



# A CALL TO DISCIPLESHIP COME AND SEE

## **Proposed Synodal Declarations to be Adopted by the Fourth Diocesan Synod of the Diocese of Springfield in Illinois**

In his Homily for the Chrism Mass on April 11, 2017, Bishop Thomas John Paprocki articulated the overall goal for the Fourth Diocesan Synod of the Diocese of Springfield in Illinois with the following words:

In order to build a vibrant community of intentional and dedicated missionary disciples of the Risen Lord and steadfast stewards of God's creation who seek to become saints, I plan to ask the Fourth Diocesan Synod of the Diocese of Springfield in Illinois to discuss how the community of Catholic faithful in this diocese can be committed to the discipleship and stewardship way of life as commanded by Christ Our Savior and as revealed by Sacred Scripture and Tradition.

With these words serving as the primary declaration for the Synod discussions, the next step is to identify specific topics relating to discipleship and stewardship in the diocese. Based on his own observations of the state of the diocese, and in consultation with various groups from throughout the diocese, including input provided through the Preliminary Synod Questionnaire, Bishop Paprocki has further proposed seven declarations for the Synod to consider:

1. The Diocese of Springfield in Illinois is committed to implementing the Four Pillars of Discipleship and Stewardship, namely:
  - a. **Hospitality** – to **invite** people proactively to join us in prayer, especially Sunday Mass;
  - b. **Formation** – to **study** the Bible and **learn** more about Jesus and our Catholic faith;

- c. **Prayer** – to **provide** well-prepared celebrations of the sacraments and other occasions for **prayer** as signs of hope and paths of grace to heaven; and
- d. **Service** – to **serve** those in need by practicing charity and justice.

Prior to the decision to hold the Fourth Diocesan Synod, the Diocese of Springfield in Illinois had already begun to take steps toward embracing a way of life rooted in discipleship and stewardship. Much of the efforts in this regard can be found in Bishop Paprocki's second Pastoral Letter on Building a Culture of Growth in the Church. In that letter, he proposed a four-fold strategy for fostering this culture of growth, as seen in the Four Pillars of Discipleship and Stewardship listed above.

The Synod will consider how the diocese can make these pillars the foundation for the various aspects of diocesan life.

- 2. The catechetical programs in our Catholic schools and parish schools of religion and our adult faith formation programs will make formation for discipleship and stewardship as a way of life the primary focus of their efforts, with sacramental preparation seen as a step in this process, but not the end of the process.

One of the recognized patterns in the Church with regards to catechesis is that it tends to be focused on sacramental preparation. The sacraments are seen as goals to achieve, resulting in an attitude that once the sacrament is received, catechesis is concluded. The result of such an approach to catechesis is that many young people cease to be engaged in any formal program of formation after the reception of First Holy Communion or Confirmation.

The Synod is being asked to consider how to shift the focus of catechesis to be on forming disciples as the primary goal. Sacramental preparation, while important, is just a step in the process as opposed to the end of the process. Discipleship formation is to be targeted at every age group, for there is no stage in life in which discipleship formation is not needed.

Various programs and resources have been introduced in recent years which have as their primary goal discipleship formation. Traditional programs of catechesis can still be effective in helping the faithful to grow in their understanding of the faith, but efforts should be taken to ensure that this catechesis is presented in relation to discipleship formation.

- 3. The Sacraments of Christian Initiation will be offered in the proper sequence and at the appropriate age most favorable to promoting the discipleship and stewardship way of life.

Building on the previous declaration, it has been observed throughout the world that the Sacrament of Confirmation is often considered a sort of Catholic graduation after which further catechetical formation is no longer needed. In fact, Pope Francis quipped that the sacrament might better be called the “sacrament of farewell,” for after this point, many young people not only abandon further catechetical formation, but the regular practice of their Catholic faith.

Several dioceses, some of which are in the United States, have studied this phenomenon and have made the decision to restore the reception of the Sacraments of Initiation to their proper theological sequence, with Confirmation taking place before (or at the same celebration as) the reception of First Holy Communion.

The Synod will be invited to discuss considering the possibility of restoring the Sacraments of Initiation to their proper order so as to promote the discipleship and stewardship way of life more effectively. If such a change is deemed desirable, the practical considerations of how to accomplish this change will need to be discussed.

