



DIOCESE OF GREAT FALLS-BILLINGS

OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

P.O. Box 1399 * Great Falls, Montana 59403 * (406) 727-6683

www.diocesegfb.org

DECREE PROMULGATING THE DECLARATION OF THE SECOND SYNOD OF THE DIOCESE OF GREAT FALLS-BILLINGS

WHEREAS, after having heard the Presbyteral Council and judging it to be good for this local Church, I duly convoked the Second Synod of the Diocese of Great Falls-Billings and appointed and summoned the Delegates of the Synod by individual decrees in accord with the law of the Church in the *Code of Canon Law* canons 460-466 and the *Instruction on Diocesan Synods*, to the opening of the Synod on September 10, 2021, at the Cathedral of St. Ann in Great Falls, MT, and to the subsequent sessions of the Diocesan Synod;

WHEREAS, listening sessions and the official vicariate level discussion sessions were held over the subsequent several weeks, in which the delegates, comprised of lay, clerics, and religious members of the Christian faithful, participated;

WHEREAS, plenary regular sessions of the Synod were held on October 15th and October 22nd, 2021, and which during the final session on October 22nd the delegates amended and approved the draft Declaration with overwhelming majority;

THEREFORE, I, the Most Reverend Michael Warfel, by the Grace of God and the favor of the Apostolic See, Bishop of Great Falls-Billings, by this decree do hereby promulgate the Declaration of the Second Synod of the Diocese of Great Falls-Billings, attached to this decree, commending the Declaration to all the Christian faithful of our Diocese, and promising to use it as the basis for my post synodal apostolic letter to all the Christian faithful of our Diocese. This decree is effective by publication on the website of our Diocese (www.diocesegfb.org).

Given at the Diocesan Chancery in Great Falls, Montana on this twenty-ninth day of October in the Year of Our Lord, two thousand and twenty-one.

Most Reverend Michael Warfel
Bishop of Great Falls-Billings

Darren Eultgen
Chancellor

MT/

Bishop's Livestock Brand



I. **The Trinity: One Family, Several Persons**

1. Reflect how the family is one unit, but made of several individuals. ***We recommend the Bishop address in his Pastoral Letter:***
 - A. A definition of the family should include how a family fulfills a basic human need of belonging.
 - B. Acknowledgement should be made that many families are different from what one would consider a typical family of father, mother, and children, and that they are loved and supported by the Church. Examples should include:
 - a. Blended families
 - b. Single parent families
 - c. Intergenerational households and extended families
 - d. Adoptive and foster families
 - e. Adult singles
 - f. Families without children in the home
 - C. The individuality of each member of the family and their gifts should be recognized, cultivated, and put to the service of the family as a whole.
 - D. Each member of the family should work to build up the family, while the family as a whole should support each member of the family.

2. Reflect how the individuals in the family change and develop, and how this impacts family life. ***We recommend the Bishop address in his Pastoral Letter:***
 - A. An acknowledgement of the current state of many families should be made, including such things as:
 - a. The mobility of families, often moving many states away from their hometowns.
 - b. The challenges of both parents working.
 - c. The commonality of divorce with or without annulments.
 - d. Commonality of interfaith or interdenominational marriages.
 - e. Families which include non practicing family members.
 - f. Families which are irregular in the practice of their faith or not fully engaged with the faith.
 - B. Changes in individuals affect the family dynamic for good or ill.
 - a. Family members are encouraged to be honest and open with one another in order to foster a healthy Catholic family life.
 - b. Parents should be attentive to the different ways their children approach life and faith, especially as they grow and mature.
 - C. Families should be encouraged to reach out to their parish and pastor for assistance, and pastors should be attentive to the needs of their families.
 - D. Parishes should assist families by developing programs or parent classes which help families in their struggles.

