

Announcements on Synods and Synodality

What will be the work of the Synodality Steering Committee?

Bishop Estévez has appointed a committee with vast representation from across the diocese to enact our local diocesan synod consultation over the next several months. Over the next week months, you will be reading more about this 3- step process. The first step will be held in every diocese across the world. The second step will be a national consultation. The third step will be held in Rome in 2023. The official kick off weekend across the world will be Sunday, October 17. Our event will be held at St. Joseph Parish, starting with a 2:00 pm Mass, followed by formation and information.

Where does the word synod come from?

The word “synod” has deep roots within the Church’s tradition. It is a two-part Greek word: *syn*, meaning “together” and *hodos* meaning the “road or the way.” Putting the two parts together, we get the meaning of walking together along the way. We see in the Scriptures, that Jesus often taught His disciples while they walked “along the way.” This idea became such a part of the community, that the followers of Jesus became known as “followers of the way.”

Where in the Scriptures can we find the concept of synodality?

The story of the two disciples on the road to Emmaus is a good Scriptural example of how Jesus sought to listen to others as he walked with them. In the story, Jesus asks them to tell him their story which reveals some misunderstandings about him. Then, Jesus accompanies them to dinner, breaking open the Word of God with them and revealing himself in the breaking of the bread. This is how these disciples understood that Jesus was accompanying them on “their way.” (Lk 24:13-35)

How does Acts of the Apostles give example of synodal thinking?

Throughout the history found in Acts of the Apostles, we see the concept of synodality, the entire community in conversation when important decisions need to be made that affect all. In Acts 1:15 we read that about 120 people gathered with Peter to discern a replacement for Judas. Later in Acts (15:1-35) we read about the first Council of the Church at Jerusalem wherein the Apostles and presbyters, “in agreement with the whole church” decide on several matters that affected the Gentiles as they sought to join the Church.

What is a Synod of Bishops?

Almost every two years since 1967, the Church has celebrated a Synod of Bishops. This is a special and unique moment in the life of the Church. Bishops from all over the world gather to assist the Bishop of Rome with “providing for the good of the universal Church”. In each Synod, the Church “journeys together”, along a specific path, focusing on a theme chosen by the Pope. In the end, the Pope “confirms his brethren in the faith” regarding “matters and situations that bear upon the internal life of the Church and upon the kind of action (s) that the Church should be carrying on in today's world” (Pope St. Paul VI)

History of Synods Part I

Pope Paul VI established the Synod of Bishops in 1965. The Second Vatican Council had just concluded. Motivated by the experience of the Council itself, Paul VI desired to: “permanently establish a Council of Bishops, with the aim of providing for a continuance after the Council of the great abundance of benefits that we have been so happy to see flow to the Christian people during the time of the Council as a result of our close collaboration with the bishops.” *Apostolica sollicitudo*.

<https://bit.ly/3d6UQP0>

The Role of the Synod of Bishops

In the words of Pope Francis, the Synod of Bishops is a body that, “manifests the solicitude of the College of Bishops for the needs of the People of God and for communion among the Churches.” The Synod is a means of gathering information on a particular theme from local Churches. The Synodal Assembly has a “consultative role, offering information and counsel to the Roman Pontiff on various ecclesial questions, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.” (Pope Francis using the words of Pope St. Paul VI). The Synodal Process, then, is to be a suitable instrument to give voice to the entire People of God.

Documents that govern a Synod

There are several documents which govern the workings of a Synod. The Apostolic Letter of Pope St. Paul VI, *Apostolica sollicitudo* (1965), is a general outline for future synods. *Ordo synodi episcoporum* (1966) contains the norms regarding how themes are chosen, organizational details as well as some very specific details for the gatherings themselves. This document is updated to reflect current structure or needs. The *Code of Canon Law* (1983) has a chapter dedicated to the Synod of Bishops. Most recently, Pope Francis issued *Apostolic constitutio episcopalis communio* (2018) which is the current governing document for Synods. The essential change that Pope Francis made to the previous documents is the inclusion of the entire People of God in both the consultation and implementation phases.