4. In order that cost not be a barrier for children to receive a Catholic education, our Catholic grade schools and high schools (K-12) will offer Catholic education without charging tuition to parents for all children whose parents agree to the terms of the Family School Agreement.
5. As a means of fulfilling the responsibility of all the Christian faithful (not just parents) to hand on the Catholic faith to the next generation, our parishes will pay for the tuition in Catholic grade schools and high schools (K-12) for all children of their parishes whose parents agree to the terms of the Family School Agreement.

Catholic education is one of the primary means of ensuring the continuation of a way of life that is rooted in discipleship and stewardship in the Diocese of Springfield in Illinois. Formation in discipleship must begin at the earliest stages and our Catholic schools are privileged places in which students can receive this formation. Recognizing the opportunity that exists in our Catholic schools to be those centers of formation, the Synod will be encouraged to seriously consider how to make this formation available to as many students as possible, thus enabling them to embrace this way of life without the concern for the financial burdens that sometimes prohibit families from choosing to send their children to Catholic schools.

Such a model requires a shift in mentality with regards to Catholic education. In recent decades, Catholic education has been operating under a consumer model in which parents who desire for their children to receive a Catholic education are required to pay for it, as though it were a product one purchases. Under the proposed model,

parishes will adopt a stewardship model in which the entire parish considers it their shared responsibility to ensure that Catholic education and discipleship formation is made available to the next generation. This model will become possible by having parishes pay for the tuition of those children in their parish who desire to receive a Catholic education without passing on the burden of the cost to each family.

According to the Family School Agreement, families will be expected to be actively involved in the life of the parish, including financially, so as not to abuse this model, while at the same time respecting those families who are genuinely in need.

6. Our Catholic faithful will be expected to fulfill the Biblical command to tithe by donating 8% of their income to their parishes and 2% to other charities.

The life of one committed to discipleship necessarily involves an awareness that everything that one has comes from and ultimately belongs to God. In gratitude for the generosity with which the Lord blesses us, we should feel compelled to respond to that generosity by being generous in the giving of our gifts back to God and our neighbor. One of the ways in which this is done is through the sharing of the financial gifts that we have received. As such, it has long been recommended that the faithful consider the Biblical notion of tithing 10% of their financial income for the purposes of supporting one's parish and other charitable activities (cf., Leviticus 27:30; Numbers 18:26; Deuteronomy 14:24; 2 Chronicles 31:5; Malachi 3:8-11; 1 Corinthians 16:2; Corinthians 9:7; and Hebrews 7:1-6).

The Synod will be invited to consider proposing this model as an important part of the life of discipleship and stewardship in the Diocese of Springfield in Illinois. Recognizing that adopting such a practice may require some adjustments, the Synod may consider the possibility of phasing this model in over a period of time.

7. Instead of the Annual Catholic Services Appeal, our parishes will tithe 10% of their annual income to the diocese, which will in turn tithe 10% of its annual income to national and international collections.

Stewardship is a way of life that is to be practiced in every level of life in the diocese. As such, parishes and the diocese itself are encouraged to make the practice of tithing an important expression of the commitment to discipleship and stewardship as a way of life. Doing so will help to reinforce the catholicity of the Church in that parishes identify themselves as part of a larger body in which they share with other parishes in contributing to the well-being of the diocese and the universal Church.

There is a danger of falling into a sort of parochialism in which each parish sees itself as a self-sustaining entity. While this may be true of other Christian denominations, it is inconsistent with a Catholic understanding of the Church.

The Synod will be invited to consider how our parishes and the diocese can more authentically express our catholicity and our shared responsibility to assist one another not just in fulfilling the individual mission of each parish, but in the mission of the diocese of which they are a part, which in turn is in communion with other dioceses as they all seek to promote the universal mission of the Church throughout the world.

## **Prayer for the Fourth Synod of the Diocese of Springfield in Illinois**

O God, who never forsake your people and ever journey with them through the struggles and joys of daily life, stir up the flame of faith in the hearts of your sons and daughters in our Diocese of Springfield in Illinois.

Help us to experience anew your great love for us and fill us with a greater desire to love and serve you and our neighbor.

Throughout this time of our fourth diocesan synod, help us, by the light of the Holy Spirit, to discern the needs of our local Church and better follow Christ your Son as intentional disciples.

Open our hearts and minds to know your will, to speak the truth with love, and to hear each other, that together we might plan, with the help of your grace, for the strengthening and growth of our diocese.

May Mary, the Immaculate Conception, first and greatest of all disciples, lead us closer to your Son. May she accompany us as we follow the call to live as his disciples and as generous stewards of your many gifts.

Through Christ our Lord. Amen.