

Called Together.... The Holy Synod of the Ecumenical Catholic Communion of 2014

Greetings to the Sisters, Brothers, and Friends of our beloved Communion!

Dear Fellow Delegates and Co-workers in the Gospel of Christ!

In a few short weeks we will be coming together in Aurora, Colorado to convene our sixth Holy Synod as the international Ecumenical Catholic Communion. We look forward with great anticipation, and not a little anxiety, as we realize the great and holy importance of such an assembly. As it is written in that ancient New Testament document called "To the Hebrews" we read, "Forsake not the assembling of yourselves together..." so we fulfill this apostolic injunction to assemble ourselves together this October for three days of holy conversation, a conversation that must always be informed by what the Apostle Paul, in his celebrated correspondence to the Churches of Galatia, described as "the fruit of the Holy Spirit which is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self control...for if we live in the Spirit, let us also follow the Spirit."

Now that we are in the final weeks of our prayerful preparation for this sacred gathering I wish to draw your attention to the wisdom of certain words that the Sacred Scriptures and the holy Tradition of the Catholic Church provides for us. From this I hope to deepen our understanding of what we are about to experience and our own role as participants in this hallowed event.

As you know, much of the vocabulary that we employ as a Catholic Church is derived from the language used in the writings of the Apostolic Church of the first century, namely, Koine Greek. Attention to these words will enable us to better understand our purpose and mission for our coming together.

First, there is the word, **ekklesia**, which literally means "the called out ones." It can best be compared to our English word, "assembly" but is more commonly translated by the word "church." The church is the gathering of those who have been called by Christ to follow Him, the baptized people of God. So as we gather together in Aurora we do so as "church" as the gathering of those who are the called of Christ.

Second, there is the word, **synod**, which means to sit together. This word has been translated into the more familiar Latin word, conciliar or council. The image that comes to mind here is the great 19th century icon by the Russian iconographer, Rublev, who depicts the three angelic visitors to Abraham, which has long been recognized in Christian tradition as an image of the three eternal persons of the Divine Trinity, sitting together around the table in a state of holy listening. So we gather in Aurora to sit together at the common table of holy communion in order to listen for the voice of Christ, who speaks to His own through the gentle whisper of the Holy Spirit as manifest in the voices of the people of God in which there are three: the holy laity, the holy presbyterate, and the holy episcopate (the three legged stool).

Third, there is the word, **hagios**, which refers to that which is "set apart." Saint Paul says that we are "set apart" for the Gospel of God in Christ Jesus the Lord. We are more

familiar with the common English word, holy. The Latin derived word is sanctity or sacred. We have been "set apart" for Christ by the Holy Spirit who continually is at work within us in a saving process called sanctification. When we use this word "holy" in reference to the synod we are saying that we are gathering together for the purpose consecrating each other, our time, and our space in order that we may be of service to the Holy One, who is God the Blessed Trinity, and to the holy ones, which are the People of God. It is the recognition that the persons of the Trinity are holy. "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty" are the words that the prophet Isaiah heard the angles of heaven sing. We are set apart for the Divine purposes of the One who has called us into being. We are to do God's will, the reign of God! As the Mosaic writer of Torah records God saying, "You must be holy even as I AM holy." Jesus, in Matthew's gospel puts it this way, "You must be perfect even as your Father in heaven is perfect; or again in Luke's gospel, "You must be compassionate even as your heavenly Father is compassionate." Our gathering must be characterized by this holiness that can only be imparted to us by means of putting our trust in Jesus the Savior. Therefore, we call this gathering the "Holy Synod."

Fourth, there is the word, **energia**, which refers to the "work" that we are called to do. We derive two important words from this in English: Liturgy, which literally means the "work of the people" of God. As Saint Paul writes to the Christian community, "Work out your own salvation with trembling awe for it is God who is at work in you to will and to do what is pleasing to Him (Christ)." This brings us to the other word, "synergy" we work with God and one another. So the entire work of the Synod, the praying, the listening, the speaking, the celebrating, the discerning, the eating, the sleeping, the laughter, and the tears are all a part of a holy work we do together with God, that is synergy, a holy liturgy. Everything that we do together at the Synod is Holy Liturgy!

That is why the Synod Schedule is the way that I am showing it below. The thinking of your elected synodal officers, the Leadership Council, was prayerfully informed by the abovementioned words that I have just described. This has been two years in the making. Some have seen an earlier version of this schedule and were perplexed by what seemed to be a "breaking up" of the Holy Liturgy by the intrusion of the profane and worldly. This is understandable because it was a draft that was published without due explanation. But I can assure you that this is not the case. It is not the breaking up of the integrity of the liturgy by the profane, but rather, it is the taking up of the profane into the liturgy in order that all we do will be sanctified, made sacred, by our collective prayer as ekklesia, as church.

So the proper way to look at all of this is that we are celebrating a three day liturgy. It is all connected; it dissolves the dualistic way in which we often exist; it is all liturgy, the work of the People of God, and it all remains holy. This liturgy has already begun. The moment you woke up with the intention of coming to the Holy Synod your prayerful participation has begun, you have already entered into the great procession toward the "mountain of God." This holy procession began when I first met with the leaders whom you elected to plan and implement this holy moment for us. Along the way the procession has grown as others, including yourself, have joined in.

