

FOR A renewed CHURCH

A SYNODAL REFLECTION

By Christine Gage

The Saint John Paul II Pastoral Unit has whole-heartedly embarked on the Synodal journey, beginning with the Diocesan launch party in October 2021, from gathering at Synod Encounters in the Spring of 2022 in the parishes, to incorporating the synodal way in the workings of the pastoral team. It's important to note that the synodal mind-set was already entrenched in the Diocese since many years. I can vividly remember Bishop Emeritus Lionel Gendron talking about co-responsibility in his homilies. To be honest, the first time I heard it, I thought it was just wishful thinking !

That mind-set has transferred to our pastoral unit. In a letter dated August 31, 2020, from Bishop Hamelin to our Pastor, Fr. Manus Bradley, the pastoral unit was requested to work together to arrive at suggestions regarding the future of pastoral work in this unit, the viability or otherwise of the parishes in the unit, and what new organizational structures need to be in place to ensure the mission and proclamation of the Gospel in the present context. An intimate team, mandated by the Bishop comprised of the Pastor, the pastoral unit's coordinator, a diocesan representative and four parishioners, resulted from that letter. They embarked on a synodal journey of reflection and discernment. From September 2020 to May 2021, at online and in-person meetings of the team as well as town-hall style meetings with the priest collaborators, pastoral agents, fabrique chairpersons, dedicated volunteers, and parents of the children in the faith education program, the mandated committee put into practice a process which was truly Synodal: Listening, Discernment, and Participation. In his report to the Diocese, Fr. Manus concluded with the following: let us move forward with an abundance of good will, of greater trust and confidence in our leadership, and daring to reach out with a renewed sense of mission.

In that light, the Pastoral Unit Orientation Council (PUOC) was formed. Gathering a representative from each parish, together with Fr. John Torrance and myself, Fr. Manus formed the council so that they would have an advisory role and will have not only the interests of their own parish at heart but also have a generous attitude to the needs of the whole pastoral unit that makes up

FOR A *renewed* CHURCH

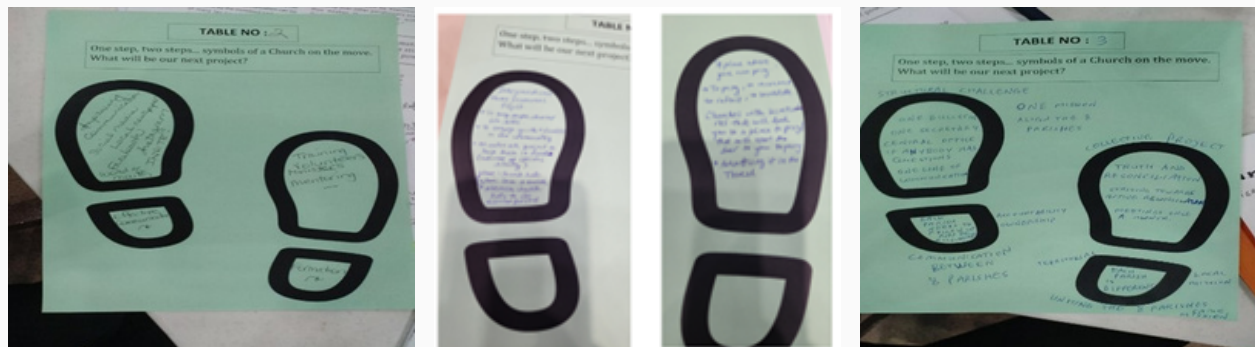
the Anglophone Region of the Diocese. It is important to note that this group is a council, an interface between the parishes and the Pastor. Building bridges between the parishes, which are spaced out throughout the vast Diocesan territory, the work of the PUOC is ongoing and will continue to serve as a link for the parishes and Pastor.

All this to say: Embarking on the journey of the Synod on Synodality was natural for this Diocese and our pastoral unit. In February of 2022, Bishop Claude Hamelin invited me to join the “Comité porteur de la démarche synodale” which was a committee supporting the process of the Synod in our Diocese. This committee’s mandate was to follow and support the parishes/pastoral unit’s efforts along the Synodal path. With coordinating the Synod Encounters in eight parishes, I had my hands full and had a lot to say at these meetings - perhaps to the chagrin of the other members! It was a pleasure though to share the work that we were doing in our pastoral unit. The Synod Encounters were rich and fruitful; the Encounter reports flowing back to the Diocese were dense with feedback from the participants. It was truly an honour to meet with so many parishioners so early on in my role as Administrative Coordinator for the SJP2PU.

As noted in the timeline above, in October 2023, the Diocese gathered 250 participants for a day-long experience of synodality: to exchange ideas in the form of spiritual listening and discernment. Grouped by common interest, we began the day reflecting on one of the seven poles laid out in the Quebec Provincial Synthesis on the Synod on Synodality. While the intention was not to come to any conclusions or decisions, the conversation around the 35+ tables in the hall was reflective, respectful, and fruitful. Our conclusions were quickly tallied and remitted to Bishop Hamelin. Following a quick lunch and fellowship, we were regrouped by parish/pastoral unit. The SJP2PU participants occupied three tables - we were encouraged to bring to the table what we had absorbed from the morning session and put our heads together to look forward on how to live synodality in the pastoral unit. What fruits did we want to bring back to our parishes? I am glad we took photos of our notes, so much was shared I don’t know if we would have remembered it all ! The day culminated with Mass concelebrated by Bishop Hamelin with the priests present.

TESTIMONIAL

FOR A renewed CHURCH



One step, two steps... symbols of our Church on the move ! What will be our next step?

Skip forward five months to the March 23rd gathering in our pastoral unit of some of those participants together with a few new invitees and we arrive at where we are today. On March 23rd, we revisited the footprints, our notes from the October 2023 gathering. What moved us to say what we said, wrote what we wrote? We then looked at the Synthesis Report that came out of the first session on the Synod in Rome which took place from October 4-29, 2023. Therein, 20 elements emerged from the dialogue, prayer and discussion that characterised those days in Rome. While some elements are far from any work that can be done in the pastoral unit, for example, we cannot begin to address Part 2, point 13: The Bishop of Rome in the College of Bishops. That's just not our domain, nor direct responsibility. So, the points we can address and put into practice were discussed and debated and decided upon. We, this group of participants, will attend the upcoming Diocesan gathering on May 25th, armed with new ardor for the Synodal way.



TESTIMONIAL