



Everything You Need to Know About The October 4-29 Synod

Part One: What's a Synod, Anyway?

“Synod”: Not a word we use every day! A “synod” (small “s”, pronounced “sin-ud”), is a group of people who come together to discuss something important. “Synod” (capital “S”) in recent Catholic Church history, is a large group of bishops from around the world, meeting every few years in Rome, to discuss something important in the life of the Church, then making some recommendations to the Pope.

This particular Synod, which will begin October 4, 2023, and conclude on Oct. 29, will also have a second session held in October 2024. It will have at least 400 participants, mostly bishops, from around the world. It is much smaller than an Ecumenical Council, called occasionally by the Pope, like Vatican Council II, which included all 2,860 bishops in the world.



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For the First Session
(October 2023)



Why is this Synod Different?

This Synod will include lay men and women for the first time, and with voting rights. The Synod is guided by a working document that is not a set of ideas, laws, or doctrines, but questions brought forth from consultation with all the People of God around the world.

“Synodal”: Another strange word! Synodal (pronounced sin-OH-dull) is the adjective used to describe a process or event during which there is much dialogue and listening. Historically, Church meetings in our local and international experience, have offered presentations with little focus on dialogue. Often those with higher-level authority speak to the laity, truncating listening and focusing on their authority.



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This coming Synod will emphasize participants LISTENING and DIALOGUING

with each other. Since the Synod process began almost two years ago, it has promoted the image of the Church as the people of God **“journeying together”** toward the Kingdom of God. One of the questions that has been asked during planning of the Synod is “who is on this journey, and who is being left out?” and “is the institutional church listening to all its baptized members?”

So, what does “Synodality” mean? Synodality (pronounced sin-oh-DAL-ity) comes from the Greek word to “journey together.” Synodality sees the Holy Spirit as guiding our journey together. It refers to a way of “being Church” where listening, both to the Holy Spirit and to each other, is the normal “characteristic” of being a Catholic, whether lay or ordained.



The title of the Oct. 4-29 Synod is the “Synod on Synodality” which hopes to promote a new experience of Church in which there is much more listening and dialogue.



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Part Two: What Will Happen at the Synod?

What has happened so far?

On October 10, 2021, Pope Francis officially announced the beginning of the preparation for the Synod on Synodality to be held in Rome in October of 2023. **During the winter/spring of 2022, parishes and Catholic organizations around the world met to discuss the synod questions and submit a summary report of their meetings to their diocese.** (In the United States some parishes participated, others did not, depending on the leadership of the particular diocese or local parish.) Diocesan summary reports were sent to the USCCB (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops), which collated the individual diocesan reports and sent a national summary report to the Vatican. An international report was assembled in late 2022 and sent back to “Continental” groups for review. Those groups responded back to Rome. **The Vatican issued a working document, the IL (*Instrumentum Laboris*) in June of 2023 which will guide the Synod Process.**

What are they actually going to do at the Synod?

Cardinal Mario Grech, secretary general of the Synod, describes the IL as **the “fruit of a synodal process”** which **“involved the whole Church”** in an exercise of listening to the people of God. (IL #1) It is “a practical aid for the conduct” of the Synod; it is not a document of the Church’s Magisterium, or teaching office. **It articulates “some of the priorities that emerged from listening to the People of God... It expresses them as questions addressed to the synodal assembly.”** (IL #10)

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At the Synod there will be 400+ participants, both lay and ordained, from around the world.

The assembly will be divided into small groups of 12 people sitting at round tables according to various language groups. **They will work in these groups, addressing the many questions from the IL document which is based upon issues raised through the global consultation under the Synod themes of Communion, Mission, and Participation.** (coming in Part Four)



The IL (*Instrumentum Laboris*) can be viewed at:
https://www.synod.va/content/dam/synod/common/phases/universal-stage/il/ENG_INSTRUMENTUM-LABORIS.pdf

Some of the issues raised around the world include:

- **the role of women** in the Church,
- **the exercise of authority** in the Church at all levels,
- **the formation** in the seminary,
- **the question of the ordination** of mature married men in some regions,
- **the approach to the divorced and remarried Catholics and to LGBTQ+ people,**
- **the care of our earth,**
- **and much more.**

After listening to each other in these groups they will gather in plenary (total) sessions and share their input.



