

Synod
2021
2023

Synod on Synodality

Communion, Participation, and Mission

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1. Prayer for the Synod: *Adsumus Sancte Spiritus*

Every session of the Second Vatican Council began with the prayer *Adsumus Sancte Spiritus*, the first word of the original Latin, meaning, “We stand before You, Holy Spirit,” which has been historically used at Councils, Synods and other Church gatherings for hundreds of years, and is attributed to Saint Isidore of Seville (c. 560 - 4 April 636). As we embrace this Synodal Process, this prayer invites the Holy Spirit to be at work in us so that we may be a community and a people of grace. For the Synodal journey from 2021 to 2023, we propose to the following simplified version,[1] so that any group or liturgical assembly can pray it more easily.

**We stand before You, Holy Spirit,
as we gather together in Your name.**

**With You alone to guide us,
make Yourself at home in our hearts;
Teach us the way we must go
and how we are to pursue it.**

**We are weak and sinful;
do not let us promote disorder.
Do not let ignorance lead us down the wrong path
nor partiality influence our actions.**

**Let us find in You our unity
so that we may journey together to eternal life
and not stray from the way of truth
and what is right.**

**All this we ask of You,
who are at work in every place and time,
in the communion of the Father and the Son,
forever and ever. Amen.**

2. Overview

The Synod on Synodality is a two-year process of listening and dialogue beginning with a solemn opening in Rome on October 9 and 10, 2021 with each individual diocese and church celebrating the following week on October 17. The synodal process will conclude in 2023.

Pope Francis invites the entire Church to reflect on a theme that is decisive for its life and mission: “It is precisely this path of synodality which God expects of the Church of the third millennium.” This journey, which follows in the wake of the Church’s “renewal” proposed by the Second Vatican Council, is both a gift and a task: by journeying together and reflecting together on the journey that has been made, the Church will be able to learn through Her experience which processes can help Her to live communion, to achieve participation, to open Herself to mission. www.USCCB.org

Pope Francis invites the whole Church to participate in this global Synod on Synodality. This unprecedented opportunity will facilitate discussion and reflection to help shape the Church’s understanding of herself and her mission of evangelization.

3. Definition of Terms

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* (σύννοδος) 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).

www.sfarch/org/synod

The Synod is a **convention of bishops to discuss matters of the church and seek advice from the Pope**. Pope Francis formally opened the Synod of Bishops on Oct. 10 (local time) with a solemn Mass in St Peter's Basilica. Oct 18, 2021

After Vatican II, Pope Paul VI established the Synod of Bishops, an advisory board to the Holy Father. Since then, the bishops meet in assemblies (synods) and make recommendations to the pope. Since 1967, there have been 16 ordinary synods, 3 extraordinary synods, and 11 special synods. Oct 4, 2021

A synod is a meeting of bishops gathered to discuss a topic of theological or pastoral significance, in order to prepare a document of advice or counsel to the Pope.

"What the synod is, practically speaking, is an advisory panel. It is a body which gives the pope a way of discussing the issues of the day, and receiving feedback and advice from the episcopacy. St. Paul VI may have given it its current shape, but the reality is that popes have always done this, consulting with their bishops on different matters, in one form or another." *Dr. Jessica Murdoch, associate professor of fundamental and dogmatic theology at Villanova University.*

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)

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Murdoch said that synodality is a rich concept with a long history in the Church. "Synodality as a concept really just means collegiality. It is the way in which the different parts of the Church come together as the mystical Body of Christ," she said.

The [International Theological Commission \(ITC\) describes synodality](#) this way:

First and foremost, synodality denotes the particular *style* that qualifies the life and mission of the Church, expressing her nature as the People of God journeying together and gathering in assembly, summoned by the Lord Jesus in the power of the Holy Spirit to proclaim the Gospel. Synodality ought to be expressed in the Church's ordinary way of living and working.

In this sense, synodality enables the entire People of God to walk forward together, listening to the Holy Spirit and the Word of God, to participate in the mission of the Church in the communion that Christ establishes between us. Ultimately, this path of walking together is the most effective way of manifesting and putting into practice the nature of the Church as the pilgrim and missionary People of God (*PD*, 1).

