



Archdiocese of Winnipeg

Office of the Archbishop

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February 22, 2016

The Feast of the Chair of St. Peter

Dear Brothers and Sisters of the Archdiocese of Winnipeg,

I wish to announce to you news of great joy! As we move into the next 100 years of the Archdiocese of Winnipeg, there is a vital need to plan for the future together and determine new pastoral directions for our faith community. 2015 was a momentous year for us! During the past year we saw the conclusion of the 10 Year Pastoral Vision and we celebrated our 100th Anniversary in many marvelous ways. We now look to the years ahead and to do this effectively and well, I have, after a period of consultation, decided to call a Synod for the Archdiocese of Winnipeg. This will be our first Synod and, having celebrated our Centennial Year, now is a wonderful time to begin this process.

What is a Synod?

In the Church's Canon Law (c. 460) we read that the purpose of a diocesan synod is to foster the good of the entire diocesan community by calling together the clergy, religious and laity of the local church to deliberate on the pastoral needs of the diocese. Of all the institutions found in the Church to provide better governance, the diocesan synod is foremost. In a diocesan synod, which lasts several years, the bishop exercises his office of governing the church entrusted to his care. Through a consultative process, he determines the themes, questions and priorities to be discussed. In Canon Law we further learn that all those who participate in the synod, assist the bishop by freely and sincerely expressing their opinions relative to the questions under consideration. At the end of the process, the bishop determines which of the recommendations made by the Synod will be accepted and promulgated in the diocese.

Pope Francis calls a diocesan synod, an opportunity to walk together – a truly *“wonderful experience where people walk and journey through history together with Our Lord who walks among us. We do not walk alone.”*

Why are we holding a Synod?

There are good reasons why a diocesan synod is being called at this time. At its core, a diocesan synod is an exercise of the bishop's ministry of governance of the local church and an exercise of communion among the People of God. Let us remember that the People of God are not just a collection of disciples, but rather they are a priestly community established by Christ and led by the bishop who is the foundation of unity within the local church. Pope Francis has said that the Church must become a more synodal church where we not only walk together but we talk together. He poses questions such as: *How do we walk? How does our diocese walk? Does it walk together? And what am I doing so that it may truly walk in unity?*

In addition to assisting the bishop in governance, planning for the future and building a strong sense of diocesan unity, our synod comes at an important time in our archdiocesan history. We have just celebrated our 100th Anniversary and we look forward to growing in faith together in the years to come. Since the focus of a synod is to foster both the communion of the Church and further its mission, now is the opportune time to shape the pastoral life of our local church at the beginning of our second century.

When will the Synod be held?

The Synod will consist of several phases. The Preparatory Phase will commence on Pentecost Sunday, May 15, 2016. This phase will consist of a variety of opportunities for the voice of the local church to be heard over a one year period. This will be followed by the formal synod sessions from May, 2017 to November, 2017. Finally, there will be an implementation stage ending with the formal closing of the synod on Pentecost Sunday, May 20, 2018. Further details on the synod process will be released with my pastoral letter in the near future.

What will the Synod accomplish?

At the end of the Synod, a Synod Declaration will be published. This is an episcopal letter summing up the synod process including what has been learned and a listing of recommendations and pastoral priorities for the archdiocese and parishes. It is hoped that the synod will also assist in the framing of archdiocesan statutes where necessary. In addition, the synod produces guidelines and resources for the effective implementation of the synod at all levels.

Pope Francis describes the holding of a Synod as a beautiful experience where we must consider carefully, and prayerfully, what the Holy Spirit is saying to us during this time of grace. He reminds us that we must walk in unity, without running ahead and without nostalgia for the past. Our Synod, and the sessions leading up to it during the preparatory stage, will be wonderful and spirit filled events which will help us to plan our course as we walk into our second century as an archdiocese.

We begin our synod during this Holy Year of Mercy. The Holy Father is inviting us to open our hearts so as to experience the closeness of the Father of mercy and to practice mercy towards others. This same generous openness to the promptings of the Holy Spirit will be required of all of us as we launch our synod! I ask for your prayers as we prepare for the opening of our Archdiocesan Synod.

May God bless all of you and I look forward to a full and active participation in this first Synod for the Archdiocese of Winnipeg.

Yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Richard Gagnon". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'R' and a long horizontal flourish at the end.

✦Richard Gagnon
Archbishop of Winnipeg