



DIOCESE OF SAINT JOHN

115 Villa Madonna Road
Rothesay, NB E2H 2X4
Canada
Tel (506) 653-6800

Office of the Bishop

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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

In 2022, our diocese participated in the local phase of the Synod on Synodality, which culminated in a diocesan report that was sent to the Atlantic Episcopal Assembly in May 2022 for the Atlantic Region Report. During that process, what emerged was the common desire to participate as members of the Church in discerning the will of the Holy Spirit. We committed as a diocese to discerning a path forward that builds on this foundation of Synodality, encouraging and supporting parishes to continue engaging the faithful in ongoing conversations rooted in prayer that will open hearts to the will of God for parishes, the diocese, and the Universal Church.

Since that time, we have worked diligently to share the Gospel of Jesus, paying particular attention to the themes that were identified during that process. We have been building up youth ministry by sending a large group of young people to Steubenville Atlantic last summer, hosting follow-up youth rallies in both Saint John and the Miramichi, and supporting parish youth groups. A diocesan World Youth Day event was held on the Solemnity of Christ the King, and from this, a young adults initiative was born to help form youth leaders in the diocese under the direction of our new Director of Missionary Discipleship Formation, Jim Anderson. Jim will also be working with lay leaders including our Religious Education Coordinators and Catechists at the parish level, forming and equipping them for mission as spirit-filled evangelizers.

We are currently participating in a pilot project of the Catholic Leadership Institute (CLI) which helps to support priests in their role as pastors by offering leadership formation and support. And we continue the important work of casting vision throughout the diocese, drawing people into a deeper encounter with Jesus in the Church by sharing and living out our diocesan mission: *Led by the Holy Spirit through the Gospel and the Eucharist, we are called to raise up disciples who are joyfully living out the mission, proclaiming the Good News of Jesus Christ, and making disciples of others.*

The work of Synodality continues! In this next phase, dioceses are being invited to reflect on the Synthesis Report published in October 2023 (available on our diocesan website, <https://dioceseofsaintjohn.org/synod-2021-2023>) and to prepare contributions for the final session of the Synod in October 2024. For the next step in the overall synod process, the Holy See has requested that these reflection sessions involve a more focused number of participants to reflect on specific themes from the Synthesis Report that are of particular relevance to the local church. These more focused discussions build upon the broad consultation of the earlier Synod on Synodality listening events held in 2022.

To that end, each parish will each be inviting 2-3 key leaders to attend two Synod Reflection Sessions to prayerfully engage the following themes in the context of our diocesan mission: *Church is Mission* (theme #8) and *A Synodal Approach to Formation* (theme #14). These sessions will take place during the first two weeks of March. Participants will be people of prayer with a heart for the Church (priests, parish leaders, leaders of synodal teams, and youth in particular) who express a variety of experiences, skills, charisms, ministries within the People of God. This process, which relies on the Conversation in the Spirit method emphasized in theme #2 of the Synthesis Report, will be useful in training parish leaders to listen and discern in their own important decisions at the local level. It will also provide a useful tool for our diocese as we continue the work of listening to the Spirit in the visioning process in the coming year.

As we engage in this next phase it is important to take seriously the words of Pope Francis that “the Synod is about synodality, and not about this or that theme...the important thing is how the reflection is done, that is, in a synodal way.” With hearts wide open to the Holy Spirit, we entrust our diocese to Our Lady in the sure hope that through this important work, the Lord will help us truly grow as a listening Church. Please join me in praying for all who will participate.

United in prayer and mission,



✠ Christian Riesbeck, CC
Bishop of Saint John

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