

May 9, 2024

Dear Bishop William and the CCCB

Thank you for giving me, along with my brother priests Fabio Desouza and Daniel Ouellet the opportunity to participate in the Parish Priests for the Synod meeting in Rome. While there, it was great to get know these brother Canadian priests, as well as Fathers Raymond Lafontaine from Montreal, who served as a table facilitator, and Gilles Routhier from Quebec, who was present as a theological Expert. The five of us were proud to be “Team Canada”. And it was truly a blessing to gather, pray, listen and discern with priests from around the world. This was certainly a spiritual encounter for me, and my sense is that all other participants would say the same.

A little more than a week prior to this event, we received a series of questions, divided into three modules, and the agenda. The modules addressed:

- 1) **Experiences and understanding of synodality in the life of the parish and diocese/eparchy.**
- 2) **The participation of different chrisms, vocations, and ministries in the life of the parish and diocese/eparchy.**
- 3) **Discernment dynamics for mission and participation bodies in the life of the parish and diocese/eparchy.**

Given my experience of Synodal gatherings, and prior use of the Conversations in the Spirit method, I arrived relatively prepared. I had done the reflection and had even written out some texts which should have been about three minutes long. I was looking forward to sharing, primarily, about my parish experience. I had well-planned to speak about the benefits of supporting the baptismal charisms and gifts of the laity by involving them in and empowering them to lead a variety of ministries. All of this, as well as my Synodal learnings at the level of the diocese, I did speak about, but given the program of listening to presentation before responding to questions, my prepared texts could not be read.

At the meeting, at *Fraterna Domus*, we were arranged into groups of 12, including a facilitator. I was placed in a French language group which counted Africans, Europeans, and Asians. I was the lone priest, in my group, from the Americas.

Our sessions always involved theological input from a variety of sources (Gilles Routhier, Thomas Halik, Pablo Virgilio David, Lia Zervino, and Benedict Ndubueze Ejeh). From there we went into group work. Following the Conversations in the Spirit method, groups were given time and space to dialogue. I cannot speak for other groups, but can say that in mine the facilitator often allowed individuals to speak beyond their turn. In any event, we would always come to a consensus and submit a lengthy and well-discerned report.

Throughout the week, groups were invited to share their reports to which the Experts again spoke. They pushed us to go deeper in our reflections. And, there was always time for an “open mike” plenary.

When all was said and done there were two things that emerged from these conversations.

- 1) That Conversations in the Spirit must continue to be promoted at every level of the church.
- 2) That those who participated in this event must go forth sharing this methodology with others, particularly with other Parish Priests.

It was suggested on the floor, discussed among the five Canadians, offered support by the General Secretariat, and mandated by the Holy Father, that we go forth approaching our bishops about a way to organize input from priests from across our Episcopal Conference, giving them the Synodal experience we have received.

Yes, the Holy Father commission us as Missionaries of Synodality. He asked us to speak to our bishops, and to blame him for the request.

I would be happy to join my brother participants (Daniel, Fabio, Raymond, Gilles) in speaking to the Conference, and to assist in the organisation of a national synod for priests that draws on the wealth of synod experts (ie. Gilles Routhier, Catherine Clifford) who understand the Canadian context.

Thank you again for sending me to this event. I sincerely hope to share more about it in the future.

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