**PREPARING FOR THE SYNOD**

One great benefit that the Church has reaped from the Second Vatican Council is the awareness of the Church as the People of God. They include the bishops, priests, religious and secular men and women. Clergy and laity are of equal standing in the Church through their baptism. Each one follows a particular vocation from God that complements the vocations of the others.

Sixty years after Vatican II, the People of God are making an all-out attempt to actualize the Council’s vision of the Church. Pope Francis and our bishops are inviting all God’s People to contribute to the Church’s mission. The Council stressed that all the People of God are missionaries and that they contribute in their own way to the Church’s missionary activity.

The involvement of all the Church’s members in proclaiming the Kingdom of God by their words and actions does not detract from the mission of the bishops, but rather adds greatly to its effectiveness.

An important task of the Synod is to read “the signs of the times” and to act upon them.

The Second Vatican Council stated, “the Church has always had the duty of scrutinizing the signs of the times and of interpreting them in the light of the gospel. Thus, in language intelligible to each generation, she can respond to the perennial questions which people ask about this present life and the life to come, and about the relationship of the one to the other” (Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et Spes*, 4).

“Signs of the times” was a phrase frequently used by Pope John XXIII. He based it on Luke’s gospel: “How is it you do not know how to interpret these times?” (Lk 12:56), and he lifted the phrase from the parallel passage in Matthew: “you cannot read the signs of the times” (Mt 16:3).

Among the current signs that stimulate development from within society and the Church are recognition of the place of women; the inclusion of Indigenous people in the life of nations; freedom of religion; globalization, universal planning, and the unification of the world.

Archbishop Oscar Romero, martyr of El Salvador, wrote a brief meditation that he called, “A Future Not Our Own.” I find this reflection appropriate in our preparation for the Synod, as it maps out the Church’s future:

“It helps now and then to step back and take the long view. The Kingdom is not only beyond our efforts, it is even beyond our vision.

“We accomplish in our lifetime only a tiny fraction of the magnificent enterprise that is God's work. Nothing we do is complete, which is another way of saying that the Kingdom always lies beyondus.

“No statement says all that could be said. No prayer fully expresses our faith. No confession brings perfection, no pastoral visit brings wholeness.

“No program accomplishes the Church's mission. No set of goals and objectives includes everything.

“This is what we are about. We plant the seeds that one day will grow. We water seeds already planted, knowing that they hold future promise.

“We lay foundations that will need further development. We provide yeast that produces effects far beyond our capabilities.

“We cannot do everything, and there is a sense of liberationin realizing that. This enables us to do something and do it well. It may be incomplete, but it is a beginning, a step along the way, an opportunity for the Lord's grace to enter and do the rest.

“We may never see the end results, but that is the difference between the master builder and the worker. We are workers, not master builders, ministers not messiahs. We are prophets of a future not our own.”