3. Reflect on how other groups (school, work, parish) affect family life. ***We recommend the Bishop address in his Pastoral Letter:***
 - A. Many factors from outside the families can positively affect family life.
 - a. Catholic media (especially EWTN and FORMED) and Catholic cinema (especially saint movies and children's religious films), and other wholesome films.
 - b. Public witness of prayer in sports and other public events.
 - c. Rosary rallies, prolife events, Eucharistic processions, etc.
 - d. Positive peer pressure, especially from peers within the Catholic communities.
 - B. Many factors from outside the family can negatively affect family life.
 - a. Bias in media or cinema.
 - b. Attempts to exclude God from society.
 - c. Sports or other activities as priorities.
 - d. Peer pressure.
 - C. Technology poses its own challenges to family life. Mobile devices provide particular challenges to family life.
 - a. The use of smartphones and other technology can isolate family members from each other, even while at the same table, watching the same movie, or trying to have a conversation. Families should be encouraged to develop healthy boundaries.
 - b. Parents should carefully guide their children in finding positive material to consume while avoiding anti-Christian/Catholic messaging.
 - c. Pornography, including suggestive or immodest content, can destroy marriage and family life.
 - i. Particular care should be given to blocking pornography from devices. In addition to frank and loving discussion about the evils of pornography, filtering or monitoring software should be encouraged.
 - D. The Church should support families in giving priority to the faith.
 - a. The parish, cooperating with other Christian communities, should defend family and church time (e.g. Wednesday nights and Sunday) against encroachment by other activities.
 - b. Prayer should be given a central place in the religious education of all Catholics, with particular emphasis on reception of Communion and Mass attendance.
 - c. Families should be empowered to prioritize the faith over other activities.

- E. Families should be encouraged to protect their time and energy from overwork. While work is an important way we cooperate with God in creation, it can be all consuming, especially in our modern culture.

II. The Incarnation: One Family, but both Natural and Supernatural

- 4. Reflect on the difference between a purely natural marriage and sacramental marriage. ***We recommend the Bishop address in his Pastoral Letter:***
 - A. The definition of marriage.
 - B. That sacramental marriage is cherished by the Church as a gift from Jesus not just for the couple but for the upbuilding of the whole Church. Particular care should be given to:
 - a. How a sacramental marriage expresses in a most beautiful way the union of Christ and His Church.
 - b. Its focus on heaven.
 - c. The special graces given to the couple to joyfully and fruitfully live out their marriage covenant.
 - d. How the marital act is designed to unite a married couple and must always be open to the gift of life.
 - C. The Diocese and parishes are required to provide solid marriage preparation and encouraged to provide marriage enrichment outreach.
 - a. Pastors should identify and encourage couples who are models (even though imperfect) of sacramental marriage to assist couples preparing for marriage or who need support in any way.
 - b. Families should be encouraged to invite their clergy/religious to family life events to get to know them and be comfortable enough to reach out to them for support.
 - c. Families should be encouraged to reach out for help in times of struggle without fear of judgement but with hope for Christian support.
 - d. Clergy should offer to be available to bless family homes in their parish.

5. Reflect on the difference between raising good citizens of earth and good citizens of heaven. ***We recommend the Bishop address in his Pastoral Letter:***
 - A. Priority must be given to raising children to become saints, which will naturally result in raising good citizens by:
 - a. Encouraging memorization of common prayers.
 - b. Mass attendance.
 - c. Consistent reception of the sacraments.
 - d. Parental involvement of the education and preparation of the sacraments
 - e. Participation in Eucharistic Adoration and other Catholic devotions.
 - B. Some way in which our faith purifies our earthly citizenship should be discussed.
 - a. Love of neighbor vs activism or neglect.
 - b. Patriotism vs nationalism or indifference.
 - c. Political responsibility vs partisanship or apathy.
 - d. Care of creation vs eco-activism or careless consumption.
 - e. Responsibility for the full welfare of others and self.

6. Reflect on the challenge of “fitting in” with others and being totally devoted to God. ***We recommend the Bishop address in his Pastoral Letter:***
 - A. Being devoted to God takes many forms.
 - a. Serving God in one’s state of life or vocation.
 - b. Prayer, fidelity to Church teaching, virtues in daily life.
 - c. Lifelong learning about the faith.
 - d. Aiming for Heaven above all else.
 - B. Living an authentic Catholic life can bring challenges to belonging to the larger community, and sometimes the secular culture makes Catholics feel rejected or at least weird. Examples of such things can include:
 - a. Public prayer, or even “private” prayer before meals.
 - b. Rejection of vice, which is encouraged, explicitly or implicitly, by forces in secular society.
 - c. Being ridiculed for believing in the existence of God or the teachings of the Church.
 - d. Belief in objective truth.
 - C. Families should be encouraged to do their best to be good role models to other families who may feel shy or awkward about being Catholic in the modern age.
 - D. Families, supported by their pastors, should be encouraged to seek out or establish Catholic groups who will pray with and support each other in the faith.

- E. The Diocese should work to create a strong Catholic culture where “fitting in” aligns with a Catholic faith.