Many who have not experienced liturgy in this way and are unfamiliar with this may understandably feel that this is somehow a betrayal of Catholic Tradition. However, I can

again assure you that this is well within the experience of that which is characteristic of Catholic practice. The greatest example of this, as our beloved sister, Mother Kedda has pointed out, is the Holy Triduum that we celebrate every year at Holy Week. It is a three day liturgy. That begins on Holy Thursday and does not conclude until the fullness of the Paschal Mystery is celebrated on the Morning of Easter Sunday! So the Liturgy of the Holy Synod is for three days culminating in our own celebration of the Paschal Mystery in the Eucharistic Feast in which we realize true koinonia with Jesus, the Risen Christ, and one another, the Body of Christ.

Now, with this in mind, read over the Synod schedule and be prepared to be amazed as we encounter and experience the Great Mystery of our Faith: The dying and rising of Christ among us!

The 2014 Holy Synod of the Ecumenical Catholic Communion

Tuesday, October 7: The Holy Procession and the Gathering of the Faithful

4:00 PM - 9:00 PM: The Synod Check-in (The People of God assemble: Ecclesia!)

8:00 PM - 10:00 PM: The Welcome and the Beginning of Holy Fellowship (Hagia Koinonia!)

Wednesday, October 8: The Beginning of the Holy Work of God's People (Liturgia!)

07:00 - 08:30: Breakfast (We nourish our bodies together)

07:00 - 08:30 Synod Check-In Continues

08:30 - 10:00: Preparation for Worship:

We are Greeted by the Host Community
(Father Scott Jenkins and the Church of the Holy Family)

Invocation

The Kyrie

The Gloria

The Opening Prayer

(Our Presiding Bishop, Peter Elder Hickman and his wife, Mirella)

10:00 Instruction in Worship:

The Liturgy of the Word

10:00 - 10:45

1st Reading (Acts 2:42-47)

Responsorial Psalm

(Reflection by Mother Kae Madden)

10:45-11:30

2nd Reading (Ephesians 4:1-16)

Song Response

(Reflection by Father Frank Krebs)

11:30 - Noon

Break (Resting in the Spirit)

Noon - 1:00

Lunch "They ate their meals with exultation and sincerity of heart."

1:00 - 2:40 Holy Discernment (Discerning the Mind of the Spirit)

Q & A Session with the Candidates

*(Note: The lay delegates and the pastoral delegates gather in their respective Houses
The Candidates will switch rooms at 1:50 PM)*

2:40 - 3:00 Break (Resting in the Spirit)

3:00 - 3:45 The Meeting of the Houses

3:45 - 4:30 Gospel Acclamation and the Reading of the Holy Gospel

Homily - Bishop Peter Elder Hickman

4:30 - 5:00 Break for Prayerful Consideration

5:00 - 5:30 Holy Discernment Continues

*The First Vote (Note: there will be up to three votes this evening until 2/3 majority is reached.
If not reached in three votes then the voting will carry over to Thursday)*

5:30 - 6:00 Break (Resting in the Spirit)

6:00 - 7:00 Dinner Provided (We nourish our bodies and souls together)

7:00 - 8:00 The Proclamation of the Holy Election for the Second Presiding Bishop of our
Beloved Communion (Results of the voting will be announced)

8:00ff Recess (Celebrating Friendship- Joyful Koinonia!)

Thursday, October 9: The Continuation of the Holy Work of God's People (Liturgical!)

07:00 - 08:30 Breakfast (We nourish our bodies together)

8:30 - 9:30 The Rite of Ordination for the Diaconate - Bishop Peter Hickman

9:30 - 9:45 Break (Resting in the Spirit)

9:45 - Noon: The Meeting of the Houses

Noon - 1:00 p.m. Lunch Provided (We eat together and enjoy holy conversation-koinonia!)

1:00 - 2:30 Workshops (Holy Instruction for ministry to the Church and the World)

2:30 - 2:45 Break (Resting in the Spirit)

2:45 - 4:15 Workshops (further instruction for Ministry)

4:30 - 5:00 We Profess our Faith and share the Prayers of the Faithful

5:00ff Dinner on our own and continuing our Holy Fellowship (Koinonia!)

Friday, October 10: The Continuation of the Holy Work of God's People (Liturgia!)

07:00 - 08:00 Breakfast (We nourish our bodies together)

8:00 - 9:30 Sign of Peace & Reconciliation - Bishop Peter

9:30 - Noon The Meeting of the Houses

Noon - 1:15 Lunch Provided (We eat together "Blest be the tie that binds...")

1:15 - 2:45 Workshops (More Instruction for Ministry)

2:45 - 3:00 Break (Resting in the Spirit)

3:00 - 4:30 The Final Meeting of the Houses

4:30 - 4:45 Break (Resting in the Spirit)

4:45 - 5:15 Rite of Ordination of new Presiding Bishop

5:15- 6:00 The Liturgy of the Eucharist

We celebrate with the Newly Ordained Presiding Bishop the real Presence of the Risen Christ Among Us (We see Him in the breaking of the One Bread and the sharing of the One Cup)

6:00 - 7:30 Dinner Provided (We nourish our bodies and souls together)

7:30 - 9:00 Dismissal Rites

Bishop Peter Signing of Legislation Blessing of new leaders Commissioning of everyone
"Go forth...."

9:00 - 11:00 Reception