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Part Three: What does a “Synodal Church” Look Like?

**What’s unique about being a Church
that works synodally?**

The IL (*Instrumentum Laboris*) document, which guides the process of the October Synod, says that the **“synodal process offers an opportunity for an encounter in faith that makes the bond with the Lord, fraternity between people, and love for the Church.”** What does that look like in the everyday life of the Church and my parish, weekend after weekend, year after year?

To begin with, **“the protagonist of the Synod is the Holy Spirit.”** The synodal process trusts that the **Holy Spirit will guide the participants to address the “problems, resistances, difficulties and tensions” that the Church experiences today.** These will be “identified and named in a context of authentic dialogue that makes it possible for all participants to speak and listen with freedom and sincerity.” (IL # 17) The Holy Spirit will move us toward becoming a Synodal Church.

When persons listen to the Spirit and to each other, an “awareness emerges of certain characteristics or distinctive signs of a synodal Church.”

These signs are described on pages 10-13 of the IL.

Some of those signs are . . .

- The **common dignity derived from Baptism**, making us sons and daughters of God.
- A belief that the Church is meant to **become increasingly synodal in its institutions, structures, and procedures.**
- Awareness that **to be a synodal Church is to be a listening Church.** (In the early listening stages of the Synod process, some participants said “the great surprise was the experience of being listened to by the community, in some cases for the first time!”)





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- A commitment to be **humble**. A synodal Church knows that it **must ask forgiveness and has much to learn from its members**.
- The need for **encounter and dialogue with other Churches**. A profound desire to **deepen the ecumenical journey** emerges: an authentically synodal Church cannot but involve all those who share the one Baptism.
- A practice of **openness, encounter and dialogue** which is not afraid of the variety it bears, but values it without forcing it into uniformity.
- An ability to **manage tensions without being crushed by them**. Authentic listening and the ability to find ways to continue walking together beyond fragmentation and polarization are indispensable for the Church to remain alive and vital.
- **Listening attentively to each other's lived experiences**, growing in mutual respect and discerning God's Spirit in the lives of others and in our own.

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Part Four: What Questions Will Be Discussed at the Synod?

Three Areas of Questions.

The entire second half (pp. 23-60) of the IL (*Instrumentum Laboris*), the working document which guides the Synod, is devoted to raising questions which were gleaned from the synodal sessions around the world.

The questions are divided into the three areas which are the overall themes of the Synod: Communion, Mission, and Participation.

The IL presents “Worksheets” which provide starting points for the dialogue by the participants in each of the three themes. The Worksheets provide literally hundreds of questions.



Here are only a few of the questions from each of the three themes.

A Communion that Radiates:

- How does the service of charity and commitment to justice and care for our common home nourish communion in a synodal Church?
- How can a synodal Church fulfill its mission through a renewed ecumenical commitment?
- How can we create spaces where those who feel hurt by the Church and unwelcomed by the community feel recognized, received, are free to ask questions and are not judged? What concrete steps are needed to welcome those who feel excluded from the Church because of their status or sexuality (for example, remarried divorcees, people in polygamous marriages, LGBTQ+ people, etc.)?



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Co-Responsibility in Mission:

- How can preaching, catechesis and pastoral work promote a shared awareness of the meaning and content of mission? How can it convey that mission constitutes a real and concrete call for every Baptized person?
- How can we raise awareness that professional, social, and political commitment and voluntary work are areas in which mission is exercised?
- How can the Church of our time better fulfill its mission through greater recognition and promotion of the baptismal dignity of women?



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Participation, Governance, Authority:

- What processes, structures, and institutions are needed in a synodal Church?
- How can authority and responsibility be understood and exercised such that it serves the participation of the whole People of God?

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