Types of Synod

There are three types of Synods of Bishops:

1. **Ordinary General Assembly** which is called to reflect on matters that pertain to the good of the universal Church. There have been 13 of these Assemblies called the last one being in 2018, Synod on *Young People, Faith, and Vocational Discernment*.
2. **Extraordinary General Assembly** which, like its name, means an exception to what is normally done. This assembly is called to reflect on matters of a more urgent nature.
3. **Special Assembly** which is called for a particular geographic region and not for the Church Universal. The Synod on the Pan-Amazon Region (2019) would be an example.

The Three Phases of a Synod

Every Synod primary has three phases. The first is a **preparatory phase**. Normally a preparatory document gathers information from Bishops, congregations of the consecrated, and from the Roman Curia. The second stage is the **discussion phase** wherein members, experts, auditors, and other people who have been invited attend meetings in Rome. The third phase is the **implementation phase** wherein the Holy Father, in conversation with the Bishops, create a commission or utilize a current commission to implement the work of the Synod. This is announced by way of an Apostolic Letter.

What is an Apostolic Exhortation?

It is customary that, following each Synod, a document called an Apostolic Exhortation is issued by the Pope. The Holy Father draws on the information that has been provided to him to write a document for the betterment of the Church in the world. One example of an Apostolic Exhortation that has long been an influential teaching document is *Evangelii nuntiani*, published by Pope St. Paul VI in 1974 after the completion of the Synod of Bishops that focused on “Evangelization in the Modern World. Another highly influential Apostolic Exhortation is *Familiaris consortio*, published following the Fifth Ordinary General Assembly of Bishops in 1980 under the theme, “The Christian Family.”

What does Pope Francis say about the synodal process?

“Consultation of the faithful must be followed by discernment on the part of the Bishops chosen for the task, united in the search for a consensus that springs not from worldly logic, but from common obedience to the Spirit of Christ. Attentive to the *sensus fidei* of the People of God---‘which they need to distinguish carefully from the changing currents of public opinion’ ---the members of the Assembly offer their opinion to the Roman Pontiff so that it can help him in his ministry as universal Pastor of the Church...When it is therefore a question involving the faith itself, the *consensus ecclesiae*...is the outcome of the working of the Spirit, the soul of the one Church of Christ.” (*Apostolic constitutio episcopalis communio* # 7, 2018) <https://bit.ly/3vPCJne>

Opening of the next synod

The next Synod of Bishops will open locally in October, 2021, officially on October 10 in Rome and October 17 in each of the dioceses of the world. Prior to this opening, the general secretariat will send each of the bishops a preparatory document, a handbook for training, and logistics for the local event. Each bishop will have appointed a contact person or committee to lead the local consultation. After this consultation, the input will be synthesized into a cohesive document to be submitted to the U.S. Bishops as part of the second step of this process.

The call for worldwide synodality

Cardinal Grech, the General Secretary of the Synod of Bishops, recalled in the proclamation of this Synod, that synods were a typical practice of the first millennium of the Church, a practice that continued within the Orthodox Church. He described this process as “ a great vision, which unites the tradition of the Eastern and Western Churches, giving to a synodal Church that principle of unity that was even lacking in the Church of the Fathers...from this synodal journey, we can also expect with confidence great fruits on the ecumenical level.” <https://bit.ly/3d42VEg> (Synod of Bishops website for interview)

Phases of the synod October, 2021- October, 2023

This Synod, as have all three of the previous, will involve 3 distinctive steps: *The Diocesan Phase* (October, 2021-April 2022). *The Continental Phase* (September, 2022 – March , 2023) and *The Universal Church Phase* (October, 2023). The local diocesan opening events around the world will be held on the weekend of October 16-17, 2021, with the opening event occurring in Rome on the weekend of October 9-10, 2021. Here in the Diocese of St. Augustine, our opening event will be the celebration of Mass in St. Joseph Church on Sunday, October 17 at 2:00 pm, followed by a formation session, and concluding with a social. This will be planned by the local Synodality Steering Committee, which is representative of the diocese. <https://bit.ly/3d42VEg> (Synod of Bishops website for more information)

Sources

International Theological Commission, *Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church*, March 2, 2018.

Pope Francis. *Apostolic constitutio episcopalis communio* (2018)

Pope St. Paul VI. *Apostolica sollicitudo* (1965)

https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/synod/index.htm

Vatican News Service.