Archdiocese of Cape Town

ARCHBISHOP SITHEMBELE SIPUKA

Archdiocesan News

November 2026

This newsletter includes five attachments: the booklet on synodality, the synodality workshop presentation, the facilitator's note, the workshop report form, and the advertisement for the post of Secretary to the Archbishop. Because this issue sets out what every parish is required to do in the coming months, I ask that you read it carefully and in its entirety, together with the attachments.

Synodality and the Life of Our Archdiocese

Walking Together as Church

In recent newsletters, we have reflected on synodality through the disciples' journey to Emmaus and the early Church's discernment in Jerusalem. This month, I would like us to consider more directly what this journey means for the life of our Archdiocese.

My impression is that awareness of and enthusiasm for synodality in Cape Town remain limited. It is not yet part of our common vocabulary, nor is it consistently visible in the everyday life of our parishes. Ask parishioners leaving Mass on Sunday what synodality means, and many might struggle to explain it. Ask our councils how it has changed the way they work, and the honest answer in many cases might be that it has not. I offer this observation not to discount the good work already being done, but to invite us to build on it with greater purpose and urgency.

We Know Synodality and Do It: Now We Must Practise It Intentionally

Some may say, "We know synodality, and we are already doing it." Indeed, our parish councils, sodalities, religious communities and other bodies provide valuable opportunities for consultation and cooperation. We do not start from nothing. Yet having structures of consultation is not the same as being synodal.

We must ask whether we understand and practise synodality intentionally. Do we listen before deciding? Do we make room for those whose voices are seldom heard? Do our meetings help us discern what God asks of us, or do they merely organise activities and communicate decisions already taken? If synodality were already our customary way of proceeding, it would be evident in our vocabulary, our habits and our structures.

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A Gap in Our Structures

At present, we do not yet have an Archdiocesan synodal team or an established network of deanery and parish synodal teams to coordinate this work. We need to address this gap without delay. The universal Church's timetable calls us to evaluate our progress in the first half of 2027. When we share our experience with the wider Church, we should be able to describe not only what we have discussed, but what we have begun to live.

Why Everyone's Contribution Matters

The starting point of synodality is not a meeting or a committee, but our baptism. Through baptism, we belong to Christ and share responsibility for the Church's mission. This does not mean that everyone has the same role. It means that no one should be merely a spectator. The faithful contribute not simply as helpers of the clergy, but as baptised members of Christ's body, endowed with gifts by the Holy Spirit and called to bring the Gospel into every part of life.

A parent raising children, a young person seeking work, a teacher forming young minds, and a person caring for a sick relative all know something about living the faith that the rest of us need to hear. Their experience does not replace Scripture or the Church's teaching. It helps us discern how that teaching is being understood and lived, and where our pastoral care needs to become more attentive and effective.

This asks something of us all. Bishops and priests must be willing to listen and to acknowledge that we do not have every answer. Laypeople, too, must move beyond leaving everything to "Father", find their voice, and accept their responsibility. We are not exchanging one group's dominance for another's. We are learning to recognise and bring together the gifts God has entrusted to his people.

A Booklet to Read, Discuss and Live

To help us on this journey, I share again the booklet on synodality that I first prepared for the Diocese of Mthatha. Although written for that diocese, its explanation of synodality's foundations and practice can also serve our communities in Cape Town. Its language is simple, but its content is substantial, bringing together Scripture, the Church's teaching, practical guidance, and responses to common concerns.

I warmly encourage you to read it. It is not intended only for priests, deacons or members of Parish Pastoral Councils. It is for anyone who wishes to understand more clearly what it means to belong to the Church and share in her mission.

Please do not feel that you must read it all at once. Read a chapter at a time, personally and with others—in a family, a sodality, a religious community or a parish group. Pray over what you read. Ask where it describes something already alive in your community and where it challenges a habit that needs to change.

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The booklet uses a simple comparison: knowing how swimming works does not make someone a swimmer; one must enter the water. In the same way, understanding synodality is necessary, but insufficient. We must practise it. I hope that the booklet will be read not once but many times, not only alone but together, and not merely studied but lived.

More Than a Method for Meetings

One helpful distinction in the booklet is between synodality as an everyday spirituality and Conversation in the Spirit as a structured method of communal listening and discernment. We need both, but we should not confuse them. Not every practical decision requires a lengthy formal process. Significant pastoral questions, however, deserve deliberate prayer, listening and discernment.

