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ROMAN CATHOLIC
DIOCESE *of Calgary*

DIOCESAN SYNTHESIS

As the culmination of the Diocesan Phase of the Synod on Synodality, this document gathers and expresses the fruits of our communal discernment through the major themes that emerged from the listening sessions and collected contributions, indicating at the same, how the Holy Spirit's call to the Church has been understood in our local context.

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PART I
Synodal Journey and Experience

The Invitation

1. *"Come, follow me"* (Matthew 4:19). Jesus used these simple words to call Peter, Andrew, James, and John to leave their livelihood immediately and to follow Him in his travels and learn from Him. They were not exactly sure what the journey with Jesus would entail. Their "yes" to Jesus' invitation, however, opens up the path along which they come to know their Teacher and Messiah and thus, commit to His life and mission. In their journey, they became Jesus' disciples.

   This is what we experienced at the beginning of the synodal journey. Many of us had never even heard of the word *"synod"* or *"synodality"* when our Bishop called us to join him and the People of God across the Diocese to engage in a process of encounter, listening, and discernment that is both ancient in its origin but also new in practice for many of us. We did not know how it would unfold or what to expect. Some of us even doubted that making such a journey would bear any fruits personally and communally.

2. However, with complete trust and obedience to the promptings of the Holy Spirit, we began the synodal journey together with our Bishop and almost 3000 disciples, young and old, from communities throughout the Diocese. True to his promise, the Holy Spirit amazed us with his gifts, filled us with courage and strength, and breathed new life and hope into the weariness that we have been experiencing in these past few years. We all came to share with one another that which was most intimate in our hearts – the longing to grow closer to Christ and his Church.

   A parish synod leader shared the experience at her parish, which also echoes the responses received from other synod leaders:

   "The synod experience was one that allowed our parishioners to move from a period of isolation to gathering once more and in doing so discovering each other's stories of faith. This was just the beginning of a renewal for our parish and Church in listening to the hurts of the past and to forge forward with hope to grow stronger together."

The Process

3. When Pope Francis invoked the 2021-2023 Synod on Synodality, he identified three essentials for the synodal process in every local faith community: *Encounter - Listening - Discernment.* In the listening encounters, we are invited to open our hearts to the faith experiences of others and become active participants in discerning the will of God for each one of us, and for the faith community.

In God's providence, our Diocese had already begun this process through the formation of the Pastoral Discernment Advisory Committee with the mandate to listen to the experiences of the *People* of God, to learn from God's revealed actions, and to assist the Bishop in choosing courageously the paths of renewal for our faith community as we were emerging from the COVID pandemic. Members of the committee come from throughout the Diocese, including lay men and women, clergy and religious. Representing the People of God, these members have met monthly and will continue to serve in the coming year as the pastoral instrument that gives impetus to our commitment of becoming ever more concretely the *listening* Church which goes forth as missionary disciples.

4. Pastors, religious, parish, lay association, and ministry leaders were the next group in our Diocese to set out on the synodal listening journey, one that was deeply rooted in the Word of God. *"My sheep listen to my voice, I know them, and they follow me"* (John 10:27). Jesus' revealed identity to his disciples is also a command to imitate him as the Way, the Truth and the Life. As we prayerfully listened in *lectio divina* with the ears of our hearts for what had transpired on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-34), we found in the experience of the two disciples our own journey. We recognize that it is Jesus himself who has always walked alongside and listened to the questions and concerns in our hearts. Jesus shows us that God is not distant but He walks at our side and meets us wherever we are, often on the difficult roads of life.

5. To prepare for the next phase of our listening encounters, we followed the example of Mary and the disciples as they prayed in the upper room awaiting the coming of the Holy Spirit. All faithful of the Diocese were invited to unite in the *Novena of Prayer for the Synod* as we invoked the presence of the Holy Spirit and the Lord's guidance. Many brought the Synod and the Holy Father's intentions before the Lord during their time of prayer and spiritual devotions. The Synod prayer *Adsumus Sancte Spiritus* introduced at the beginning of this synodal journey has been adopted as the prayer that opens meetings or gatherings. Indeed, we have become more attentive in inviting the Holy Spirit to be present and at work in us so as to truly be a community and a people of grace.

