

Diocese of Austin

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Office of the Bishop

To be Active Participants in the Mission of the Church

(Lumen Gentium, 32-33)

Pastoral Letter of His Excellency, Bishop Joe S. Vásquez

about the Synod of Bishops with the topic

“For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation and Mission”

To all the faithful of the particular church of Austin

November 6, 2021

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Pope Saint Paul VI established the Synod of Bishops in 1965 following Vatican II as a gathering of bishops convened by the pope to discuss a topic of theological or pastoral significance for advice or counsel to the pope. Earlier this year, Pope Francis approved a synodal program for the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops. The synodal journey comprises three phases: a diocesan phase (October 2021 through April 2022), a continental phase (September 2022 through March 2023), and a conclusive phase in Rome at the level of the universal Church with the bishops at the Vatican in the Synodal Assembly (October 2023).

With this synodal program, the Holy Father wants to involve more actively the whole church at local, national, and continental levels through a process of “listening and discernment” on the important theme of synodality: “For a synodal Church: communion, participation, and mission.” The key concept of this “listening” or “synodal” process is found in the Greek origin of the word “synod”, comprising “*syn*” (with or together with) and “*hodos*” (path or way), meaning “journeying together along the same path.” As we reflect on the concept of synodality, it is important to remember that the concept stands out as a method. Synodality is not an end in and of itself. More precisely, synodality is a method of governing the church and a method of fulfilling its mission. So, it is important to consider that the term synodality is not used in isolation, rather, synodality goes together with *communion*, *participation*, and *mission*.

The entire Church is invited to contemplate synodality on the theme that is decisive for its life and mission because this is the “path of synodality which God expects of the Church of the third millennium” (Pope Francis, *Commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the Institution of the Synod of Bishops*, 17 October 2015). As baptized members of Christ’s faithful, we are reminded of the words of Saint Paul to people of Ephesus, “So then you are no longer strangers

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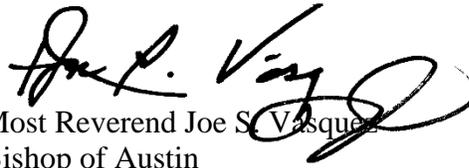
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and sojourners, but you are fellow citizens with the holy ones and members of the household of God built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the capstone” (Ephesians 2:19-20). In view of this, I encourage you to participate fully, consciously, and actively in the consultation to be undertaken throughout the Diocese of Austin.

I have appointed a Diocesan Synodal Team comprised of clergy and lay faithful from throughout our diocese to establish a listening process that is anchored in meditation on Scripture, the liturgy, and prayer. This way, our pathways of authentic listening to one another throughout our diocese may become a genuine opportunity of discerning the voice of the Holy Spirit.

As companions on the journey and coworkers in the vineyard, let us remember that our work of consultation for this Synod will only be as effective as the genuinely objective efforts we give to achieve the authentic results of prayerful listening and reflection under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Our consultation is not about any particular individual or collective agendas. Our consultation for the Synod is about prayerful discernment of the voice and directions of the Holy Spirit. So, let us resolve to beseech the guidance of the Spirit as we ready our journey together in communion to be active participants in the mission of the Church.

Sincerely in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Joe S. Vasquez". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, sweeping flourish at the end.

Most Reverend Joe S. Vasquez
Bishop of Austin