



DIOCESE OF PEMBROKE

284 TRAFALGAR ROAD
PEMBROKE, ONTARIO K8A 5A8

January 14, 2025

Dear Sisters and Brothers of the Diocese of Pembroke,

As Pilgrims of Hope, we have begun this New Year and inaugurated the Jubilee, walking together as we follow Jesus our Redeemer. Accompanied by Mary, we want to embrace the future with hope! I write to you today to share some important information about how we can plan for and embrace our future.

At our recent meeting of the Council of Priests on December 4, 2024, we decided to begin a synodal process of discernment and decision-making so that all of us together will be able to renew and re-invigorate our faith communities through the power of the Holy Spirit. As I have traveled to different parishes in the Diocese over the last four months, many of you have asked me about our future. You have encouraged me by your enthusiasm and love for the Diocese. You have urged me to move forward as we face many challenges, so that we can do this together.

We recognize that we are beginning a *process*, a journey, which will take time, careful reflection and gradual implementation. This process is a kind of pilgrimage on which we set out in faith. It will demand your generous participation and leadership, but also the commitment of every priest and every community. We need to do this together.

With the support of the Council of Priests, I am proposing a five-year process of discerning and decision-making:

- 2025: Information-gathering, Most Urgent Issues, Criteria and Assessment
- 2026: Building a Vision for Embracing the Future with Hope
- 2027: Diocesan Synod: Preparation – Draft Plan, Process and Delegates
- 2028: Diocesan Synod: Assembly – Discernment and Decision on Plan
- 2029: Diocesan Synod: Implementation – Assessment and Evaluation

As we begin 2025, we want to initiate the process of Information-gathering, especially with the preparation of a Parish Profile for every community. We also need to identify more urgent issues which need to be faced quickly. Although the full preparation, adoption and implementation of a Diocesan Pastoral Plan will be a gradual process over the next five years, we are aware that there will be situations which will require attention and decisions much sooner.

In order to begin this process, I wish to provide you with some very important information:

- 1. Template for Developing a Parish Profile:** I ask that every Parish and Mission in the Diocese develop such a Profile. A template has already been provided to our parish priests, and these profiles will help us to plan with a common language and common information about each faith community. I ask every Pastor and Administrator to lead and guide the preparation of this profile. It would be especially helpful to involve at least the Parish and Finance Councils, as well as any other pastoral workers in the parish. This work is to be completed and conveyed to me by March 15, 2025.
- 2. Priestly Personnel Projections:** We have worked to develop the best possible projections for priests in the Diocese over the next decades. In 2025, we have 15 active priests belonging to the Diocese. In 5 years, we will have no more than 13 active priests belonging to the Diocese. In 10 years, we will have no more than 10 active priests belonging to the Diocese. Together with the assistance of 9 active priests who do not belong to the Diocese, we serve in 54 parishes and missions. At the present time, we also have a number of retired priests who help very generously to the extent that they are able.

As you can see, the situation in the Diocese is changing dramatically and quickly. Our priests are stretched to the limits in order to respond to the needs of the people. We are blessed with 4 seminarians, but even if all of these good young men persevere, they will not be able to replace the priests. We need to urgently explore new models for assuring the pastoral service of our parishes and missions in order to guarantee vibrant Faith Communities for the future.

- 3. Demographic Trends for the Area of the Diocese:** Census data indicates that although the total number of residents in the territory of the Diocese has not changed greatly in recent decades, the demographics have shifted from more rural communities to towns and cities, and many of our communities are aging rapidly. These shifts will have serious impacts on all our faith communities.
- 4. Church attendance Statistics for 2023 and 2024:** We believe it will be very helpful for effective planning to take into account the attendance in all of our Churches. For this reason, I remind all pastors that **we will continue to accurately record the numbers participating in parish Masses on weekends and holydays.**

We have not yet received all the financial and property information we need in order to present a report on the economic situation of the Diocese. We are still gathering up-to-date information, and analysing its implications. This information will be shared with you within the next few months. We encourage each Parish community to carefully and critically examine its financial situation. This reflection and ongoing dialogue is an essential part of the first year of our five-year plan outlined above.

The Council of Priests has asked that this information be shared with the parishioners of the Diocese. Sisters and brothers, there are many challenges ahead of us as we engage in this process. As pilgrims of hope in this Jubilee Year, we know that we are not alone! Accompanied by Jesus Christ, and in the power of the Holy Spirit, we go forward in faith so that we may embrace the future with hope.

We entrust this synodal journey into the hands of Mary our Mother, and we count on the prayers of St. Columbkille, great missionary and patron of our diocese. God is faithful, and he will never leave us to face these challenges alone.

I am deeply grateful for your dedication to your parish and to the whole Diocese. Your support of the priests and deacons serving parishes and missions is extraordinary. Your appreciation of our retired priests who continue to serve in ministry, prayer and witness is a real blessing. Thank you for your commitment and contributions to our process of discernment.

Your brother in Christ our Redeemer and Mary our Mother,

+ Michael Brehl, C.S.R.

✠ Michael Brehl, C.Ss.R.

Bishop of Pembroke