

## WHAT IS A SYNOD?

The word “synod” (pronounced /sínəd/) comes from the Greek word *synodos*, meaning “an assembly,” an ecclesiastical gathering under the hierarchical authority of a bishop in a diocese. The assembly can include clergy, religious sisters and brothers, and lay persons. Synods are called to discuss and recommend decisions on matters of faith, morals, discipline or governance. Synod members advise the bishop.

Synods are rare and exceptionally historic events. Only 10 synods been called in Detroit since the Church here was founded in 1701, all of them after the Diocese of Detroit was established in 1833 by Pope Gregory XVI. (At that time the diocese included all of Michigan, Wisconsin, Minnesota and portions of the Dakotas east of the Mississippi River!) Each Detroit synod was called to address particular issues of immediate concern to the local church. The issues typically included diocesan and parish structure and governance, and the implementation of the teachings of various provincial, national or global councils.

Bishop LeFevre convened two synods in Detroit (1859 & 1862) to address regulation of clergy and to implement council decrees. Bishop Borgess convened five synods between 1873 and 1886, covering establishing parish schools, supporting charitable organizations, and constructing a new cathedral. Cardinal Mooney convened two synods (1944 & 1954), covering the liturgy and the teaching office of the Church.

Cardinal Dearden called one synod in April 1966, shortly after the close of the Second Vatican Council. This synod, completed in May 1969 and referred to as “Synod 69,” was convened to implement certain aspects of Vatican II, in particular the “Universal Call to Holiness” in the Dogmatic Constitution of the Church (*Lumen Gentium*). Synod 69 had substantial lay involvement and substantial impact in promoting ecumenism, restructuring diocesan offices, enhancing lay participation in parish, vicariate and diocesan councils, and in requiring processes of accountability. Synod 69 is why we have a parish Pastoral Council, a Finance Council, and Commissions for faith formation, worship, Christian service and stewardship.

Synod 16, the most recent in the Archdiocese of Detroit (AOD), was called at Pentecost in 2015 by Archbishop Allen Vigneron and met from November 18 to 20, 2016. (It is referred to as “Synod 16” following how Synod 69 was named.) The Pastoral Letter ***Unleash the Gospel*** was written by Archbishop Vigneron to express his discernment of the movement of the Holy Spirit in Synod 16. The Letter was based on all the discussions, debates and recommendations of Synod members. The particular concerns addressed by Synod 16 and the preparations that led up to Synod 16 are detailed in the Pastoral Letter.

Briefly, the Archbishop is responding to the crisis in the church in Detroit and southeastern Michigan brought on by changing demographics, economic challenges, and especially by prevailing secular cultural trends of materialism, scientism, and moral relativism. He recognized that the AOD is not supposed to be in circumstances that force closing parishes. Rather, parishes and the AOD should be growing and not struggling in some “maintenance” mode. The Church in Detroit should be in “mission” mode, spreading the Gospel. The Archbishop desires “to change the DNA of the church ... and of the culture”, to return the world to Jesus Christ, and to do so by energizing the New Evangelization called for by St. Pope John Paul the Great in the decades following Vatican II.

Synod 16 was called after years of intense, prayerful preparation. There was a year of prayer for a New Pentecost across the AOD in 2014-2015, the faithful together praying for a new outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Dynamic Eucharistic Adoration services called “Come, Encounter Christ” were held in 30 parishes across the AOD in 2015-2016. A profoundly significant Mass for Pardon was held in October, 2016 to repent on behalf of the AOD for “... sins committed over the generations by our bishops, priests, lay ministers, institutions, and all the faithful.” There was a year-long discernment and prayerful preparation by the AOD and Synod 16 members. Scrutiny of over 11,000 comments collected from surveys and from parishioners in town hall meetings, including here at STM, formed the material for deliberation at Synod 16.

***Unleash the Gospel*** arose from Archbishop Vigneron’s prayerful discernment of all the debate and discussion at Synod 16, laying out the road for us to follow to become joyful missionary disciples.

Again, what is a “synod”? The Greek word “synodos” itself comes from two Greek words for “together” (*syn*) and “road” (*hodos*). This means that the people of Detroit, shepherded by Archbishop Vigneron and with his priests in each parish, are “on the road together,” moving forward to meet the challenges we face. Guided by *Unleash the Gospel*, we are called to share the Gospel with everyone in southeastern Michigan and promote life- and culture-changing encounters with Jesus Christ in His Church.