

THE DAY OF THE LORD: An Unleash the Gospel Pastoral Note

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

The Archdiocese of Detroit is in the midst of a “missionary conversion, a change in our culture, such that every person at every level of the Church, through personal encounter with Jesus Christ, embraces his or her identity as a son or daughter of God and, in the power of the Holy Spirit, is formed and sent forth as a joyful missionary disciple.”¹ This conversion requires a re-examining of the way we live collectively as a community of faith. The Church in Southeast Michigan is responding to graces of Synod 16 and actively seeking to Unleash the Gospel in our personal lives, our families and through our institutions.

One of the clearest calls from Synod 16 was for our Church to reclaim Sunday as a day set apart for the Lord, for family and for works of mercy. There are many necessary and worthwhile pursuits which occupy our time and energy all throughout the week but from the earliest days of the Church, Sunday was unique for Catholics. In our time, Sunday has slowly lost its pride of place. In the Archdiocese of Detroit, we are committed to setting aside this day as much as possible for God-centered pursuits.

First and foremost, Sunday is the day of the Resurrection of Jesus to new life. It is the day that definitively marked Jesus’ victory over sin and death, and it is the day that represents that in Jesus we too share in this same victory through our baptism. Therefore, Sunday is not an ordinary day, not just another day of the week. Every Sunday is a mini-Easter Sunday! It is right then to say that Sunday is truly the Lord’s Day.

The first way we keep Sunday holy is through our worship of the Triune God. This is done most perfectly in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, where we offer back to the Father the very life of the Son in the power of the Holy Spirit. For this reason, the disciples of Jesus made it a hallmark to gather as a community of believers on this day. The Code of Canon Law and the Catechism of the Catholic Church state that “on Sundays and other holy days of obligation the faithful are bound to participate in the Mass.”² This obligation to attend Sunday Mass – either on the day or on the vigil in the evening – is the most essential way we individually and collectively worship the Lord who gave himself for us.

Our communal worship flows out from the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass into many other areas: “Sharing in the Eucharist is the heart of Sunday, but the duty to keep Sunday holy cannot be reduced to this.”³ Eucharistic adoration, personal prayer, reciting the Rosary, time for catechesis and Bible studies, faith sharing groups and the like all are ways families and individuals honor the Lord’s Day beyond Sunday Mass. We are called to live this whole day in recognition that we are God’s people, intimately united to him through the blood of Jesus, in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Our rest on this day also imitates the first “rest” of God after the work of creation: “he rested on the seventh day from all the work he had undertaken.”⁴ God teaches us the value of work — through creation, in the very life of Jesus and in the lives of the saints — but he also teaches us the value of rest. Too often in our world we are valued by how busy we are. This “cult of busyness” is not of the Lord. Taking the Lord’s Day not to be busy with the affairs of the world but rather to rest in more important pursuits honors God and helps us to show him more perfectly to our world. Southeast Michigan needs men and women who can manifest the presence of God through their work and through their rest.

When work becomes the most important thing in our lives, we value ourselves and others by what they can contribute rather than by who they are. This leads to devaluing of human life which Pope St. John Paul II called the “culture of death,” and which Pope Francis calls the “throwaway culture.”⁵ We are not valued by what we can contribute to society. Instead our worth comes from what God has done for us: We are made in his image and likeness, and Christ has died for us. When we choose to make Sunday a day of rest, we choose to renounce these false cultures and live as part of Christ’s band of disciples.

Keeping holy Sunday also reminds us of our eternal destiny; it allows us to keep our eyes fixed on Jesus. We put aside the worldly pursuits which are necessary for this life but too often become a distraction from what is ultimately important: “Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given you besides.”⁶ Sunday is a day to rest from work so that we have the time and leisure to pursue things that do not have worldly utility. Unless we take this regular time away from these matters, we will easily and quickly lose sight of our ultimate destiny. Our attention needs to be intentionally interrupted from our earthly work to call to mind the reality that we are joint heirs with Christ of the things of heaven.

For our local Church to be faithful to the graces of Synod 16, we also must commit to seeing Sunday as a day when families can be together. The vision for families laid out in *Unleash the Gospel* requires time set aside from many other good activities so that families can be together, free from other distractions. Some of the particular aspects of Sunday family time include family Scripture time, the family Rosary, making use of parish activities together as a family and “reclaiming Sunday” through Mass and a shared meal. For some families, this time together has been marked by “technology-free family time” on Sunday, when parents and children set aside their phones and other devices and commit to spending uninterrupted family time together.

