The Diocesan Synod

A Brief Summary of the Institution of the Diocesan Synod and
A Preview of our Second Diocesan Synod
Definition of a Synod

• An assembly or “coming together” of the local Church.

• **Code of Canon Law**
  
  • **c. 460** A diocesan synod is a group of selected priests and other members of the Christian faithful of a particular church who offer assistance to the diocesan bishop for the good of the whole diocesan community...
Purpose of a Synod

- What’s the **purpose** of a Diocesan Synod?
  1. **Unity** – brings the Diocese together
  2. **Reform and Renewal**
     - Teaching
     - Spirituality
  3. **Assess/Implement Best Practices**
     - Pastoral
     - Financial
  4. **Communicate Info** – from Rome/USCCB
  5. **Legislate practical Norms**
     - To aid: Pastors, Vicars, Business Managers, Parish Secretaries, Diocesan Officials, Lay faithful, etc…
Purpose of a Synod

- **What a Synod is not…**
  - A Diocesan Synod is not a ‘be all to end all’ pastoral plan
  - Rather, a Diocesan Synod is intended to meet the current practical needs of the Church and is to be renewed when those needs change (~8-10 years)
  - A Synod provides (when needed) pastoral and administrative ‘housecleaning’.
First Diocesan Synods

- Rooted in 2 ancient practices
  - The presbyterate meeting to share in the governance of the local church
  - Bishops of an area/province gathering to address issues of common concern
- Why were they needed?
  - **Heresies** threatened Church Teaching
  - **Schisms** threatened Church Unity
  - **Lax Behavior** (clergy:) threatened Evangelization
First Diocesan Synods

- Historically, Dioceses were more so municipal, city-centered entities with the Bishop and his clergy being located very closely geographically.
- When Christianity spread at an increased rate after the time of Constantine, dioceses became geographically much larger.
- This development brought about the birth of the Diocesan Synod.
- Clergy and Synodal Witnesses were sent out to investigate and report back about needs for correction and reform.
By the 12th Century, Ecclesiastical law mandated that synods be held annually to enable the local bishop to promulgate the norms of provincial councils to his presbyterate.

Council of Trent (1563) also legislated the mandatory annual celebration of diocesan synods with the intention that they be used as a tool in the Counter-Reformation.

Pope Benedict XIV in the 1740’s strongly discouraged lay involvement unless custom of a local church provided otherwise.

N.B. Discouragement of lay involvement was likely a response to secular government officials trying to exert influence over ecclesiastical affairs.
Who can be a part of a Synod?

**1917 Code**
- Vicar General
- The canons of cathedral churches or diocesan consultors
- The rector of a diocesan Seminary, at least the major one
- The vicars forane
- The deputies of any collegial church chosen from the membership by the Chapter of the same church
- **The pastors in the city in which the Synod is celebrated**
- At least one pastor from each vicariate forane
- Abbots of governance and one of the Superiors of each clerical religious institute present in the diocese
- **Any others the Bishop chooses.** They have full voting rights unless otherwise stated in their invitation.

**1983 Code**
- coadjutor bishop and auxiliary bishops;
- vicars general, episcopal vicars, and the judicial vicar;
- canons of the cathedral church;
- the rector of the diocesan major seminary;
- members of the presbyteral council;
- vicars forane;
- lay members of the Christian faithful, even members of institutes of consecrated life, chosen by the pastoral council or, where this council does not exist, by the diocesan bishop;
- at least one presbyter from each vicariate forane
- some superiors of religious institutes and of societies of apostolic life chosen by the bishop.
How often should a Synod be held?  
Comparison of 1917 and 1983 Codes

1917 Code

• Can. 356 §1 A synod is to be celebrated **every 10 years** and treat those things that refer to the needs or utility of the clergy and people of a particular diocese. (Bismarck has had only one Synod in 1924)

• §2 Bishop can convoke synod for all dioceses in his car if he rules them principally as one.

1983 Code

• Can. 461 §1. A synod is to be celebrated in individual particular churches **when circumstances suggest it** in the judgment of the diocesan bishop *after* he has heard the presbyteral council.

