

Answering frequently asked questions

What is a synod?

A synod is a council of the Church, usually convened to decide an issue of doctrine, administration or application. The word synod is from the Greek *sinodos* meaning “assembly” or “meeting” and is similar to the Latin *concilium* meaning “council”. Sometimes the phrase “general synod” or “general council” refers to an ecumenical council, like the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965).

What is a Synod of Bishops and why do they happen?

At the end of the Second Vatican Council, Saint Pope Paul VI sensed the need for the Roman Pontiff to continue meeting periodically with the bishops of the world, which is why, on September 15, 1965, he established a new entity within the Church called the Synod of Bishops. The Synod of Bishops is a permanent institution that forms part of the Church’s long tradition of organizing ecclesial assemblies to deliberate on the most pressing issues of a particular place and time. Since its establishment in 1965, the Popes have called for and led a total of 15 General Ordinary Assemblies, 3 General Extraordinary Assemblies, and 11 Special Assemblies of the Synod of Bishops. The topics of each assembly are selected by the Pope. The most recent General Assemblies have been on Youth, Family, New Evangelization, the Word of God, and the Eucharist.

What is Synodality?

In the words of Pope Francis, a synodal Church is a “listening Church knowing that listening is more than feeling. It is a mutual listening in which everyone has something to learn. We must all listen to the Holy Spirit, the spirit of Truth to know what the Spirit is saying to the Church. [...] This is what the Lord expects from the Church of the third millennium.” (Address at the commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the Synod of Bishops, 17 October 2015) Synodality provides opportunities to listen to the Holy Spirit and the People of God in order to discern together and walk forward on a common path, accompanying each other on the spiritual journey as we live out our missionary call to personal discipleship with our Lord.

What is the current Synod?

In the ceremony to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the institution of the Synod of Bishops in October 2015, Pope Francis declared that “the world in which we live, and which we are called to love and serve, even with its contradictions, demands that the Church strengthen cooperation in all areas of her mission.” (For a Synodal Church handbook) This call to cooperate in the mission of the Church is addressed to the entire People of God. In April 2021, Pope Francis initiated a synodal journey of the whole People of God, to begin in October 2021 in each local Church and culminating in October 2023 in the Assembly of the Synod of Bishops.

What is the goal of this Synod?

The objective of this Synodal Process is not to provide a temporary or one-time experience of synodality, but rather to provide an opportunity for the entire People of God to discern together how to move forward on the path towards being a more synodal Church in the long-term. Pope Francis characterizes the two interrelated goals of this process of listening: “to listen to God, so

that with him we may hear the cry of his people; to listen to his people until we are in harmony with the will to which God calls us.”

Why are we participating in a Synod at this time?

In October 2015, Pope Francis stated that “the world in which we live, and which we are called to love and serve, even with its contradictions, demands that the Church strengthens cooperation in all areas of her mission.” This process is especially important during times of changes in Church and society. We must reflect on the signs of the times in light of the Gospel. “The decision to ‘journey together’ is a prophetic sign for the human family, which needs a shared project capable of pursuing the good of all... We need to let ourselves be educated by the Spirit to a truly synodal mentality, entering with courage and freedom of heart into a conversion process that is indispensable for the ‘continual reformation of which [the Church] always has need, in so far as she is a human institution’” (Synod 2023 Preparatory Document, no.9).

Who can participate?

All the baptized are invited to participate in this Synodal Process. Special care should be taken to involve those persons who may be at risk of being excluded: persons with disabilities, migrants, refugees, the elderly, people who live in poverty, inactive Catholics, etc.