



Frequently Asked Questions

National Synthesis for the 2021-2023 Synod:
For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, and Mission

What is a Synod?

- A synod is a gathering of the faithful with their pastors in order to listen to what the Holy Spirit is saying to the Church. Synods have taken many forms in church history and they are already practiced in the Church at all levels: from local parish councils and national assemblies to the Synod of Bishops, when bishops from across the world gather in Rome with the Pope.
- Synod-type mechanisms (listening, dialogue, discernment) have always taken place in monasteries and religious houses when faced with decisions and choices; it is what happens at conclaves to elect popes.

What makes this Synod unique?

- This is the longest and broadest consultation of the faithful ever undertaken by the Catholic Church. Both the baptized People of God and our larger communities have been asked to engage in an exercise of listening and discernment, of walking together.
- The aim of the synod is to help the Church become more synodal, more of a listening Church in which all the baptized are recognized as subjects and take part in the mission of the Church. All the baptized are explicitly invited to take part, but they are also asked to reach out to their local communities, and no one is excluded.

Will this Synod result in a change in Church Teaching?

- This Synod is an open-ended process, the outcome of the consultation of the People of God is unknown. Although the objectives of the synod are clear – to build communion, enable participation, and strengthen our mission – the outcome is not.
- While the Synod will produce documents, producing documents is not the aim. While votes will probably take place at the conclusion of the two-year process, those votes will largely be a demonstration of the emergence of consensus.

How did dioceses gather feedback?

- Dioceses utilized several different tools and opportunities to gather feedback: in-person and online group listening sessions, one-on-one meetings, targeted outreach efforts, online surveys, and others.

How was the National Synthesis produced?

- All one hundred seventy-eight (178) Latin (arch)dioceses contributed syntheses. Due to the size of the country, these contributions were gathered regionally, to produce fourteen intermediate syntheses which aided in the development of this national synthesis. Due to their long history of synodal practice, the Eastern Catholic Churches shared their reports directly with the Holy See, to be incorporated along with the U.S. Latin Church national synthesis into the Document for the Continental Stage, which represents the next step in the 2021-2023 Synod.
- Catholic associations, organizations, and national ministries in the United States were also invited to participate in the Synod by submitting a summary report from their listening sessions. In all, one hundred twelve (112) submissions were received from organizations to create the “Region XVI” synthesis.
- In total, two hundred ninety (290) documents were submitted to the U.S. Synod Team.
- These contributions represent over 22,000 reports from individual parishes and other groups. There were over 30,000 opportunities to participate in the Synod through in-person and virtual listening sessions as well as online surveys. An estimated 700,000 people participated in the diocesan phase of the Synod in the United States.

What does the rest of the process look like?

- Following the conclusion of the local consultation phase, the Vatican will use the synthesized reports from bishops’ conferences around the world to develop a working document to guide continental or regional ecclesial assemblies that will take place by March 2023.
- The Continental Phase for North America will be a collaboration of the U.S. and Canada. Regional listening sessions regarding the *Document for the Continental Stage* (DCS) will be held in late winter 2022 and early 2023. These listening sessions will inform the composition of the Continental Synthesis due to the Synod Secretariat on March 31, 2023.
- The Continental Synthesis will help in the drafting of a second working document for the Synod of Bishops in October 2023.