• §2. Bishop can convoke synod for all dioceses in his car if he rules them principally as one.
1st Diocesan Synod - 1924

- Promoter: Msgr. Raith
- Secretaries: Frs. Aberle and Weber
- November 12, 1924 at St. Mary’s Pro-Cathedral

1st Session: “The Bishop reviewed the proposed Statutes of the Diocese, a copy of which had been sent to every priest some time in October. These Statutes had been discussed by the priests of every Deanery at a Conference held October 29th, and many suggestions had been proposed to the Bishop through the secretaries of these Conferences and by letters of some priests.”

2nd Session: Account of funds for the support of sick priests; progress report for new Cathedral; Address on the principal duties of the priesthood
1st Diocesan Synod - 1924

- Noteworthy:

  - Ch. 1 - Intro, #3: “Statutes...have no other purpose than to apply the Church laws to the peculiar conditions existing within the Diocese and to remind the priests of some regulations which may have been neglected by some pastors.”

  - Ch. 2 - Clergy, #2: “We strictly forbid priests to visit balls, dances, theatres and unbecoming shows, also public picture shows, *unless* they are evidently of a high moral standard and truly instructive.”
Ch. 2 - Clergy, #5: “We order for at least five years after Ordination, two **yearly EXAMINATIONS** of the young priests take place, orally and in writing...dogmatic theology, moral theology, Scripture, Canon Law, Church history, and Liturgy.”

Ch. 2 - Clergy, #7: “On account of the very high Seminary expenses all priests who have been helped by the Diocese during the years of study are requested to **pay back** into the Seminary funds ONE HALF of the money expended by the Diocese for their benefit.”
1st Diocesan Synod - 1924

- Ch. 5 – Religious Instruction, #2: Preaching – “The young priests [are to] preserve during the first ten years after ordination their written preparations of sermons for our inspection whenever we may demand them.”

- Ch. 5, #3: “At all early Masses on Sundays and Holy Days of obligation an instruction of AT LEAST 10 minutes, at the parochial or High Mass a sermon of NOT LESS THAN about 20 minutes and usually not more than 30 minutes must be preached.”
1\textsuperscript{st} Diocesan Synod - 1924

- Ch. 7 – The Holy Eucharist, #6: “The \textbf{Mass stipends} for this diocese are: For private Mass $1, for Highmass $5, for Funeral Requiem Highmass or for Nuptial Highmass $10, for Solemn Highmass $25.”

- Ch. 7, #10: “We strictly forbid the use of coal oil and all so-called candles made of mineral matters for the sanctuary lamp. The only time when the use of such may be tolerated is the extreme COLD in winter when vegetable oils refuse to burn.”
1st Diocesan Synod - 1924

- Ch. 12 – Temporal Goods, #4: “The **Cathedraticum**, for diocesan needs, an assessment, due November 1st. The **Seminaristicum**…to be paid at Easter.”

- Ch. 12, #5: “The **annual salary** allowed to pastors of a parish for his personal support *and* expenses shall NOT EXCEED the sum of $1200…Assistants are allowed to receive $400 the year, and another $400 is allowed the pastor for the household expenses of each assistant.”
  - $1200 = $16,000 today
Topics for 2\textsuperscript{nd} Diocesan Synod

- The People of God
  - Diocesan Organization, Clerics, Vicars Forane, Pastors, etc.
  - Chaplains, Religious, Lay Faithful

- The Sanctifying Office
  - All Sacraments, w/ emphasis on Marriage, and Sacramentals
  - Sacred Places and Times
  - The Most Holy Eucharist

- The Teaching Office
  - Preaching, Social Communication, Catholic Schools, Religious Ed.

- Temporal Goods $
## Timeline for 2nd Diocesan Synod

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Diocesan Pastoral Plan</td>
<td>2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A thorough listening session</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Synod Remote Preparation</td>
<td>JULY &amp; AUG ‘15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Synod Preparatory Commission</td>
<td>SEPT &amp; OCT ‘15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Synod Prep. Commission work</td>
<td>NOV ’15 thru MAR ‘16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Synod Directory Drafting</td>
<td>APRIL ’16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Directory Publication</td>
<td>MAY thru AUGUST ‘16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observation Deadline</td>
<td>SEPTEMBER ‘16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deanery Meetings?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Convocation and Member Appoint.</td>
<td>OCTOBER ’16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solemn Celebration of Synod</td>
<td>NOVEMBER ’16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effective date</td>
<td>Ash Wednesday ‘17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>