Finally, Sunday is the day when the Holy Spirit was poured out in power upon the disciples of Jesus. In fact, John Paul II called Sunday a “weekly Pentecost.”⁷ Therefore, Sunday is a fitting day to grow in our faith. Catechesis for young people and for adults is not out of place on this day. It also is a day to witness to our faith. That first Pentecost saw the apostles boldly proclaiming Jesus as Lord. As we seek to live a new Pentecost, we should be witnesses to God’s mercy,

particularly on the Lord's Day. This means we should look for opportunities to share our faith with others on this day. We do this in our words of kindness, by sharing our faith with others and through works of charity, especially to the less fortunate.

In the Foundational Conviction section of *Unleash the Gospel*, I wrote that "this missionary conversion" calls for a "strikingly countercultural way of living." Living Sunday more radically and intentionally as God's people will help us do this. It will help us to root our lives in prayer and the sacraments. It will create the space for us to demonstrate unusually gracious hospitality and to include those on the margins. And it will remind us of God's presence even in difficult and stressful times, so that we can be Jesus' band of joyful missionary disciples in Southeast Michigan.

What follows here are details about one particular way we are committed to this "strikingly countercultural way of living." After prayerful consultation with the presbyterate of Detroit and responding to what I believe is the call of the Holy Spirit through Synod 16, we in the Archdiocese of Detroit will cease sporting events on Sunday. This means that competitive athletic programs in the grade school and high school levels are called to no longer play games or conduct practices on the Lord's Day. In the months ahead, we will offer a number of resources to assist families in their own practice of keeping holy the Lord's Day.

In shifting away from the hustle of required sporting activities on Sunday, we will reclaim this holy day and create more time for families to choose activities that prioritize time spent with each other and our Lord. As the Catholic Church, our primary role is to form disciples. Informed by Synod 16 and inspired by the Holy Spirit, we look forward to abundant blessings as we seek to abide by our God's teaching to keep holy the Lord's Day.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Archbishop Allen H. Vigneron

[1] *Unleash the Gospel*, Foundational Conviction, Col. 2:12.

[2] Code of Canon Law, 1247; CCC 2180.

[3] *Dies Domini*, 52.

[4] Gen. 2:2.

[5] *Evangelium Vitae*, 12 and *Laudato Si*, 16.

[6] Mt. 6:33.

[7] *Dies Domini*, 28.

Frequently Asked Questions

The Day of the Lord

What is a pastoral note?

Following the Pentecost 2017 release of Archbishop Vigneron's pastoral letter, *Unleash the Gospel*, the Archbishop committed to release a series of "Pastoral Notes" expanding upon the Spirit-led insight found in the letter. The Church's teaching and Sacred Scripture are rich, but often not well understood. These notes are a way for our Archbishop to dive deeper into the beauty and foundation of our beliefs and to help support our movement to Unleash the Gospel and become a missionary archdiocese.

According to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*: "Bishops, with priests as co-workers, have as their first task 'to preach the Gospel of God to all men,' in keeping with the Lord's command." Additionally, bishops "'are authentic teachers' of the apostolic faith 'endowed with the authority of Christ'" (888). By preaching and writing pastoral letters and accompanying "notes," Archbishop Vigneron is fulfilling his sacred duties to the faithful in the Archdiocese of Detroit and beyond.

How many pastoral notes has Archbishop Vigneron written?

The newest pastoral note, *The Day of the Lord*, is the fourth pastoral note written to expand upon the teachings in Archbishop Vigneron's pastoral letter, *Unleash the Gospel*. Others include:

- *Agents for the New Creation: A Pastoral Note on Christ's Victory over the Sins of Racism, June 18, 2018*
- *Living Christ's Love: A Pastoral Note released on the 50th anniversary of Humanae Vitae, July 25, 2018*
- *An Act of Mercy and Faith: A Pastoral Note on Christian Burial, October 8, 2018*

Are there more notes coming and what are the topics?

Archbishop Vigneron has plans to write more pastoral notes, further expanding upon his *Unleash the Gospel* teachings. Future notes will cover a variety of topics, such as vocations.

No Sports on Sunday Policy

How was this policy created?

Unleash the Gospel – the pastoral letter, the fruit of Synod 16 – called for several “Action Steps” to fulfill the movement of the Holy Spirit we witnessed during the Synod. One of these action steps was to cease sporting events on Sunday. This was a theme that had been brought up by parents and pastors for many years, and it emerged again as a clear direction for the Archdiocese of Detroit during Synod 16. To allow for this new policy to be implemented smoothly, a timeline was set for it to take effect at the beginning of the 2019-2020 academic year.