At home, synodality begins when we give someone our full attention rather than prepare our reply while they are still speaking. In a parish, it becomes visible when a concern can be raised without fear of dismissal, when young people are heard, and when we notice those who are absent from our gatherings. In leadership, it means listening genuinely before deciding, rather than consulting only to confirm a conclusion already reached.

For important questions, Conversation in the Spirit offers a more deliberate way of proceeding. Participants prepare in prayer, speak without interruption, reflect on what they have heard, and discern together the points of agreement, the differences and the questions that remain. Silence is part of the process because we seek more than an exchange of opinions: we ask what God is calling us to do.
This listening must also lead us beyond our own meetings. If it makes us more attentive to the lonely, the unemployed, struggling families and those who feel unwelcome, it is bearing fruit. We walk together not simply to improve our internal arrangements, but to become more faithful witnesses to Christ.

Questions Deserve a Hearing, but We Must Join the Journey

Questions about synodality, including concerns about where it may lead, deserve a thoughtful response. Debate is good for the Church, and no one should feel disloyal for raising a concern. The booklet addresses several of these concerns.

Synodality does not put revealed truth to a vote, nor does it remove the responsibilities of bishops and priests. It calls for authority to be exercised through genuine listening and discernment, in fidelity to Scripture, Tradition and the Church's teaching. Listening is not a surrender of responsibility; it is part of exercising responsibility well.

At the same time, synodality is not simply an optional programme that a local Church may take up or leave aside. In his accompanying note to the Synod's Final Document, Pope Francis affirmed that the document forms part of the ordinary Magisterium of the Successor of Peter and asked that it be received accordingly. He also explained that its application requires discernment and adaptation to particular circumstances. This calls for practical choices consistent with the document, not merely discussion of it.

There is room, therefore, for questions, careful reflection and approaches suited to different communities. But we cannot exclude ourselves from the journey of the universal Church. We can debate how we walk; we cannot decide not to walk. We are called to understand synodality and give it practical expression in our own circumstances.

From Reflection to Action

Where Your Responses Are Leading

Thank you once again for the generous response of parishes to the questions circulated in August. I am reviewing these responses carefully.

I envisage a representative gathering of the Archdiocese in February 2027, where the findings and proposed way forward will be presented and discussed. Details of the date, venue and representation will follow.

The workshops outlined below will help ensure that this gathering reflects the experience of our communities and that what we hear in the parishes helps shape our common direction. The February gathering will also be an important step in preparing our evaluation of how we have lived synodality, ahead of the universal Church's reporting deadline of 30 June 2027.

Synodality Workshops in Every Parish and Community

As a first step, I held a workshop with our deacons and shared my presentation. I had hoped that they would help lead similar workshops in our parishes. One of the deacons rightly pointed out, however, that priests need to be involved from the outset. If synodality is to become part of parish life, priests, deacons and the faithful must learn and participate together.

The slide presentation accompanying this newsletter is intended to assist with these workshops. I ask parish priests, as those with particular responsibility for animating the life of their communities, to work with the deacons in leading this process, beginning with Parish Pastoral Council members and the various sodalities and parish groups.

I extend the same invitation to the superiors of our monasteries and convents, the principals of our Catholic schools, and the heads of our Catholic institutions to arrange workshops in their own communities.

The slides may be adapted to suit each audience. The booklet provides fuller explanations for preparation and continuing reflection. The separate facilitator's note suggests how to combine the presentation with Conversation in the Spirit, so that synodality is experienced and not only explained.

Parish Requirements and Deadline

These workshops are mandatory for every parish and must lead to practical implementation. **Each parish is required to hold a synodality workshop with its Parish Pastoral Council and its sodalities by 31 January 2027.**

With December and January falling within the holiday period, it is important to begin planning now rather than wait until the deadline approaches.

After the workshop, please complete the accompanying one-page report form and return it promptly to the Office of the Archbishop. The report should confirm that the workshop took place, what fruits and challenges emerged, and what practical steps the parish intends to take.

Deans will report at their deanery meetings on the workshops held in their deaneries, and parish representatives will bring the fruits of their workshops to the February gathering.

