

LETTER AND DECREE
from
His Eminence
Donald Cardinal Wuerl



ANNOUNCING THE FIRST SYNOD
of the
ARCHDIOCESE OF WASHINGTON

In Anticipation of the Archdiocese's
75TH ANNIVERSARY



Dear Brothers and Sisters in the Lord,

Pentecost Sunday, May 19, 2013, marks the beginning, in a formal manner, of the preparatory phase of our Archdiocesan Synod which concludes on Pentecost Sunday, June 8, 2014.

On August 15, 2012, I announced my intention to convene a synod of the Archdiocese of Washington to coincide with the 75th anniversary of our archdiocese in 2014. This jubilee provides us an opportunity to rejoice in the past accomplishments of the Church of Washington and also to plan for the future. Looking forward challenges us to embrace the New Evangelization which is the call to deepen our knowledge of our faith so that we are more confident in its truth in order that we can share the Good News with those who have not heard or have forgotten it.

Since I last wrote to you on the synod, much has happened in our local Church and the Church Universal, and I thought now would be a good time to reflect together on the context for our Archdiocesan Synod and to review the recent extraordinary events.

The wider context for our synod is, of course, the call to the New Evangelization unfolding throughout the Church everywhere. In October of 2012, we received fresh emphasis, inspiration and guidance in this important matter as Pope Benedict XVI addressed this topic with a month-long meeting of bishops in Rome, the Synod on the New Evangelization for the Transmission of the Christian Faith. During my participation in these meetings I was struck by how the need to grow in faith and confidence so we can invite others to know Christ is not limited to our country or even our hemisphere. This awareness is experienced throughout the world.

We are also within the Year of Faith, initiated by Pope Benedict XVI, which invites us to reflect more profoundly on our Catholic faith as we attempt to live it more fully. During this year many archdiocesan efforts have helped the Church reach those who may have been away from the practice of the faith. Initiatives such as *Find the Perfect Gift*, *The Light Is On for You* and *Living Catholic* have touched people in new ways.

At the end of February 2013, Pope Benedict XVI resigned as Bishop of Rome and Universal Pastor of the Church and Pope Francis was elected to this office. Since the evening that Pope Francis walked onto the loggia overlooking Saint Peter's Square, he has shown us the model for the New Evangelization in both his words and actions.

All of these events reaffirm the idea that this is a providential moment and one that encourages an Archdiocesan Synod.

From January 2013 preparatory work of the synod has been underway and a *Directory for the Archdiocesan Synod* developed. Since a local synod is defined as "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," individual members to be directly involved in this undertaking, following the directives of the Code of Canon Law, have been identified.

A goal of the Archdiocesan Synod is to give the Christian faithful an opportunity to participate in the work of our local Church as we review its mission in manifesting the kingdom of God here in our community. Thus, all of the faithful throughout this local Church have been invited to participate in person in listening sessions and through online communications in order to take a look at the life of our archdiocesan Church, to evaluate areas where ministry is successful and where there may be need for more attention so that we can better prepare ourselves to carry forward our work in the future.

Today, on this Solemnity of Pentecost, the official participants in this synod, which include representatives of each part of the archdiocese, begin the task now of evaluating what we have heard in parish and online listening sessions, bringing their own experiences to bear as we now turn our attention to prioritizing areas of ministry. In particular, the New Evangelization will provide the lens to discern and then make recommendations that will strengthen the faith, confidence and ability of this Church to share Christ with others. This synod would also be the setting in which existing diocesan policies would be reviewed and, if necessary, updated.

Mindful of the Holy See's *Instruction on Diocesan Synods* and the provisions of the Code of Canon Law, the participating members of the synod have been identified, invited to this task and are convened today. Here in the Cathedral of Saint Matthew the Apostle the members include the Auxiliary Bishops, Episcopal Vicars, the Judicial Vicar, members of the Priest Council, Deans, representatives of religious communities located in the archdiocese, members of the Archdiocesan Pastoral Council and selected clergy and lay members from all 14 Deaneries throughout the five counties and the District of Columbia that comprise this archdiocesan Church.

Today I invite all here present in the Cathedral Church to witness the commissioning of the synodal participants and to pray for them and this archdiocesan Church as they begin this very special work.

Synodal sessions will be held from today to Pentecost 2014 to reflect on all the observations that have been received and to prepare the conclusions of the synod. The final moment of the synod will be the gathering on Pentecost 2014 when the priorities of the archdiocesan Church and any declarations and statutes will be promulgated.

The frame of reference for the reflections and discussions within the synod will include the five areas of Church life often referred to as the Indicators of Vitality. Since this will be the first synod in our archdiocesan history we will have an opportunity to reflect on the many accomplishments of our particular Church and to propose ways to build on them in the future. We will examine each of the following five areas.

Worship

The heart of the Church is the celebration of the sacraments, particularly the Eucharist. From the Eucharist flows all the worship, prayer, acts of charity and faith formation. Possible areas for discussion may include full, active and conscious participation in liturgy; homilies that are appropriate to the needs and cares of Catholics today; the quality of music and singing; the cultural needs of a diverse Church, and parish involvement in the Rite of Election.

Education

Forming the lay faithful for mission depends on a variety of educational programs. Assessing the Church's ability to teach the faith to parishioners of all ages is essential. Possible areas for discussion may include effective formation for adults who have not been catechized; Catholic schools and religious education programs that successfully transmit the faith; catechetical programs for adults and children with special needs; ways in which the Church teaches, and the importance of religious liberty.

