



Charity in Truth

WITH ARCHBISHOP WILLIAM E. LORI

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Encountering Christ together

Next month, the Church throughout the world will initiate a synodal process (see page 12). Words such as “synod” or “synodal process” or “synodality” might sound unfamiliar, so let me begin with a brief explanation of what they mean and why they are important.

The word “synod” (and its variants) refer to certain types of church meetings, yet they mean so much more. The root meaning of these words, as reflected in Scripture, has to do with “journeying together,” walking together in the way of the Lord, or better yet, joining together as disciples in walking along the way which Jesus, as Messiah and Lord, has traced for us. “Synod” refers to important meetings, such as a diocesan synod or the worldwide synod of bishops.

The word “synodality” refers to a way of going about the Church’s mission, not as partisans or isolated individuals, but rather as the People of God, joined together in Christ and listening to the Holy Spirit.

Expressions of synodality already exist in the Church’s life. Since the Second Vatican Council (1962-65), structures have been put in place designed to invite discussion, dialogue and discernment. For example, parishes are to have pastoral councils and finance councils. Moreover, pastors are to work collaboratively, not only with fellow clergy and staff, but also with parishioners, and be ready to invite them to use their gifts and talents for the good of the whole parish.

Other examples of synodality come

to mind such as the archdiocesan Presbyteral Council and clergy convocations. Some years ago, I reestablished the Archdiocesan Pastoral Council and it has been hard at work ever since. The Board of Financial Administration (BOFA) discusses the financial and administrative challenges the local church faces. There are also regional meetings of clergy, catechists, youth ministers and others. From time to time, there have been regional meetings for both clergy and laity to discuss issues such as pastoral planning and sexual abuse. Currently, a diocesan-wide discussion and dialogue around the issue of racism is underway.

Now, Pope Francis is engaging the whole Church in a process designed to highlight the synodal character of the Church itself. This process will have three phases: diocesan, national and international, capped off by a synodal meeting in Rome.

The theme of the synodal process is threefold: “participation, communion, and mission.” It is designed to be neither a planning meeting nor a platform for agendas but rather a time of prayerful listening and discernment, reaching out to those who currently participate in the Church’s life as well as those who do not.

The diocesan phase will include meetings in our pastorates and regional meetings. It will also involve religious communities, healthcare ministry and higher education, to name a few. This process will culminate in a diocesan level gathering sometime early in the spring of 2022. Bishop Bruce A. Le-



CHRISTOPHER GUNTY | CR STAFF

A newly established Archdiocesan Pastoral Council meets for the first time Sept. 14, 2019, at the Shrine of St. Anthony in Ellicott City.

wandowski, together with the Archdiocesan Pastoral Council and members of the archdiocesan Senior Leadership Team, will oversee the process. It will open with a Mass at the Cathedral of Mary Our Queen Oct. 17, at 11 a.m.

As you can imagine, preparing for this process on somewhat short notice is a bit daunting, but I can assure you that a lot of preparatory work is going on behind the scenes. I am very grateful to my good co-workers in the Lord.

Yet, the key to this whole process is not the plans we make but rather our openness to the presence of the Lord in our midst. If we enter into discussions without having encountered the Lord in prayer – in Word and Sacrament – and in reflection, even the best-planned process will not bear the good fruit of the Gospel.

Thus, prayer must frame and saturate every gathering associated with this process. For when we pray together, we encounter the Lord, and encountering the Lord, we find the grace to walk together in mission. ●