6. Synodal gatherings and individual online participation took place throughout the Diocese in parishes, associations, and school communities. While the level of participation may have been statistically small in the context of the total Catholic population within the Diocese, the overall level of engagement from *participants* was very strong. Those who participated were grateful and expressed their desire to continue the journey beyond the Diocesan phase of the Synod. In addition, an important fruit of this process was the formation of a dedicated group of parish/community synod leaders and team members. Over 300 participated in various modules of orientation and training on how to facilitate the synodal listening process. The task of renewal in local faith communities will definitely benefit from their continued engagement and formation.

7. Participation in the synodal journey was strongest among those most easily reached within parish communities. Some groups were notably under-represented, for example, men in

general, young adults, and the elderly or home-bound. Many synodal encounters were offered in virtual format, which may have posed certain challenges to our senior population. There is no discernable reason as to why men or young adults were not more deeply engaged in the experience. Further exploring reasons for not reaching these and others on the periphery, and those who are no longer connected to the faith community, would be important next steps.

8. At the heart of the synodal experiences was the small group spiritual conversations and individual reflection on the Synod's fundamental questions: *"How have you experienced journeying together as the Church? What steps does the Holy Spirit invite us to take in order to grow in our journeying together?"* All of us were invited to share with the Bishop what was important and crucial as a result of our reflection. Aiming to promote a new *style* of living the communion, participation, and mission of the Church, the Synod questions and small group process invited us to reflect on the experiences of faith lived in and through the concrete pastoral life of the Church.

9. *"The synodal* process *is first and foremost a spiritual process. It is not a mechanical data-*gathering *exercise or a series of meetings and debates. Synodal listening is oriented towards discernment"* (Vademecum, Synod Handbook).

   This synodal objective was clearly reflected in the responses submitted to the Bishop. All synodal listening and sharing took place in the spirit of freedom, humility, patience, and understanding, and in many instances, readiness to respond to spiritual and pastoral renewal. Collectively, the responses pointed to our current pastoral realities and the dreams and hopes that the People of God desired for their faith community going forward. As the culmination of our spiritual discernment, the following section aims to gather and express the fruits of communal discernment through the major themes that emerged from the listening sessions and the collected contributions, indicating at the same time, how the Holy Spirit's call to the Church has been understood in our local context.

PART II
What the Holy Spirit Inspired Our Community to See

Longings

10. One of the first realities to emerge from the hundreds of responses shared with the Bishop were expressions of a deep longing. This longing took a number of different forms: truly to belong to our parish community; to be called by name in our parish where we worship; to be known in the words of the homily addressed to us on Sunday; and a longing to be drawn into

ministry appropriate to our state of life. This desire for involvement in ministry reflected the longing to make the church our own; to have the trust and respect of our priests in regards to parish life. For many, it was a longing to be intimately assured that God knows and loves us in our unique and even messy life. We heard longing for a past experience of Church life that for many seemed to have disappeared. On the other hand, there was a longing for a new experience of the Church still waiting to be born.

Quite clearly, participants in the Synod are longing for a hopeful future for the church and share a deep desire for our children and grandchildren to be present and engaged; for our young people to love the church as we do. There is a longing to lift our heads high and be proud of the Church we call home. Some of us wondered whether and how this Synod process would have any impact on parish and diocesan life, conveying a longing for pastoral renewal. An overwhelming majority expressed a longing to know God more deeply, to know the Church's teaching better, and to strengthen relationships with our shepherds and fellow parishioners.

11. This longing was not without its experience of the many identified challenges. Some readily described the challenge experienced by our brothers and sisters who prefer the traditional Latin mass versus the Novus Ordo. Others identified the inconsistencies between their children's experience of learning in Catholic Schools and support for faith development of our youth desired in local parishes. Some experienced the tension around parish governance, specifically regarding the lack of shared-responsibility between laity and the clergy, including the Church's practice of the inadmissibility of women to be ordained. Many experienced the lack of coherence between their personal beliefs and Church teachings particularly in the areas of sexual morality, ethics and conscience. To be people of faith in the context of a secular society is a challenge that requires formation, truthful dialogue, honest conversations, and the courage to listen. Many of the faithful feel unprepared to explain and defend their faith. They require and desire the understanding, language and tools to do so.

