

What is the Purpose of a Synod?

... We recall that the purpose of the Synod, and therefore of this consultation, 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... Pope Francis

Why Synodality?

Synodality denotes the particular style that qualifies the life and mission of the church, expressing her nature as the People of God on a journey. The process allows us to walk forward together, listening to the Holy Spirit and the Word of God to participate in the mission of the church as the pilgrim and missionary people of God.

The Synodal process is first and foremost a spiritual process. It is not a mechanical data-gathering exercise or a series of meetings and debates. Synodal listening is oriented towards discernment.

How Will We Journey Together?

Each Parish will arrange for group meetings and dialogue sessions within their parishes. The formats will vary to encourage as much participation as possible. In addition, the Synod committee will hold similar meetings inviting those who may no longer have a parish home to participate. Other small groups within parishes may also come together to dialogue and discern. All groups will answer the same questions posed universally for the Synod process.

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.

Prayer

*We stand together 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.*



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What is a Synod?

Pope Francis has initiated a Synodal process for the universal Church. It is a process of pastoral planning with the voices of all Catholics to be heard. The Synod is for the good of the whole church both locally and universally.

In Greek, syn means "together" and hodos means "path." Thus we are called to journey together in this synod to learn how to walk as one community, in the same direction, led by the Holy Spirit responding to the important issues in the Church today.

A synod is an ancient and venerable word in the Tradition of the Church. It refers to the Lord Jesus, who presents himself as The Way, The Truth and The Life and to the fact that Christians, his followers, were originally called "Followers of the Way."

What is the object of this Synod?

The objective of this Synodal Process is to provide an opportunity for the entire People of God to discern together how to move forward as Church by listening universally to what the Holy Spirit is saying.

We do this by living the Tradition of the Church, and then by listening to one another, and especially to those at the margins, discerning the signs of the times. In fact, the whole Synodal Process aims at fostering a lived experience of discernment, participation, and co-responsibility, where a diversity of gifts is brought together for the Church's mission in the world.

Examples of the Questions for Conversation and Dialogue:

- *How do we promote the active participation of all the faithful in the liturgy?*
- *In our local Church, what groups or individuals are left on the margins?*
- *What enables or hinders speaking up courageously and responsibly in our local church?*
- *How does prayer and liturgical celebrations inspire and guide our common life and mission?*
- *What hinders the baptized in being active in mission?*
- *What particular issues in the Church and society that we need to pay more attention to?*
- *What relationship does our Church community have with members of other Christian traditions and denominations?*
- *How does our church community form people to be more capable of walking together, listening to one another, participating in mission, and engaging in dialogue?*
- *How can we grow in communal and spiritual discernment?*

What is the theme of the Synod?

The theme of the Synod is “For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, and Mission.” These three dimensions are profoundly interrelated. They are the vital pillars of a Synodal Church. There is no hierarchy between them. Rather, each one enriches and orients the other two. There is a dynamic relationship between the three that must be articulated with all three in mind.

- **Communion:** By his gracious will, God gathers us together as diverse peoples of one faith, through the covenant that He 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*, (Sense of the Faithful), that we share. We all have a role to play in discerning and living out God's call for His people.
- **Participation:** 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 at Baptism. Genuine efforts must be made to ensure the inclusion of those at the margins or who feel excluded.
- **Mission:** The Church exists to evangelize. We can never be centered on ourselves. Our mission is to witness to the love of God in the midst of the whole human family. This Synodal Process has a deeply 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 fulfill her mission of evangelization in the world, as a leaven at the service of the coming of God's kingdom.

The unfolding of the Synodal process at a local level must also involve:

Discernment, through listening to create space for the guidance of the Holy Spirit

Accessibility, in order to ensure that as many people as possible can participate, regardless of location, language, education, socio-economic status, ability/disability, and material resources.

Cultural Awareness to celebrate and embrace the diversity within local communities.

Inclusion, making every effort to involve those who feel excluded or marginalized.

Partnership, based on the model of a co-responsible Church.

Respect, for the rights, dignity, and opinion of each participant.

Accurate Syntheses, that truly captures the range of critical and appreciative perspectives of all responses, including views that are expressed only by a minority of participants.

Transparency, ensuring that processes of invitation, involvement, inclusion, and aggregation of input are clear and well communicated.

Fairness, ensuring that participation in the listening process treats each person equally, so that every voice can be duly heard.

Participating in a Synod means taking the same path as the Word made flesh: following in His footsteps, listening to His word and the words of others, discovering with amazement that the Holy Spirit always surprises us with fresh paths and new ways of speaking... Pope Francis