the local phase of the synod gets underway, the Diocese of Harrisburg is making available various resources and documents to assist the faithful in listening, dialoguing, discerning and praying. The resources can be accessed online at www.hbgdiocese.org/synod-2021-2023/.



Diocesan ambassadors in the synodal process - Father Joshua Broszmar, Karen Hurley and Deacon Gregory Amaranite - receive a special blessing.



Bishop Ronald Gainer describes the synod and its process of dialogue and discernment during his homily.



Faithful gather at St. Patrick Cathedral in Harrisburg for the opening Mass of the synodal process in the Diocese on Oct. 17.