12. Many expressed the collective sorrow and shame over the abuse of vulnerable children and adults, particularly, the separation of families that took place in residential schools. In different ways, there was a developing awareness of the Church's loss of innocence. Prior generations viewed the Church as an organization without blemish. We now find ourselves confronted with her sinfulness and very human frailty. Many spoke of LGBTQ+ individuals, the divorced, remarried, single parents, and single unmarried who have not found a place in the parish community. Some observed that a Church once so outspoken on Church's teachings and topics has now become strangely silent. It was noted that many parishes also seemed to be silent in both words and practice on the social justice mission of the Church.

13. Despite the wounds and loss of which many spoke, we also heard a spirit of resilience and perseverance that inspired our brothers and sisters to continue journeying in faith. *"Church has been a beacon of light in our personal and family life – grateful to have Church as a reference and rock, though not perfect"* (Synod participant). Love for the Church was genuinely expressed and desired as many identified the inherent goodness seen at work in our Church and in the life of

our faith communities. The spiritual grace of the sacraments and devotional practices provided nourishment and strength for many. A personal commitment in the life of faith helped others to cultivate a deepening sense of identity as members of the Body of Christ. Ultimately, there is an underlying hope that the Holy Spirit who was given to the Church at the beginning of her journey will also bring it to fulfillment.

Returning to the Essential – Encounter

14. Without question, the overriding predominant theme of how the Church could go forward was related to encounter through community. Many spoke passionately of the desire to be a part of a welcoming community that was vibrant and encouraging. There was enthusiastic support for the synodal process of listening, for it provided not only an opportunity to be heard, but to get to know one another on the faith journey. Walking together as a community allowed us to share and listen from the heart so that faith was no longer considered an abstract subject or a private affair, but lived concretely in the true encounter of pilgrims.

15. For many, the experience of encounter also meant becoming involved, contributing to the life of the community, receiving faith formation opportunities, witnessing to the faith, and serving those in need. Participating in lay groups, retreats, Bible study courses, mission and outreach apostolates were also identified as some of the many fruitful experiences of encounter to grow closer to Christ and his people. For all these to happen, parishes needed to create opportunities and to invite participation in personal ways.

16. Not everyone, however, experienced encounters in the community. Indeed, many expressed how they felt unrecognized and invisible in the parish. One of the synod participants dejectedly posed the question: *"It's like if I died tomorrow, would anyone from the Church realize it?"* It was no longer enough for the faith community to reach out to those who were isolated, alone, or on the margins. We heard a persistent appeal for the community also to "encounter" those closest to us, in our family, among our friends, those in the pews. Repeatedly and with great sadness, many expressed concerns for the next generations and the future of the Church. We are desperate for our children and grandchildren to be nurtured in the life of faith. Identified as a top priority, young people and families need to encounter Christ and his Church in relationship with members of our parish, but it is very difficult to journey together if they do not experience closeness. Families and youth deserve a place, a purpose, a home. They must feel welcomed and relevant in our parish community.

17. Parish priests play an integral role of pastoral leadership in creating encounter opportunities and communities. Many wished pastors would spend more time with their people, *"smelling like their* sheep," knowing their flock, communicating their care and building relationships. In the same spirit, the willingness and capacity among pastors to work collaboratively with parishioners was also identified as a high priority. When a pastor is approachable and welcomes without a stance of judgement, the community is activated and a sense of unity and joy prevails. When the pastor rejects the shared responsibilities and contributions of the

community, the parish begins to wither, resentment can grow, authentic dialogue that requires listening and trust are non-existent.

