

In 1994 Pope John Paul convened a Synod of the Bishops of Africa in Rome to examine the work of evangelization in this continent. Mention was made of the great wealth of cultural values and the priceless human qualities which the Church in Africa can offer to humanity as a whole such as the profound religious sense of Africans and the importance they attach to the family. The Synod took the Church as God's family as its guiding idea for the evangelization of Africa and invited the local churches to develop a theology and practice around this.

### 3.2 2<sup>nd</sup> Africa Synod, October 2009.

At this Synod the bishops formulated 57 items of particular interest for Africa. Here in our region the bishops consider two of them of particular importance and relevance, namely family life and reconciliation. When the full account of the African Synod is published no doubt these two issues will receive more attention.

### 3.3 The Pastoral Forums of the 1990's

Four years before the turn of the Millennium Pope John Paul initiated a three year evangelization programme in honour of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit to end with a great celebration in the year 2000. Individual dioceses took up the challenge and organized their own pastoral responses as for example the Diocese of Bethlehem which issued its own pastoral initiative "Stand up and be counted" in 1998. In the meantime the Bishops' Conference organized a national consultation called a "Forum" for the year 2000 which produced three priorities, namely, Marriage and Family Life, Youth and Adult Faith Formation. As pastoral priorities they met with varying degrees of success but with the passage of time they tended to lose impetus.

## 4 LOOKING AT THE PRESENT.

A number of events overtook the carrying out of the Pastoral Plan. The events of 1993 and the tremendous changes which occurred in the political and economic and cultural sectors claimed the attention of the whole country including that of the Church. These changes signalled the death and end of a particular phase in South African history and the dawning of a new democratic era. It also had great repercussions in Church life. The ending of the group Areas Act changed the population mix in the cities for example, demanding new pastoral responses to meet the needs of new parishioners. With the removal of restrictions on travel and immigration, many African born missionaries arrived from other African countries who had little or no awareness of the pastoral policies of the local Church. In many cases the Pastoral Plan was seen as something that belonged to the past. Changing priests from one parish to another often occasioned a failure to follow up on initiatives. Changing personnel in pastoral councils had the same effect.

Since 1993, all the old problems associated with the Apartheid era slowly gave way to new ones such as an increase in crime, corruption, an unexpected upsurge in the proliferation of informal settlements and HIV/AIDS. At the same time there is the positive side to the advent of democracy and what that means to the people. There is a growing sense of ownership of the country, a sense of independence and a sense of personal dignity. The younger generation growing up has fewer memories of the apartheid years. They move and talk with a greater sense of self-confidence and are very aware of their rights and opportunities available to them.

The political, social and economic context for evangelization has changed radically. In 2007, 2008, and 2009, the Bishops held other Forums which began to explore more deeply the role of the Laity in the Church. The Vocation of the Laity as sharers in the three-fold mission of Jesus as priest, prophet and king focused strongly on the Laity as evangelizing the different strata of society and living out their priesthood in family, workplace, etc.

There has been the same experience in that what was learned and decided at these meetings did not succeed in getting far beyond the circle of participants. So it was decided that there would be a process of consultation with the whole Church with a view to charting the way forwards in the new South Africa.

# INTERDIOCESAN CONSULTATION 2012

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## GLOSSARY OF TERMS

**Vatican Council.** This was a council of the Church called by Pope John XXIII in 1963 and which lasted from 1964 - 1966.

**Synod.** A Synod is a special meeting called by the Pope to examine a specific issue. The bishop of a diocese can also hold a synod to discuss issues.

**Pastoral cycle** sometimes called the Pastoral Circle. This is a method to respond skilfully and effectively to the world around us in accordance with God's will. It is a tool for effective pastoral ministry.

**Forum (plural Fora),** this is the name given to a number of meetings organized by the Bishops' Conference in the 1990's and attended by representatives from every Diocese.

# INTERDIOCESAN CONSULTATION

## 1 Introduction

At the Plenary Meeting of the Bishops of Southern Africa in August 2009 it was decided to hold an Inter-diocesan Consultation in 2012. This is part one of a three stage consultation process. In this part we look at the past and the Pastoral Plan of 1989 and its outcomes. The Bishops also want to look at the present and see how things have changed in society and in the Church since 1989. We can ask, " is the Pastoral Plan still relevant today and what does it mean to be a Catholic today in Southern Africa?" What good things are happening in society and in the Church at present? It may be that many of the present generation may not be so familiar with the events of the past thirty years in the local Church so this little bit of background will enable them to have a grasp of the efforts made in the past by the Church to witness to the Gospel.