Community

Building community within the parish and with those outside of it is reflected in the Church's ability to make all Catholics feel at home and to invite and welcome those who are inactive Catholics and all people who seek a relationship with Jesus Christ. Possible areas for discussion may include the qualities of a welcoming parish that prepares Catholics for mission; helping Catholics understand their baptismal obligation to share Christ with others in the world, and discernment of charisms of the laity to aid them in parish ministry and in perfecting the temporal order.

Service

This dimension of vitality assesses the ways in which the Church calls Catholics to serve those in need. Furthermore, it evaluates the Church's practical commitment to bringing the Gospel to bear on the issues of the day in a way that

supports the mission of the Church. Possible areas of discussion may include the extent to which the spiritual and corporal works of mercy are carried out by individual Catholics; how Catholics serve the poor through Catholic Charities, the Saint Vincent de Paul Society and local parish initiatives; sharing the Church's social teaching through preaching and catechesis; involvement in Catholic efforts to defend life, advance the preferential option for the poor and protect religious liberties.

Administration/Stewardship

The ability to carry out the mission of the Church depends on strong leadership and sound stewardship. Possible areas for discussion may include the fostering and promotion of leadership in parishes with respect to each Catholic's role within the Church; formation on the protection and advancement of religious liberty; management of the temporal goods of the Church; and the promotion of donation of time, talent and treasure.

May this formal act of the Synod of the Archdiocese of Washington and the commissioning of the participants be a moment of grace and a time when we renew our faith and our commitment to respond with open hearts to the Holy Spirit's inspiration and motivation.

In taking this step for the greater honor and glory of God and the good of our archdiocesan Church, I thank you for all you do to build up this Church so that it is truly a manifestation of the kingdom of God in our community. May the Holy Spirit guide and enlighten our entire archdiocesan Church as we begin this work.

Faithfully in Christ,

Cardinal Donald Wuerl
Archbishop of Washington

May 19, 2013
Solemnity of Pentecost

DECREE

For the glory of God and the good of Christ's Holy Church in Washington, and in order to provide the opportunity to review past accomplishments of this local Church and to plan for the future, as well as to establish stable reference points for ecclesial life and practice, and in light of the call of the Universal Church to the New Evangelization and in anticipation of the 75th Anniversary of the establishment of the Archdiocese of Washington, the following actions have been taken with regard to an Archdiocesan Synod:

- At the request of His Eminence Cardinal Donald Wuerl, Archbishop of Washington, on October 6, 2011 the Administrative Board of the Archdiocese of Washington discussed the concept of an Archdiocesan Synod. Based upon the favorable response;
- On October 12, 2011, the concept of having an Archdiocesan Synod was presented to the Priest Council of the Archdiocese of Washington. Based upon the favorable response;
- On December 10, 2011, the concept of having an Archdiocesan Synod was presented to the Pastoral Council of the Archdiocese of Washington. Based upon the favorable response;
- On December 14, 2011, the Administrative Board of the Archdiocese of Washington reviewed comments and suggestions offered at the previously noted consultative meetings. Based upon the favorable response;
- On January 11, 2012, the comments and suggestions offered at the previously noted consultative meetings, together with a proposed structure, timeline and recommended committee structures and nominating process for both a pastoral and canonical preparatory commission, were presented to the Priest Council. Based upon a favorable response;
- During January and February of 2012, Cardinal Wuerl met with the priests of the archdiocese in the context of deanery meetings throughout the archdiocese. Based upon widespread support for a synod;
- During Lent of 2012 and ending on March 31, 2012, pastors working through their deans nominated nearly 300 members of the lay faithful to serve on the Archdiocesan Synod. Following this positive development;
- On July 9, 2012, Cardinal Wuerl presided over an introductory session where nominees to both the pastoral and canonical preparatory commissions received information on the synod. Based upon their favorable response;
- On August 15, 2012, the Solemnity of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary into Heaven, Cardinal Wuerl wrote to the faithful of the Archdiocese of Washington indicating his intent to call for an Archdiocesan Synod that would also coincide with the 75th Anniversary of the Archdiocese in 2014. In this letter, it was noted that the synod would serve as an opportunity to hear from the faithful as part of a review of the life of the Church in which the major areas of reflection would include, but not be limited to, Worship, Education, Community, Service and Administration / Stewardship. In view of that step;
- On September 8, 2012, the members of the two preparatory commissions gathered to review and improve catechetical materials developed for parish listening sessions to be conducted across the archdiocese and online through the archdiocesan website. Based upon the meeting's favorable outcome;
- Between October 1, 2012 and May 19, 2013, parish and regional listening sessions were conducted in parishes across the Archdiocese of Washington and provision was made for online contributions to this information gathering phase. This process resulted in the gathering, collating and analysis of those reports that highlight the areas of success and those in need of improvement;

Therefore,
pursuant to Canon 462, §1, I initiate this Preparatory Phase of our Archdiocesan Synod commencing on the Solemnity of Pentecost, May 19, 2013. To assist in these preparations I hereby appoint a General Preparatory Commission, a Pastoral Preparatory Commission and a Canonical Preparatory Commission with appropriate sub-committees.

At this time, I also announce my intention to convoke the final session of the Synod of the Archdiocese of Washington on the Solemnity of Pentecost, June 8, 2014.

Given this sixteenth day of May, two thousand and thirteen in the Archdiocese of Washington.

Cardinal Donald Wuerl
Archbishop of Washington

Jane G. Belford
Chancellor