The entire People of God shares a common dignity and vocation through Baptism. All of us are called in virtue of our Baptism to be active participants in the life of the Church. In parishes, small Christian communities, lay movements, religious communities, and other forms of communion, women and men, young people and the elderly, we are all invited to listen to one another in order to hear the promptings of the Holy Spirit, who comes to guide our human efforts, breathing life and vitality into the Church and leading us into deeper communion for our mission in the world. As the Church embarks on this synodal journey, we must strive to ground ourselves in experiences of authentic listening and discernment on the path of becoming the Church that God calls us to be.

4. SYNOD 2021-2023 Theme

Pope Francis theme for the Synod is

“For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation and Mission”

Communion

By His gracious will, God gathers us together as diverse peoples of one faith, through the covenant that offers to his people. The communion we share finds its deepest roots in the love and unity of the Trinity. It is Christ who reconciles us to the Father and unites us with each other in the Holy Spirit. Together, we are inspired by listening to the Word of God, through the living Tradition of the Church, and grounded in the *sensus fidei* that we share. We all have a role to play in discerning and living out God’s call for his people.

Local Churches are communitarian subjects that make the one People of God real in a novel way in different cultural contexts, and they share their gifts in a reciprocal exchange in order to promote "bonds of close communion" [\[70\]](#). The

variety of local Churches - with their own ecclesiastical disciplines, liturgical rites, theological heritage, spiritual gifts and canonical norms - "is splendid evidence of the Catholicity of the undivided Church" [71]. The ministry of Peter, the *centrum unitatis*, "protects legitimate differences, while at the same time assuring that such differences do not hinder unity but rather contribute toward it" [72]. The Petrine ministry is there to serve the unity of the Church and guarantees the distinct character of each local Church. Synodality describes the path to follow to promote the Catholicity of the Church with the discernment of the paths to be taken together in the universal Church and distinctly in each local Church.

https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_cti_20180302_sinodalita_en.html#_edn70

Participation

Synodality means that the whole Church is a subject and that everyone in the Church is a subject. The faithful are *σύνοδοι*, companions on the journey. They are called to play an active role inasmuch as they share in the one priesthood of Christ [62], and are meant to receive the various charisms given by the Holy Spirit in view of the common good [63]. Synodal life reveals a Church consisting of free and different subjects, united in communion, which is dynamically shown to be a single communitarian subject built on Christ, the corner-stone, and on the Apostles, who are like pillars, built like so many living stones into "a spiritual house" (*cf. 1 Peter 2,5*), "a dwelling-place of God in the Spirit" (*Ephesians 2,22*).

Participation **is** a call for the involvement of all who belong to the People of God – laity, consecrated and ordained – to engage in the exercise of deep and respectful listening to one another. This listening creates space for us to hear the Holy Spirit together, and guides our aspirations for the Church of the Third Millennium. Participation is based on the fact that all the faithful are qualified and are called to serve one another through the gifts they have each received from the Holy Spirit. In a synodal Church the whole community, in the free and rich diversity of its members, is called together to *pray, listen, analyse, dialogue, discern and offer advice on making pastoral decisions* which correspond as closely as possible to God's will (ICT, *Syn.*, 67-68). Genuine efforts must be made to ensure the inclusion of those at the margins or who feel excluded.

https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_cti_20180302_sinodalita_en.html#_edn70

The Disciple Maker Index survey is a nationally recognized survey administered at parishes around the United States and Canada since 2013 by The Catholic Leadership Institute. The results from this survey will provide baseline feedback from which content for engagement sessions will be developed.

A handbook for dioceses says: “Special care should be taken to involve those persons who may risk being excluded: women, the handicapped, refugees, migrants, the elderly, people who live in poverty, Catholics who rarely or never practice their faith, etc.