18. Clearly conveyed in the Synod contributions is the belief that the Holy Spirit calls us to create communities of kindness and empathy, welcome and acceptance. We encounter Christ when we encounter each other. We build the Church when we unite around the Eucharist with people of different ethnicities, genders, backgrounds, ages, interests, and charisms. As members of the Body of Christ, we see a welcoming, vibrant, and invitational community as essential to our Church. This is who we are called to be.

Forming in the Faith

19. Such a community consists of committed and informed members who continually seek maturity in the knowledge of faith and in living according to the way of the Lord. Many responses, however, lamented how this is far from the reality of our lives nor in the life of our parishes. Over and over again, we heard those who professed to be "cradle Catholics" express frustration at not being formed adequately to seek answers and responses to the many challenges of our time. There is a strong yearning for deeper knowledge of faith, catechesis, the Church's teachings and its Tradition, the sacraments, rituals, and devotions. Well-prepared homilies with solid theological and relevant practical applications were identified as one of the most natural occurrences of faith formation in parish life. Bible studies, small group faith sharing, retreats, parish missions, online resources such as Formed, Word on Fire, etc., were mentioned repeatedly as necessary for adult faith formation opportunities that must be offered and promoted.

20. Recognizing the importance of forming children in their development and practice of faith at an early age, many parents spoke of the need for greater support in their role in the domestic Church. They are asking for stronger family faith formation, providing tools and accompaniment to help them navigate the challenges of parenting, especially in how to integrate faith in daily living.

21. For those who serve in parish ministries, the task of formation is even more critical and necessary. Many voiced the lack of support and training provided to our catechists and lay ministers, especially around the area of sacramental preparation. The triad of responsibility between family, school, and parish emerged as a call for greater attention to provide needed faith formation to teachers in Catholic schools. Considered as agents of evangelization, many commented on the indispensable role of well-formed and faith-filled Catholic teachers capable of living out their life of faith and practice with students and families in school and in the parish community. It should be noted here that there is also a common theme resonated over the low participation in the sacramental life among families with children enrolled in Catholic schools. While there might be many reasons, indications continually point to the strength of building and fostering greater connection between schools and parish communities, with focus on family faith formation.

Family and Youth

22. There is an overwhelming concern for families and children in the life of the faith community. Like any journey, responses on a family's experience of the Church reflected both ups and downs, and at times, quite serious challenges. Not all families felt welcomed, acknowledged, or appreciated in their communities. Many shared their personal accounts of frustration, hurt, and pain experienced at the hands of the Church's ministers. There is a general lack of understanding and appreciation of the uniqueness and the conditions that families face in the various stages of life they are in. Often this results in the parishes' inability to make connections with families with appropriate effectiveness.

23. Outreach, inviting, and being welcoming were emphasized over and over again. Families need parishes to make intentional efforts to foster relationships with them, help them to connect with other families in the community, and to work to strengthen these bonds. Special consideration also needs to be given in all our outreach activities to gauge how effective they are across families' differences. These differences can include ethnicity, culture, language, age, marital status, single parents, families with young children, and those without access to or familiarity with the latest technology. In addition, people and family circumstances change over time as we age, and communication modes and styles need to be adapted appropriately to the targeted age group.

24. *"Our children deserve a place where they can learn to know, love and serve God"* (Synod participant). This passionate appeal is echoed time and again by many in the community. Do we make consistent and intentional efforts to make sure youth get involved, feel welcome, be encouraged to participate, and have opportunities to be formed in the faith? Have we made space for our youth? Are we fostering an environment where experience and learning are encouraged without feeling scolded or frowned upon? A common concern repeated many times was a lack of organized events specifically to provide opportunities to engage youth, with a focus on ensuring they feel welcome, connected, needed, and loved. Many asked if we are proactively and properly funding youth programs to keep them engaged. The idea of sharing ministry with youth between smaller communities was raised as a possible way to leverage resources and maximize effectiveness. There is a need for perseverance, creativity, occasional re-evaluation, and a never-ending need for continuous innovation in our communication, outreach, and welcoming efforts as we journey with our youth and their families.

