



# What Is a Synod?

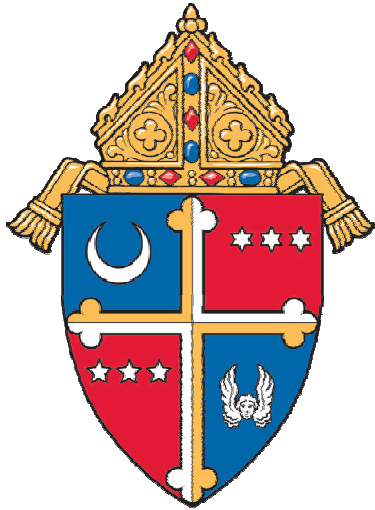
Throughout history, human beings have established *community* ("common unity"), which has always been considered the best way to advance the general welfare or the common good—taking into account both the needs of the individual and those of the community as a whole.

As Catholic Christians, we understand community not only sociologically, but also, and most importantly, theologically. For we believe that the heart of existence and the center of our lives as Catholics, is community: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Thus from the beginning of history, community has been the means through which God-Love (who is uniquely "tri-unity" or Trinity) has revealed himself; indeed, the Church herself is founded upon community: "the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the capstone" (Ephesians 2:20).

Catholic Christians together constitute a *community of communities*. Daily, Catholics gather in community to "lift up our hearts" in praise and thanksgiving (in Greek, *eucharistia*) to God and to reaffirm and celebrate our lives together in Christ. Sunday, the "Day of the Lord," is the celebration from which all other prayer flows. However, from time to time, Catholics come together in order to consider whether we are best responding to our vocation to live and give witness to the Gospel. For example, whereas in households, parents and children gather round in "family meetings," so in the Church—local, regional, and universal—bishops, clergy (priests and deacons), and members of the faithful (consecrated religious and laity) convene in **Synods** (from the Greek term, *synodos*, meaning "a meeting" or "an assembly").

Specifically, the **diocesan Synod** "is a group of selected priests and other members of the Christian faithful who offer assistance to the diocesan bishop for the good of the whole diocesan community..." (*Code of Canon Law*, 460). Moreover, "the purpose of the diocesan Synod is to assist the Bishop in the exercise of the office proper to him, namely, that of governing the Christian community" (*Instruction on Diocesan Synods*, 1). In other words, the diocesan Synod is a "consultative" body (*Instruction*, 2) whose purpose is to facilitate the bishop's ministry of "teaching, sanctifying, and governing" that "portion of the people of God ... to be shepherded by him with the cooperation of the presbytery [i.e., the priests]" (*Decree Concerning the Pastoral Office of Bishops in the Church*, 11).

## So, then, *why* have a Synod for the Archdiocese of Washington?



In the words of our Archbishop, Donald Cardinal Wuerl, the Archdiocesan Synod is "an opportunity to bring together people who represent this entire Archdiocesan Church" in order to discern if we are being the "very best church" that Christ calls us to be. In the Acts of the Apostles, we learn that "[the first Christians] devoted themselves to the teaching of the apostles and to the communal life, to the breaking of the bread and to the prayers. And every day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved" (2:42, 47). Given the model set before us by Christ and the apostles, Cardinal Wuerl has convoked a Synod in order to assess "what are we doing, how well are we doing it, and is there anything more we need to do to be everything we should be" in the key elements of the life of the Church: worship, education, community, service, and administration or stewardship.

## Why now?

Pope Benedict XVI has named October 11, 2012 (the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the opening of the Second Vatican Council and the 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the publication of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*) to November 24, 2013 (the Solemnity of Christ the King) the "Year of Faith," as "a summons to an authentic and renewed conversion to the Lord, the one Savior of the world" (*For the Indiction of the Year of Faith*, 6). Moreover, the theme of the General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops that the pope has convoked for October 2012 is "The New Evangelization for the Transmission of the Christian Faith" (*Indiction*, 4). Also, providentially, 2014 marks the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Archdiocese of Washington. For these reasons, beginning with Pentecost 2013, having reflected on the key elements of the Church's life (as listed above), representatives from all 140 parishes of the archdiocese will begin to formulate a basic plan of action that will lead the Catholic Church of Washington into the future. Thus we will renew our understanding of who we are in Christ, and recommit ourselves to being the very best Church Christ calls us to be.

