

20 July 2018

Dear Parish Priests, PPC Chairpersons and Synod Champions

On the 14<sup>th</sup> of July we had a formation session for the Synod Champions, and covered the following areas:

- What synods are, and the background to the 2008 Synod
- An analysis of the results of the online survey
- The next steps in preparing for the 2019 Synod

I want to spend some time now bringing you up to speed on the last point, that is, the next step in preparing for the 2019 Synod.

The Synod champion appointed by each parish has been given the responsibility of canvassing the groups, sodalities and parishioners at large regarding the areas which they think the Church needs to focus on for the next ten years. Each Parish Pastoral Council is to submit up to 5 areas to the co-ordinating committee for analysis and consolidation. You are, in a very real sense, determining the agenda for the Synod. Those five areas will be submitted via an online form no later than November 2018.

Each parish is different, and so the process of consultation for each will be unique. Having said that, it is important for the champion to canvas opinions as widely as possible, and so he or she should meet with each group and sodality in the parish, and also meet with members of the parish in an open forum. It is also important to ask ourselves “who are the missing voices?” and reach out to them so that the voices of those marginalised in the Church or by the Church can also be heard. All of this information should then be fed back to the PPC and Parish Priest so that the final selection of those five areas can be made.

Synods can be problem solving in nature, or aspirational. If our starting point is problem solving there is a danger that we will ignore more fundamental issues relating to our identity as Church. I have therefore asked each Synod Champion to begin from an aspirational perspective before considering the challenges which face us as Church. What does this mean?

The first question to be asked by the Synod Champion in their reflection sessions is this:

**What kind of Church do you want to belong to?**

The second question would be:

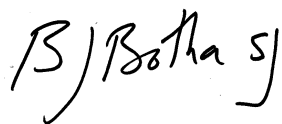
**What are the obstacles that you see or experience to becoming that kind of Church?**

By beginning with the aspirational and only then proceeding to challenges or problems will help us to focus on what is essential or more important.

I hope that this will help you in the preparation process that your parish will be participating in.

Let me conclude by thanking the Synod Champions for their enthusiasm and commitment. At the end of our formation meeting I was filled with hope and enthusiasm, and that was largely due to the energy they brought to the meeting, and the seriousness with which they are taking their responsibilities.

Yours in Christ

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "B J Botha SJ". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

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Fr Bruce Botha SJ  
(Episcopal Vicar for Evangelisation)