Point out [DMI Survey](#), listening sessions at www.sfarch.org/synod

Mission

The Church exists to evangelize. We can never be centred on ourselves. Our mission is to witness the love of God in the midst of the whole human family. This Synodal Process has a deep missionary dimension to it. It is intended to enable the Church to better witness to the Gospel, especially with those who live on the spiritual, social, economic, political, geographical, and existential peripheries of our world. In this way, synodality is a path by which the Church can more fruitfully fulfil her mission of evangelization in the world, as a leaven at the service of the coming of God’s kingdom.

The mission of the Church requires the entire People of God to be on a journey together, with each member playing his or her crucial role, united with each other. A synodal Church walks forward in communion to pursue a common mission through the participation of each and every one of her members.

<https://press.vatican.va/content/pubblico/2021/09/07>

The Church is called to constant conversion, which is a "pastoral and missionary conversion", too; this involves renewing mentalities, attitudes, practices and structures, in order to be ever more faithful to her vocation. www.synod.va

5. What is the goal of this Synod?

"By walking together, and together reflecting on the journey made, the Church will be able to learn from what it will experience which processes can help it to live communion, to achieve participation, to open itself to mission."

www.USCCB.org

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." www.sfarch.org/synod

Pope Francis teaches that "to walk together is *the constitutive way* of the Church; *the figure* that enables us to interpret reality with the eyes and heart of God; *the condition* for following the Lord Jesus and being servants of life in this wounded time. The breath and pace of the Synod show what we are, and the dynamism of communion that animates our decisions; only in this way can we truly renew our pastoral ministry and adapt it to the mission of the Church in today's world; only in this way can we address the complexity of this time, thankful for the journey accomplished thus far, and determined to continue it with *parrhesia*".

The *parrhesía* of the Spirit required the People of God on its synodal journey is the trust, frankness and courage to "enter into the expanse of God's horizon" in order to "ensure that a sacrament of unity exists in the world and that man is therefore not destined for dispersion and confusion" [\[169\]](#). The lived and enduring experience of synodality is, for the People of God, a source of the joy promised by Jesus, a catalyst of new life, the springboard for a new phase of missionary commitment.

May Mary, Mother of God and Mother of the Church, who "joined the disciples in praying for the coming of the Holy Spirit (*cf. Acts 1,14*), and thus made possible the missionary outburst which took place at Pentecost" [\[170\]](#), accompany the synodal pilgrimage of the People of God, pointing the way and teaching us the beautiful, tender and strong style of this new phase of evangelisation. ITC

6. The Synodal Process

Every parish in the Archdiocese will be offering the Disciple Maker Index (DMI) survey from January 15 to February 15 both online as a link from individual parish websites and as a hardcopy survey that can be filled out in-person at all parishes. Parishioners should take the DMI through their parish so the data can accurately reflect the feedback from each parish community. Parishes will provide a link on their website and make hardcopy surveys available through February 15. www.sfarch.org/synod

The Archdiocese of San Francisco will kick-off the local synodal process in January by asking every Catholic to participate in the Disciple Maker Index survey. The process will continue in February and March with engagement sessions offered throughout the Archdiocese.

Timeline for the Archdiocese of San Francisco

- **November – December, 2021**
Preparation work, priest orientation webinars, parish Synod leaders appointed and oriented
- January 3, 2022
Synodal and Disciple Maker Index Promotion Begins
- January 15 – February 14, 2022
Disciple Maker Index opens to all in the Archdiocese

- February 26 – March 6, 2022
In person and virtual Synod listening sessions take place
- March 2022
Results of Disciple Maker Index made available to parishes
- April 2, 2022

Submission of Synod Synthesis submitted to USCCB

The Synod of Bishops will draft a document and vote, paragraph by paragraph, to approve it. The Pope then uses the document to make informed decisions following the Synod. The goal is to reach a consensus, but it does not mean that what people support will be adopted by the Pope. The Holy Spirit guides the Pope's decision. It's not by a majority vote. The decisions are arrived at by a prayerful discernment. *Fr. Feroz Fernandes, Catholic Missionary Priest*

7. What will be the outcome of this Synodal process?

Because the history of the Church gives ample witness to the importance of consultation of diocesan clergy and faithful in matters pertaining to the good of the Church, these discussions are given special attention. The consultations are followed by discernment on the part of bishops chosen for the task, united in the search for a consensus that does not spring from worldly logic, but from common obedience to the Spirit of Christ. Attentive to the sense of the faith of the people of God – which they need to carefully distinguish from changing public opinion – the Synod Bishops will then work together for ecclesial consensus, which is not determined by the tallying of votes, but is the outcome of the working of the Holy Spirit which enlivens the one Church of Christ.

