



11 September 2026

Dear Fathers and Parish Leaders

Diocese Synodal Communal Discernment Process

Earlier this year I established a Diocesan Synod Team to assist me in the implementation phase of the Synod on Synodality.

As part of our diocesan contribution to the universal synodal process, I am required to provide a report to Rome in the New Year about our synodal process.

The accompanying document will give you the background of the journey so far and to the process I am now asking you to take part in.

One of the primary tools used throughout the synodal process has been the Ignatian Spiritual Conversation, often referred to as *Conversation in the Spirit*. This prayerful process enables participants to listen deeply to one another and to the Holy Spirit within a community. It has proven to be a powerful means of communal discernment and a practical way of fostering a synodal culture.

I am now asking the leadership of every parish, priest/s and lay faithful, to gather for at least one meeting of parish leaders, using the Spiritual Conversation process to reflect on the vision and priorities of the Diocese, reflecting on the question:

How is the Lord calling our parish to worship, catechesis and witness?

In addition to pastoral leaders in the parish, I would want to ensure parish finance committee members and school principals be included if possible.

This process is most effective with 6-9 people per group, therefore you may have two or more groups meeting concurrently, concluding by gathering feedback. Other groups in the parish are very welcome to gather and participate in this Spiritual Conversation.

Facilitation for these parish group gatherings will be supported through:

- People in the parish who have already been trained in the Spiritual Conversation process.
- Formation opportunities provided by the Diocesan Synod Team for prospective facilitators.
- A pool of trained facilitators who are available to come and facilitate the process.

The Diocese's approach to synodal implementation is intentionally gentle and practical. Rather than introducing large-scale programmes, the focus is on embedding the Spiritual Conversation as a

regular and effective tool within parish life, helping communities grow in prayerful discernment, shared responsibility, and missionary renewal.

More information can be found on [this page on the Diocesan website](#) or please contact Mike Stopforth.

Yours in Christ

A handwritten signature in black ink, starting with a cross symbol followed by the name 'Michael Gielen' in a cursive script.

+Michael Gielen
Bishop of Christchurch