25. Ultimately, our youth want to journey with us. Thanks to the dedication of our teachers and parish catechists, over 520 youth participated informally in the synodal journey as they shared their experience of Church. As can be expected, the various responses provided a wide-range of answers, reactions, and perspectives, ranging from experiencing the Church as a community that welcomes, supports, inspires, and teaches, to feeling unwelcome, uninspired, and/or judged by the Church.

26. When asked how we could grow together as a community of faith, responses from our youth included a wide spectrum of ideas for activities to make faith and Church life more appealing.

There was an expressed desire for the life of faith to be more inviting, inspiring, and to know God (Holy Spirit) personally. They felt that the Church needs to find new ways to pass on the message of faith in ways that consider individual skills, intellectual level, and age so as to lead young people to make personal decisions about their faith and their relationship with God and the Church. There must be a greater degree of collaboration and openness in accompanying them in relation to addressing modern day issues and challenges pertaining to faith and morals. They want a better understanding of the sacraments, including the Mass so that the celebrations can be more personal and understandable.

27. An important and recurring theme found in our youth responses is the desire to see personal witness among those professing to be people of faith. Noteworthy of mention is their feedback relating to the impact of schools, teachers, parents, and the parish in providing opportunities for growing in the knowledge and experience of faith.

Witness

28. As taught by our Holy Fathers from Pope Paul VI to Pope Francis, the Church has a saving mission and exists to evangelize. We are called to be missionary disciples who experience a life-giving connection to Christ and willingly share our faith testimonies and the teachings of Christ. Throughout the synodal journey, we heard many confirmations of how the proclamation of the Gospel is inspired by the Holy Spirit who supplies us with gifts integral to the task: joy, kindness, courage, confidence, boldness, empathy, persistence, passion, and discernment through prayer. Trusting in the Holy Spirit to guide, prompt, and teach us, the *witness of prayer* is an essential component of the active spiritual life of missionary disciples.

29. The *witness of presence* and outreach to others in their needs shows forth the face of Christ. Many expressed how they value this witness in our Bishop as he comes to visit parishes and schools and in the clergy. We are invited to be authentic and real so that we establish trust in our personal encounters with others who see us as being truly human and a bridge in their following Christ. Vibrant, welcoming parishes that encourage youth involvement and invite others to share their gifts are an important part of the Church's witness to Christ. The witness of our priests in their ministry, who speak the Word of God to us in homilies from their hearts to our souls and give us a deeper understanding of Scripture and Jesus as they preach the truth to us.

30. Within the Catholic community, we are encouraged to be *prophetic witnesses* to one another, sharing our gifts, and teaching the skills needed to share the faith with others. We are challenged to share the Gospel with parents as well as their children. *"Vocations come from families. Strengthening the family will strengthen the Church"* (Synod participant). Many echoed the importance of Catholic teachers living out their faith. *"Schools are a way of grounding the faith and evangelization and should be more authentically Catholic"* (Synod participant). Consecrated Religious men and women in the Diocese reflected on how they want to share their charisms with the local parish communities, bearing witness to the primacy of Christ in

their lives while assisting young people to discern God's call. The constant witness of their commitment in prayer and participation in the mission of the Church emboldens the journey of renewal for our faith community.

PART III
How is the Holy Spirit inviting us to continue the Synodal Journey?

31. The objective of the Synodal process is not to provide a temporary or one-time experience of synodality in the local community, but rather to provide an opportunity for the entire People of God to discern together how to move forward on the path towards being a more synodal Church (Vademecum, 1.3). This resolution has been confirmed by participants throughout the listening sessions. We do not wish to follow a path of renewal as a series of listening and discernment exercises that start and stop. We seek to be pilgrims on a journey of growing authentically closer to Jesus who leads us towards the communion and mission that He has entrusted to us in this moment of time.

32. The commitment to journey with Christ and with one another calls us to a path of true pastoral conversion. Ultimately, the *listening* Church seeks to make pastoral decisions that reflect the will of God, grounding them in the Word of God, in the living Tradition of the Church, and in the voice of the People of God, evidenced in the lived experience of the life of faith. Our gathering to celebrate the Holy Spirit on June 4th, 2022, was a further testament of our commitment to encounter, to listen, and to discern together as a family of faith. Over 175 representatives from parishes, schools, associations, and communities throughout the Diocese gathered around our Shepherd to provide further input and responses to the emerging fruits of the synodal journey as presented in the pastoral realities of a Draft Diocesan Synthesis.

