

Introduction to the Synod



Pope Francis invites you and all the faithful to “journey together” by participating in listening sessions as part of the preparation for the 2023 Synod of Bishops: "For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, and Mission." Learn more about the Synod and how you can participate at www.saginaw.org/synod2023. Listening sessions at our parish will be held on (insert date). You can also contact (insert parish contact person and contact info) for more information.

What is a synod?

The Synod is an assembly of bishops from around the world who assist the Holy Father by providing counsel on important questions facing the Church in a manner that preserves the Church's teaching and strengthens her internal discipline. (see the Vatican website and Code of Canon Law, canon 342) However, in recent years, the Synod has transformed into a global dialogue on particular issues of pastoral concern such as evangelization, Scripture, family life, young people, and synodality itself.

The purpose of the Synod is not to produce documents, but “to plant dreams, draw forth prophecies and visions, allow hope to flourish, inspire trust, bind up wounds, weave together relationships, awaken a dawn of hope, learn from one another and create a bright resourcefulness that will enlighten minds, warm hearts, give strength to our hands.” (Preparatory Document, paragraph 32)

A spiritual process

Pope Francis is not inviting us to participate in another survey! Instead, he is inviting us into a spiritual process by prayerfully having conversations, sharing our stories, learning about one another, and listening with open minds and hearts—without judgement, without prejudice, without agendas.

Through prayer and from our conversations with one another, Pope Francis hopes that we will discern how the Holy Spirit wants the Church to grow in “deeper communion, fuller participation, and greater openness to fulfilling our mission in the world” (Vademecum, 1.2). We are all on this journey together!

Communion, participation, mission

The three dimensions of the theme for the synod are communion, participation, and mission. There is a dynamic relationship between the three, with each dimension enriching and orienting the other two.

Communion: By his gracious will, God gathers us together as diverse peoples of one faith, through the covenant that he offers to his people.

Participation: A call for the involvement of all who belong to the People of God – clergy and lay people, including consecrated women and men -- to prayerfully engage in the exercise of deep and respectful listening to one another.

Mission: The Church exists to evangelize. As Christians, we should never be solely centered on ourselves. Our mission is to witness to the saving love of Jesus Christ in the midst of the whole human family.

All are called to participate

“All the baptized are called to take part in the Church’s life and mission,” Pope Francis reminds us. The Holy Father acknowledges "the frustration and impatience felt by many pastoral workers, members of diocesan and parish consultative bodies and women, who frequently remain on the fringes. Enabling everyone to participate is an essential ecclesial duty! All the baptized, for baptism is our identity card."

Discernment

Pope Francis is asking us to discern the will of the Holy Spirit for the Church. But what is discernment? For Christians, it means to prayerfully open our minds and hearts to allow God to illuminate us about the best path forward. This goes for individuals and for the Church as a whole. However, discernment is not just about getting answers. Discernment is about getting to know God in a deeper way and fostering that relationship.

Preparation

We invite you to begin the first step of the synodal process: prayer.

Pray for the whole Church, that each member no matter how young or old, involved or disconnected, marginalized or integrated, faithful or doubting, answers the call of the Holy Spirit to share their stories and participate in the synod.

Pray for Pope Francis, Bishop Gruss and all of our diocesan, parish and school leaders. Pray for all those who work and volunteer at the various levels of the Church -- that we may listen to the stories of the faithful with open hearts and minds and to discern how God wants to lead the Church in these times.

Pray for yourself as you embark on this synodal journey to be open to the Holy Spirit and recognize that your story and your experiences are of great value.

We pray that everyone recognize that we do not travel this synodal journey as individuals, but as a community of faith, both local and global, in communion with God and all the angels and saints. We pray that everyone answers the call to participate in the life of the Church -- to share our experiences and listen to the experiences of others. We pray that all of us accept the mission that God has given to his Church: to share the saving love and peace of Jesus Christ with everyone.

This introduction was adapted from original work by Kristyn J. Russell.

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