Pope Francis has affirmed that this Synod of Bishops must increasingly become an instrument for listening to the People of God. The results are then submitted to the Holy Father in his capacity as universal Pastor of the Church. Once the results have been accepted by the Holy Father, an implementation phase in every diocese follows, to initiate the reception of the Synod's conclusions. It must be remembered that given the diversity throughout the world, the results

must be enculturated if they are to be respected and applied. In this way, it can be seen that the synodal process not only has its point of departure, but also its point of arrival in the People of God, upon whom the gifts of grace bestowed by the Holy Spirit through the Synod of Bishops must be poured out.

www.sfarch.org/synod



Pope Francis leads a session of the Synod of Bishops for the Amazon at the Vatican Oct. 8, 2019. (CNS photo/Vatican Media)

8. FYI. 9 Things to know about the Synod on Synodality

Filed Under: [Leadership Ideas](#) October 11, 2021



Synod and Synodality are two words doing rounds in Church circles. What does it mean? People are not used to the jargon of words –unfamiliar and difficult to pronounce. Synodality is one such word. Pope Francis officially inaugurated the Synod with a theme “*For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation and Mission*” on October 10, 2021. I have listed 9 things you may not know about the Synod on Synodality.

1. What is a synod?

Synod is a meeting of church leaders. The word ‘Synod’ is based on a Greek word meaning *journeying together*. The idea is rooted in the Acts of the Apostles Chapter 15 in the New Testament.

2. What is Synodality?

Synodality is the way the Synod makes decisions. The model includes listening to a broad range of people, discussing issues to hear the Holy Spirit guiding the Church. Synodality is not about winners and losers. It is about speaking with frankness and boldness, listening humbly and being open to new ideas. In theory, Synodality can embrace any topic and even disagreement is welcome. Synodality is the top priority for Pope Francis.

3. When does Synod on Synodality begin?

The Synod on Synodality is a two-year process from October 10, 2021, to October 2023. The diocesan level listening phase will run until April 2022. A continental phase is scheduled from September 2022 to March 2023. And the last, the Universal Church phase will culminate in the traditional assembly of the Synod of Bishops in the Vatican in October 2023.

4. What is unique about this Synod on Synodality?

Unlike past Synods, the Synod on Synodality is not addressing a particular issue. It is becoming what God wants us to be as a Church – journeying together amid the reality of our times.

The uniqueness is seen for three reasons. It is no longer a one-month Synod of Bishops but a two-year synodal process for the entire people of God. It is a synod that seeks to give a lived experience of synodality, not just questionnaires. The Synod aims to put synodality in practice in the church's life, not talk about a synod – but working together to move forward.

5. What happens after the Synod of Bishops?

The Synod of Bishops will draft a document and vote, paragraph by paragraph, to approve it. The Pope then uses the document to make informed decisions following the Synod. The goal is to reach a consensus, but it does not mean that what people support will be adopted by the Pope. The Holy Spirit guides the Pope's decision. It's not by a majority vote. The decisions are arrived at by a prayerful discernment.

