



OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

DIOCESE OF WHEELING-CHARLESTON

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WHEELING, WEST VIRGINIA 26003

Monday, December 20, 2021

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

I have the privilege and pleasure of serving as the Bishop of the Wheeling-Charleston Diocese. It is likewise my joy to cooperate with Pope Francis in promoting the welfare of the Church and the mission of all its members to bring Christ to others and others to Christ.

The Pope has asked us all to participate in what he calls a “synodal process” in our parishes, institutions and in other group settings.

What is a “synodal process?” It is basically an assembly that discusses matters of importance for our living of the Christian faith. The term “synod” was used in the ancient Church when bishops met about issues particular to their times. Since the last Ecumenical Council of the Catholic Church, -- Vatican II (1962-1965) – there have been meetings every two or three years of a Synod of Bishops, representatives of the world’s bishops’ conferences, to discuss various topics.

What Pope Francis is asking of us is that, prior to the next Synod of Bishops in Rome (fall, 2023), we engage in our local dioceses in a synodal process so that, when the bishops gather in Rome to discuss the synodal dimension of Church life, they may have a clearer view of how our people are experiencing the Catholic faith. It is a “bottoms up” approach rather than a “top down” one.

The three key elements of the synodal meetings in our parishes and other groups are: *communion, participation and mission*. *Communion* means that we seek together the light of the Holy Spirit, who, according to Jesus’ promise, leads us into all truth [John 16:13]. We respect what the Spirit has led the Church to understand in the past regarding faith and morals but we now ask the Spirit to help us see what we need to know about contemporary matters. So, *communion* is characterized first of all by prayer, individually and as a group, and then by respectful listening as members of the group speak. Speakers must be allowed to speak uninterrupted and without fear but they must also remember that they are not there to air personal grievances or score points but to contribute their insights to a gathering of believers jointly seeking the truth for the good of the Church.

Participation means casting a wide net to offer as many people as possible the opportunity to contribute the wisdom gained from their experience of faith. Not only parish groups, but college students, youth groups, the clients of Catholic Charities, residents of nursing homes and assisted living facilities, Catholics who are disaffected from the Church and members of the West Virginia Council of Churches, among other groups, will be invited to take part.

As for *mission*, this is the goal of the synodal process. *Mission* is what the Lord Jesus wants us to do: *Go make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you* [Matthew 28:19-20]. We must be committed to inviting back those Catholics who no longer

walk with us in faith and to inviting the many West Virginians who have no religious affiliation whatsoever to follow Christ with us. The synodal process must motivate us to reach out to our neighbor with faith and love or it will be *sound and fury signifying nothing* [William Shakespeare, *Macbeth*].

As the Pope and the bishops gathered with him in Rome in 2023 will reflect on the contributions from Catholics and friends from around the world, so I hope to find in your discussions ideas and recommendations to foster the mission of our Diocese. We cannot stand pat while a field of grain needs harvesting. We must act boldly to share our faith with others while enhancing our family life in the Church.

I am grateful to you for your interest in this synodal process. It speaks of your love for the Lord and for your Church. Let us keep the intention of a fruitful synodal process in our daily prayers. May the Lord Jesus, with the intercession of Mary, Mother of the Church, and St. Joseph, patron of our Diocese, guide us through his Holy Spirit to the fullness of truth and life.

Sincerely in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mark E. Brennan". The signature is written in a cursive style with a cross at the beginning of the first letter.

+Mark E. Brennan
Bishop of Wheeling-Charleston