33. There was overwhelming gratitude expressed by many thanking the Church for listening, for caring, for being open to the conversation, for honesty, and for the providential act of offering a synodal process of this nature. Particular pastoral priorities were considered important for the community of faith in further discussions: a concrete reminder to listen to the solitary voice in the community; to seek out the voices of those who were not represented; to consider the role of women; and to focus on the centrality of the sacraments in the life of faith, as articulated in the experience of suffering by many during the Covid restrictions with Churches closed and sacraments not available.

Conversion: Path to Communion, Participation and Mission

34. In the Preparatory Document it highlights the double dynamic of conversion between Peter and Cornelius (Acts 10:1 – 11:18) to reveal the path of conversion as an ongoing process rather than a one-time event, and how both Peter and Cornelius involve other people in their journey of conversion, making them companions in their journey: *"The apostolic action accomplishes God's will by creating community, breaking down barriers, and promoting encounters. The word plays a central role in the encounter between the two protagonists. Cornelius begins by sharing his experience. Peter listens to him and then speaks, reporting in turn what has happened to him and testifying to the closeness of the Lord, who goes out to meet people individually to free them from what makes them prisoners of evil and mortifies humanity (cf. Acts 10:38)"* (no. 24).

35. Having experienced what the Holy Spirit has inspired our community to see throughout the Synodal journey, we commit to continue this apostolic form of communicating, of being authentic and responsive as a *listening* Church capable of bearing witness to the *closeness* of Christ for all.

36. We consider the many emerging themes and realities relating to the Church's pastoral life presented in this document as the Spirit's call to further discernment and ultimately conversion. The journey of conversion, however, does not belong to a selected few, but to all members of the faith community. By our participation in the Life, Death and Resurrection of Christ, we have a role in discerning and living out God's call for His people. All of us are co-workers in the vineyard of the Lord. What is addressed to the Bishop is at the same time a call directed to each one of us. We invite the priests, deacons, religious, catechists, teachers and every member of the faith community to listen to the voice of the People of God conveyed in this document. To be open to the prompting of the Spirit, and discern how *each of us* is called to personal conversion and renewal in our respective vocation and state of life.

37. Starting September 2022 to June 2023, we invite all Diocesan councils, parish councils, school councils, lay associations, movements, and ministry groups to gather and study carefully the themes presented, to engage in the synodal process of prayer and spiritual conversations guided by the Spirit and to consider these reflection questions for your particular community:

    - ***What is the experience of your community with respect to the synthesis themes?***
    - ***What areas in your community are inviting you to consider paths of conversion?***
    - ***What steps can your community take in becoming a more authentic witness to Christ and His Church in the world?***

38. At the Diocesan level the Pastoral Discernment Advisory Committee will follow this same journey with the Bishop. The input and responses from individuals, parishes, and communities from these reflections will contribute to the overall listening, discerning, and planning of the pastoral priorities for our Diocesan community in the coming year.

39. At the centre of the Synodal journey is Jesus Christ, not the Church. Our path to pastoral conversion must take place in obedience to the missionary mandate of Jesus, and a total reliance on the Holy Spirit who grants the courage to proclaim the newness of the Gospel with boldness *(parrhesía)* in every time and place, even going against the current when the current is a superficial way of life. Like the patient ferment of the early Church, the renewal of our faith community will not solely rely on implementing specific pastoral strategies or new programs, but in the faithful witness of prayer, faith formation, Liturgy, worship and service which are the foundation of faith communities and families.

40. On May 1, 2020 at the height of the pandemic Bishop McGrattan consecrated the Diocese of Calgary to the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of the Church. As a Church that goes forth, trusting in God's providence, may we imitate Mary in her docility to the Spirit and in our renewed commitment to grow together as a family of faith, hope and charity in the vocation and mission of Christian holiness through the Church and within the world.