

8 January 2022

Dear Bishops, Fathers, Sisters and Faithful.

Greetings of the New Year 2022, from the Synod 2021-2023 Committee.

Every year we make new resolutions. This year the call of the Synod 2021-2023 should prompt us to resolve to become a Synodal Church, a listening Church and a Church of closeness as mentioned by Pope Francis in his address at the inauguration of the Synod 2021-2023, with the theme for a synodal church, Communion, Participation, Mission. This letter is regarding the Synod 2021-2023 and in which way we are called to participate at the diocesan/vicariate level.

I have been appointed by Bishop Paul Hinder, the Apostolic Administrator for AVONA, as the Synod Coordinator for the Apostolic Vicariate of Northern Arabia, to facilitate the consultation process of the Synod with all the parishes of AVONA. With this regard I request the active participation and cooperation of all parishes in AVONA. I offer my apologies for sending out this letter a little late due to many other engagements and the time taken for preparation.

As you may already be aware, the synodal journey is a two-year journey comprising of three phases in which the whole church is engaged. We can call them as stages of consultation.

1. The Diocesan/Vicariate Phase - lasting from October 2021 to April 2022.
2. The Continental Phase - will take place from September 2022 to March 2023.
3. The Universal Phase - will begin with the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, dedicated to the theme "For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, and Mission," at the Vatican in October 2023.

The Diocesan/Vicariate Phase or local level church: This phase is where the diocese/vicariate and the local churches are called to actively participate in a consultative process with the lay people in their churches. The synodal process is carried out through listening to all the baptized. It is an invitation for us to set out on a path of profound renewal inspired by the Grace of God's Spirit. It is an opportunity to listen more deeply to the voice of the Spirit, share our experience of church, enhance participation and outreach, improve the quality of dialogue, discern about further issues, strengthen conversion in attitudes and skills, and animate people's sense of connection between the local, regional, and global church. All parishes must encourage participation in the consultation process of all members of the parish especially the excluded, the poor and those on the peripheries. There are various documents, ideas, and guidelines available on the synod 2021 -2023 website to help the consultation process at the local church levels. You will also find below the link to the AVONA website which offers some helpful ideas, prayer sessions, an interview, theme songs with actions, videos, flyer, prayer cards, posters etc. as a guide that parishes may employ or prepare their own to create awareness and elicit the responses from the faithful. There is also a set of ten questions on the website that the faithful

must answer and send in their contribution to the local parishes. Each diocese/vicariate must hold a pre-synodal meeting to conclude the consultative process, after which the diocese/vicariate will gather contributions from the laity in their area and compile them into a report, which must be sent to me. The vicariate synod committee will collate these contributions, summarized them into a report, and send to our bishop.

Here are few suggested activities based on the Synod theme through which parishes can create awareness, gather responses, enlighten, and discern:

- 1. The Synod is a Spiritual process.** Hence one can have Prayer Sessions, Lectio Divina, Bible Reflections on the Word of God. Eucharistic Adorations, composing Synodal theme songs, etc.
- 2. The Synod calls for participation:** we can do this through Gospel music concerts, drama (skits), quizzes, other activities like get together or social activities, and action songs.
- 3. The Synod calls for listening:** Encourage the laity to answer the questionnaires, hold debates, group discussions, talks, announcements, workshops on church matters or experiences, current issues faced by the church, current world crises and the church, and interviews.
- 4. Visual messages:** Posters and banners, Handouts, movies, social media posts, etc.

These helps and guides are posted on the AVONA website, which you may adapt to your local parish situation.

“The words “communion” and “mission” can risk remaining somewhat abstract, unless we cultivate an ecclesial praxis that expresses the concreteness of Synodality at every step of our journey and activity, encouraging real involvement on the part of each and all. I would say that celebrating a Synod is always a good and important thing, but it proves truly beneficial if it becomes a living expression of “being Church”, of a way of acting marked by true participation.” – Pope Francis at the inaugural address

Therefore I humbly request all the Parish Priests, lay leaders, church groups and ministries to promote the awareness of the Synod among the laity and motivate them to participate in the consultation process, helping them to become aware of the Synodal roots of the church, that we are one people of God, walking forward together, listening to the Holy Spirit and the Word of God, in the communion that Christ establishes between us, and participating in our common mission to give the Gospel to the world.

Looking forward to the enthusiastic participation of the Clergy and laity, I pray that this Synod as the Holy Father has said may truly be a season of grace, a season of the Holy Spirit, helping us to encounter, listen and reflect in which way the Spirit is leading us to be the church that He wants us to be.

During our upcoming clergy meeting we will present and further discuss the Synod 2021-2023 and the process.



Apostolic Vicariate of Northern Arabia

For a better understanding of the Synodality process we recommend the reading of the official documents:

- Vademecum for the Synod on Synodality
 - The Preparatory Document
- Both these are also available on the Vatican website and these were send to you by Bishop Paul at the very beginning of the synod.
- The link to website for more information: <http://avona.org/synod2023>

Wishing each of you once again a Happy New Year 2022 and happy walking together in a synodal way.

Much prayers

Fr Franco Pereira sdb
AVONA Coordinator of Synod 2021-23

CC: Rev Bishop Paul Hinder Ofm Cap
Archbishop Eugene Martin Nugent.