

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.

Middle Ages

- 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.**”

1st Diocesan Synod - 1924

- 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.”

1st Diocesan Synod - 1924

- Ch. 7 – The Holy Eucharist, #6: “The **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 2nd 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

- Diocesan Pastoral Plan 2010
 - A thorough listening session
- Synod Remote Preparation JULY & AUG '15
- Synod Preparatory Commission SEPT & OCT '15

- Synod Prep. Commission work NOV '15 thru MAR '16
- Synod Directory Drafting APRIL '16
- Directory Publication MAY thru AUGUST '16
- Observation Deadline SEPTEMBER '16
 - Deanery Meetings?
- Convocation and Member Appoint. OCTOBER '16
- Solemn Celebration of Synod NOVEMBER '16
- Effective date Ash Wednesday '17