

This week Pope Francis is convening a special Synod on the Family. The bishops of the synod will gather testimonies and proposals as to how families can proclaim and live the gospel. Next year the synod will reconvene to prepare specific ways for this to happen. Earlier this year the Holy Father sent out a questionnaire for people to contribute ideas. The synod's bishops received questions concerning various topics; for example, the diffusion of the Church's teachings on the family, the ways that families spread the gospel, care for those in difficult marital situations, same-sex unions, the education of children in irregular marriages, and the openness of married couples to having children.

Many people have wondered if the synod would change the way that divorced Catholics apply for an annulment. Last month Pope Francis appointed a special commission to investigate this very question in hopes of simplifying the process. He is not waiting for the synod, which will not make specific proposals until next year. Still, if any of you are not in a marriage recognized by the church, I invite you to contact Fr. Mike or me. We would both like to help you resolve the situation as soon as possible. Those not married in the Church cannot participate in the sacraments. The Church encourages Catholics to participate at mass and receive communion every week. Confession is not necessary before every communion. If Fr. Mike and I can help you come back to the sacraments, we are anxious to do so.

In convening the synod on the family, Pope Francis is giving us a model of good leadership in the church. He has frequently challenged us church leaders to be better ministers. Last week he opened an investigation in our own diocese to make sure that we are being properly cared for.

Jesus also wanted better service from the religious leaders of his day. He had little tolerance for their hypocrisy. He addressed today's parable to the chief priests and elders of the people. God entrusted his people to religious leaders in the way that a landowner entrusts a vineyard to tenants. But those leaders did not care for the people and even killed the prophets whom God sent to help them. Finally, God sent Jesus, the greatest of the prophets, his own Son. But Jesus knows that the leaders will kill him too. Jesus is the son in the parable, the stone rejected by the builders.

Pope Francis has asked for our prayers for the Synod on the Family. He wants our religious leaders to take proper care of the people. Within every family, parents are religious leaders too. They have a responsibility for the religious formation of their children. Parents worship on Sundays with their children, they lead prayer at meals and bedtime at home, they bring children to religious education sessions, and they provide moral guidance so that children can determine right from wrong. Working together we can produce the good fruit that God desires.