Implementing this policy has been an intentional process involving many key constituents over the last two years. Beginning in June 2017, all seasonal meetings with Athletic Directors included notification of this upcoming change in policy. Next, we created a task force with diverse representatives including pastors, coaches, families with and without children in sports programs, principals, representatives from the Catholic High School League (CHSL) and the Catholic Youth Organization (CYO), and the Office of Evangelization, Catechesis and Schools. This committee reflected on the pastoral letter’s Action Step 3.3C and developed a plan to fulfill its call to cease sporting activities on Sundays. Per Canon (Church) law, this policy was presented to and reviewed with the Presbyterial Council in February 2019, where it ultimately was approved. Prior to that meeting, the draft policy was sent to all priests in the Archdiocese to solicit input.

In the Catholic Church, our primary role is to form disciples. As the Archbishop shared in his recently released pastoral note: This is about living in a counter-cultural way that witnesses to our faith. We are confident this is what the Lord wants, and we look forward to abundant blessings as we seek to abide by the Lord’s teaching to keep holy the Sabbath.

Will our student athletes still play full schedules when this policy is implemented?

Yes. While the new policy is deeply rooted in our calling to reclaim Sunday as a day of rest and worship of our Lord, practically speaking, it is a matter of rescheduling. The Catholic High School League and Catholic Youth Organization have already been working carefully to ensure teams enjoy a full line-up of practices, scrimmages and games, taking advantage of a Monday through Saturday schedule.

Are youth sports still a priority in the Archdiocese of Detroit?

Absolutely! We continue to embrace sports and athleticism. Sports teach perseverance, discipline, teamwork and the knowledge that it takes effort to improve. Perhaps most importantly, physical activity is a key to our health; Catholics consider our bodies temples of the

Holy Spirit and we are encouraged to take care of ourselves. And of course, watching sports is a favorite pastime of countless people regardless of religious affiliation.

Here in the Archdiocese of Detroit, we have a vibrant Catholic Youth Organization program for our grade schools and the Catholic High School League for high school athletes. Our teams play public, charter and other parochial schools. This commitment to youth sports will remain unchanged as we implement our new policy. In shifting away from sports on Sunday, we simply reclaim this holy day as one for worship, rest and family time – not one for rushing to various sporting competitions.

Will other activities (scouting events, youth group meetings, etc.) also be banned on Sundays?

At this time, informed and inspired by the pastoral letter, we are focused on shifting sports away from Sundays to encourage families to keep holy the Lord’s Day. Beyond this, discretion is always encouraged regarding activities that occur on Sundays. We encourage families to leave Sundays primarily for celebrating Mass together, caring for others, prayer and other faith-based activities and family meals. The family nucleus is vitally important in today’s secular world. Rest and enjoyment are good for everyone, and we have faith the Lord will bless this time spent with Him.

We anticipate that some activities, such as service projects, youth group activities and faith formation could be appropriate ways to celebrate and remember Christ’s death and resurrection. Ultimately, by removing the requirement of sporting activities, we leave more time for families to choose activities that prioritize time spent with each other and our Lord.

Have other dioceses moved away from having sports on Sundays?

Yes. Other dioceses and leagues have moved toward limiting sports on Sunday or encouraging coaches to schedule activities on other days.

Who will enforce this policy?

The policy will be enforced by CHSL and CYO leadership. We know that any society cannot be governed by policies alone, so our focus will remain on sparking a tangible “change in culture” to orient all our parishes, schools and communities toward our Christ-centered mission. We are confident that since it is a direct result of prayer, broad consultation and reliance on the Holy Spirit, this change will bear fruit for all those involved.

Does this policy apply for games played against public school teams?

Yes. Officials with the Catholic Youth Organization and Catholic High School League will work closely with their counterparts in the public school systems to arrange for games to be scheduled

on days other than Sunday. Exceptions may be made for state-level tournament competitions that we are not able to re-schedule.

Do other religions ban sports on Sunday?

We know that the Michigan High School Athletic Association doesn't schedule games on Sundays, as well as members of some religions, such as Calvinists. In addition, we have in the past honored the Sabbath of our Jewish brothers and sisters by ensuring games against the Frankel Jewish Academy are not scheduled between sunset Friday and sunset Saturday. This new policy is about extending that observance to our own Holy Day.

Will outside organizations/leagues be permitted to use/rent school property for their games or practices taking place on Sundays?

Situations such as these will be examined and considered on a case-by-case basis.

Endnotes

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