6. Why hold a Synod on Synodality?

Synodality is messy – contrary to the method of command and control. Pope Francis thinks there is a long way to go before the church makes decisions. Pope Francis wants to see synodality at every level. Synod on Synodality is the best way forward for finding out what synodality means in practice. Will Synod on Synodality completely overhaul the church's top-down decision-making? It may not happen. Pope Francis aims to give an experience for every Catholic in the participation process rather than discerning alone

7. What are the three words for the Synod?

Three words to animate the synodal process are communion, participation, and mission. Communion is about origins and identities. Communion is based on being children of One God – no matter what divides us. Participation involves playing our part in the welfare of others and caring for our common home. The mission is to go forth to listen, learn and love others. The mission is often misunderstood as sent out to destroy the ones who disagree. The mission is to go beyond our religious silos to listen to the Holy Spirit on the synodal journey.

8. What risks should a Synod avoid?

Pope Francis warned that a Synod can be a mere formal event, intellectual and complacent. A Synod is a process of authentic spiritual discernment, not an image building of the church. It's a process to facilitate dialogue between the priests and the laity. Another risk is Synod becoming an abstract approach to the problems of the church – far from the reality of God's holy people. Complacency is another risk – saying we have always done it this way. It's like applying old solutions to new problems.

9. What are the opportunities of the synodal process?

The synodal process offers opportunities for encounter, listening and reflection. The synodal process is to feel at home and participate as a people of God. It's time to listen first to the Holy Spirit, then to our brother and sisters, and the crisis of faith. The synodal process opens us to see God's style of closeness, compassion and tenderness – healing broken hearts.

The success of the synod on synodality depends on the capacity to listen and learn. God's spirit cannot be confined to one particular enclave. Synodality is about people of God, as the African saying says: "If you want to go fast, go alone; if you want to go far, go together."

About the Author

Feroz Fernandes, a Catholic Missionary, identifies himself as an Uncommon Priest. Father Feroz loves adventure in the apostolate. Check out his debut book [The Uncommon Priest: Incredible Stories You Never Read](#) on amazon. And also, the YouTube Channel: [Feroz Fernandes](#) promotes a better understanding of scripture.

9. RECAP VIDEO: SYNOD on SYNODALITY

https://youtu.be/EtTbi_WyZrc mooregina8@gmail.com

**“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.”
— Pope Francis**



THE HOLY FATHER
WANTS TO HEAR
FROM YOU!

10. REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. COMPANIONS ON THE JOURNEY

In the Church and in society we are side by side on the same road.

- In our local Church, who are those who “walk together”?
- Who are those who seem further apart?
- How are we called to grow as companions?
- What groups or individuals are left on the margins?

2. LISTENING

Listening is the first step, but it requires an open mind and heart, without prejudice.

- How is God speaking to us through voices we sometimes ignore?
- How are the laity listened to, especially women and young people?
- What facilitates or inhibits our listening?
- How well do we listen to those on the peripheries?
- How is the contribution of consecrated men and women integrated?
- What are some limitations in our ability to listen, especially to those who have different views than our own?
- What space is there for the voice of minorities, especially people who experience poverty, marginalization, or social exclusion?

3. SPEAKING OUT

All are invited to speak with courage and parrhesia, that is, in freedom, truth, and charity.

- What enables or hinders speaking up courageously, candidly, and responsibly in our local Church and in society?
- When and how do we manage to say what is important to us?
- How does the relationship with the local media work (not only Catholic media)?

- Who speaks on behalf of the Christian community, and how are they chosen?

4. CELEBRATION

“Walking together” is only possible if it is based on communal listening to the Word and the celebration of the Eucharist.

- How do prayer and liturgical celebrations actually inspire and guide our common life and mission in our community?
- How do they inspire the most important decisions?
- How do we promote the active participation of all the faithful in the liturgy?
- What space is given to participating in the ministries of lector and acolyte?

5. SHARING RESPONSIBILITY FOR OUR COMMON MISSION

Synodality is at the service of the mission of the Church, in which all members are called to participate.

- Since we are all missionary disciples, how is every baptized person called to participate in the mission of the Church?
- What hinders the baptised from being active in mission?
- What areas of mission are we neglecting?
- How does the community support its members who serve society in various ways (social and political involvement, scientific research, education, promoting social justice, protecting human rights, caring for the environment, etc.)?

*Questions derived from the [International Theological Commission document](#).

Thank you!