III. The Triple Duties of Baptism: Holiness, Knowledge, Authority

- 7. Reflect on how the members of the family are called to help each other reach holiness whether spouse to spouse, parent to child, child to parent, siblings, grandparents etc. ***We recommend the Bishop address in his Pastoral Letter:***
 - A. The different and complementary roles of the husband and wife in the family. Particular emphasis should be placed on the baptismal priestly roles of the husbands and wives in guiding their families in the faith. Husbands in particular should fulfill their role as leaders within the Domestic Church.
 - a. Priests are called to be fathers in the parish. Priests help parishioners to be holy and parishioners help their priests to be holy.
 - B. Parents should form their children in the faith especially through an emphasis on the importance of weekly Mass.
 - a. Parents can help their children actively participate by explaining what is happening on the altar. Priests should be encouraged to catechize families regarding the meaning of the parts of the Mass.
 - b. Parents should encourage their children to listen attentively to the word of God, and perhaps even read the readings with their children ahead of time.
 - c. Altar server programs and other liturgical ministries should be encouraged in every parish.
 - d. The priest and congregation should encourage and assist parents, especially of small children, such that they feel welcome with their children at Mass, even if the children make noise.
 - e. Eucharistic adoration as a family is a great way to cement devotion to Jesus in the Most Holy Eucharist and should be encouraged outside of Mass. In parishes where this is not offered regularly, pastors should make this devotion available.
 - f. Other family practices such as daily family prayer, acts of charity, fasting, and corporal and spiritual works of mercy are other ways to grow in holiness.
 - g. Pastors, parish, and parents are encouraged to teach children how to incorporate the liturgical seasons into their lives by understanding the many particular Catholic practices of each season, celebrating the feast days of their favorite saints, decorating the home in line with the season or particular feast days, etc., always with the emphasis on what is Catholic and not so much secular especially when it comes to Halloween, Christmas, and Easter.

- C. Families should often go to confession, even monthly, perhaps even scheduling blocks of time with their priest so that they may all go in the same morning/afternoon. Accordingly, priest should be generous in offering times for confession.
 - D. The special role of grandparents as an anchor of traditions of the family and the faith. Their role and dignity should be respected. Our Native and Latino families can be a model for their respect for elders.
 - E. The role and responsibilities of godparents and Confirmation sponsors as spiritual support for families.
8. Reflect on how we are called to share the faith with each other in the family, and the primary role parents have in the education of their children. ***We recommend the Bishop address in his Pastoral Letter:***
- A. Children emulate their parents, especially at a young age, in almost every aspect of their lives in some ways. The example of a parent in living out the faith and praying at home is essential for building lifelong Catholics.
 - B. Families should have times together for education in the faith. This could be a time set aside one evening a week or even on Sundays in which they read and reflect upon the Sacred Scriptures for the upcoming Sunday Mass and possibly readings and reflections on the lives of the saints. Older children should be invited to do the reading.
 - C. Adults should be formed in Catholic theology especially in the elements of sacramental theology, theology of the Church, Sacred Scripture, and of Catholic social teaching.
 - a. Parishes should continue catechetical formation even after high school graduation.
 - D. Parents, as the primary teachers of their children, should be empowered by their parish to teach the faith to their children through continuing catechesis of the parents.
 - a. Particular care should be given to the education of children in the theology of the body to increase the understanding of the Church's views and teachings on family and sexuality. Natural Family Planning should be encouraged, while promoting the dignity of life from conception to natural death.
 - E. Members of the family should be encouraged to share their experiences, joys, and struggles in the faith with each other during a weekly prayer time.
9. Reflect on how parents have the primary authority over their children and how the government, schools, etc. can or should assist them. ***We recommend the Bishop address in his Pastoral Letter:***

- A. Parents and godparents take responsibility for the faith of their children and godchildren when they agree to have their child/godchild baptized and brought up in the Church. The promises made at baptism should be emphasized as a basis of catechesis throughout our life.
- B. The role of the parish is to support the parents in raising saints. In addition to good pre-baptism education, parents should be reminded of their obligation to attend Sunday Mass. It is mandatory for parents to regularly participate in Sunday Mass, for the baptism of their children and preparation for first Sacraments-pastors should engage in open dialogue with parents regarding how they are fulfilling this obligation and in explaining the joy of living a Catholic life.
- C. The role of the government and school is to support parents and the parents' authority over their children. Parents should stay aware of what is being taught to children and resist anti Catholic curricula and programs, and priests should support them in their efforts.

IV. The Four Marks: One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic

- 10. Reflect on how the family is called to be one and how trends in society help or hinder this oneness. ***We recommend the Bishop address in his Pastoral Letter:***
 - A. Each family should be reminded that they are one domestic church with a common life which can be supported by:
 - a. Families, supported by their priest, should utilize traditional Catholic devotions in the home, especially in honor of the various saints, such that the Catholic life is truly lived at home.
 - b. In addition to penance on Fridays (abstaining from meat or other acts outside of Lent), specific family acts of fasting or penance should be encouraged to build unity, for example "no screen Thursdays."
 - B. Families must be attentive to differences in the family of origin of the spouses, which often requires prayerful negotiation and discussion of how they will be united in raising their own family.