The purpose is not to add paperwork to already busy parish lives. It is to ensure that people's contributions are heard and carried forward. We should not invite people to speak and then give them no indication of what became of their contribution. The reports will also help me understand where progress is being made and where further support is needed.

The Present Stage and the Road Ahead

The universal Church is now in the implementation phase of the Synod. We are called to receive its conclusions and allow them to shape our relationships, our ways of discerning and deciding, and the structures through which we carry out the Church's mission.

Official guidance provides for evaluation assemblies in local Churches during the first half of 2027. These are opportunities to consider prayerfully what has been attempted, what has borne fruit, what difficulties have arisen, and what further steps are needed. A narrative report and a letter to the other Churches, approved by the bishop, are then to be sent to the relevant national or regional synodal team and shared with the General Secretariat of the Synod by 30 June 2027. The letter offers an opportunity for local Churches to share their experience and learn from one another.

We have fewer than eight months before that deadline, including the December–January holiday period, when many councils and sodalities meet less frequently. We therefore need to use the time purposefully, while recognising that lasting change requires more than a hurried programme of activities.

Further national, regional, and continental stages will lead towards an Ecclesial Assembly in the Vatican in October 2028. Our work in Cape Town thus forms part of a wider journey in which local Churches contribute to the discernment of the whole Church.

Our concern, however, should not be only whether we will have a report ready. A report can be written in an office. The real question is whether there will be lived experience to report: communities listening more attentively, responsibilities being shared more fruitfully, and a renewed commitment to the Church's mission.

Clergy and Community News

Farewell to Fr Nkululeko Meyiwa OMI

Fr Nkululeko Meyiwa OMI, who has served as parish priest of St Stephen's, Rocklands, has been called by his congregation, the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate, to a new mission.
I thank him for his presence and ministry among us, and for all he has given to the people of Rocklands and to the Archdiocese. We wish him well and assure him of our prayers as he takes up his new appointment.

The pastoral care of St Stephen's is now entrusted to Fr Cebelihle Cibane OMI, assisted by Fr Patrick Regnard OMI, of St John Bosco, Westridge. I thank them and both parishes for embracing this arrangement.

Silver Jubilees of Priesthood

Two of our priests have reached the milestone of twenty-five years of priesthood. Fr Emmanuel Siljeur is celebrating his silver jubilee, while Fr Geoffrey Mawa celebrated his earlier this year.
On behalf of the Archdiocese, I congratulate them both and thank God for their twenty-five years of faithful service at the altar and among the people of God. May the Lord continue to sustain them and renew their joy in their priestly vocation. Ad multos annos!

Forty Years of the Neocatechumenal Way

We also congratulate the Neocatechumenal Way on forty years of presence in the Archdiocese of Cape Town.

We give thanks for all who have contributed to this journey and pray for its continued service to the Church. May this anniversary be an occasion to remember with gratitude and to renew its communities' contribution to the life and mission of our Archdiocese.

Archdiocesan Office

Retirement of Ms Ilidia de Sousa

Ms Ilidia de Sousa, who has served faithfully as Secretary in the Office of the Archbishop since 2013, is retiring. A fuller word of gratitude for her service will follow in due course.

Vacancy: Secretary to the Archbishop

The Archdiocese is seeking a Secretary to the Archbishop to begin in January 2027. The Secretary works directly with the Archbishop and is answerable to him.

The position is five days a week, Monday to Friday, from 08h30 to 14h30. It calls for proven secretarial experience, a good command of English, proficiency in MS Word, Outlook and Excel, and, above all, discretion.

The full advertisement accompanies this newsletter. Applicants should send a CV, a short covering letter and at least three contactable references to **absecretary@adct.org.za** by **10 December 2026**. Please bring this vacancy to the attention of suitable people in your communities.

Beginning Together

Let us approach synodality not as a slogan or an additional task, but as a way of bringing our lives and responsibilities before God together. Let us read the booklet, make time for the workshops, and begin practising what we learn—in our homes and in our communities.
We do not have to resolve every question before beginning. We do, however, have to begin—and to do so together.

+ Sithembele Sipuka
Archbishop of Cape Town

Attachments

1. Booklet on Synodality
2. Synodality Workshop Presentation
3. Facilitator's Note: Combining the Presentation with Conversation in the Spirit
4. Synodality Workshop Report Form (to be returned to the Office of the Archbishop)
5. Advertisement: Secretary to the Archbishop