- 11. Reflect on how the Christian family is called to be holy as a family and individuals and how society helps or hinders this holiness. ***We recommend the Bishop address in his Pastoral Letter:***
 - A. Families need to see their roles as building up the Church through holiness. While families need the Church for holiness, the Church needs holy families to share the love of Christ.
 - B. Families are encouraged to pray the rosary together every day, even if only a decade. This can be done while doing dishes after dinner, while driving back from a sports event, right before bed, etc.

- C. Children should be invited to lead parts of family prayer, especially parts of the rosary, and to share their intentions. Parents likewise should be open with each other and their children about their prayer intentions.
 - D. The family is the practice ground for mercy.
 - a. Differences should be aired to be better understood and potentially resolved through prayer and discussion.
 - b. Particular care should be given to especially difficult experiences, such as how to love family members who may be struggling with homosexuality, transgenderism, divorce, rejection of God and church and the reality of the occult, violence, addiction, depression and other mental illnesses, etc.
 - E. Families should live in faith which encourages community and service to others, focusing on the person outside the window vs. the person in the mirror.
12. Reflect on how the Christian family is called to be Catholic, living our faith not only in private but everywhere and all times. ***We recommend the Bishop address in his Pastoral Letter:***
- A. All Catholics, by their baptism and confirmation, are called by the Lord to proclaim and live the Gospel and bring people to Jesus and His Church.
 - B. Families should not see the faith as compartmentalized, but rather something which must be infused into all aspects of our lives.
 - C. The parish should offer opportunities throughout the week for families to connect with each other to share the faith.
 - D. Priests, deacons, and religious should be encouraged to wear their clerical attire or religious habit in order to display their faith and to encourage the faithful in publicly living out the faith.
 - E. Catholicism is countercultural; do not be afraid to live out the faith.
 - a. Families should be encouraged to embrace “public” displays of the faith like, sign of the cross before meals, religious decorations, or sharing Catholic content on social media.
 - F. Parishioners should not be afraid to witness to their Catholic faith, but rather be encouraged to, and given examples of how to practice the virtues especially:
 - a. Taking advantage of the opportunities in countering the secular culture in dressing modestly,
 - b. Practicing self control in eating and drinking,
 - c. Using humility and charity to disarm anger,
 - d. Being a good listener and allowing others to be first in expressing ideas, opinions, and desires, etc.

13. Reflect on how the Christian family is called to be apostolic handing down to one another the Catholic faith they have received, particularly by encouraging consideration of the vocation to marriage, the priesthood, and religious life. ***We recommend the Bishop address in his Pastoral Letter:***

- A. The family is the seedbed of vocations. Children and other family members should be encouraged to discern their vocations by prayerfully considering God's will in how to best serve Jesus, His Church, and others especially the least among us. Parents should generously encourage their children to consider the priesthood or religious life, while not placing undue pressure on them.
 - a. Parishes should support families in this role by providing materials and education on authentic discernment.
- B. Families should provide opportunities for interactions with priests in normal life.
 - a. Invite priests or religious to dinner or to other family activities (e.g. sporting events, parties, holiday celebrations).
 - b. Parishes should provide for the experience of religious life by inviting religious brothers and sisters to participate or lead vacation bible school or other similar events.
 - c. Priests should be generous in participating in family activities to which they are invited.
 - d. Parishes should celebrate the commitments to various vocations:
 - i. Anniversaries
 - ii. Renewal of vows
 - iii. Religious commitments
- C. The Diocese should have a dedicated Vocations Director who is available to families, who is active not simply in his own parish but a presence throughout the Diocese. This priest should be exemplary in his dedication to priestly life, cooperation with the Bishop and very importantly in his participation in priestly gatherings in the Diocese (priest retreat, priest assemblies, days of prayer.)
 - a. By "vocation" we include such vocations as: priesthood, religious women and men (to include brothers), deacons, consecrated virgins, married life, consecrated widows.

APPENDIX

Individual delegates ask that the Bishop consider:

- Faith formation programs for deadbeat fathers
- Men's groups
- Catholic history and tradition
- Push for greater community within our diocese and churches
- Consider providing an appendix which would include "How to" resources
- Reduce the number of "should" when writing the document
- The word evangelization needs to have a higher profile