



SYNODUS EPISCOPORUM

“For a synodal Church: communion, participation and mission”

XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops

Presentation of the Programme for the celebration of the upcoming Synod approved by Pope Francis during his audience with Cardinal Secretary General of the Synod of Bishops, 24 April 2021.

1. “It is precisely this path of *synodality* which God expects of the Church of the third millennium. What the Lord is asking of us is already in some sense present in the very word ‘synod.’ Journeying together — laity, pastors, the Bishop of Rome — is an easy concept to put into words, but not so easy to put into practice.” (*Address of His Holiness, Pope Francis, Ceremony Commemorating the 50th anniversary of the institution of the Synod of Bishops, 17 October 2015*). For this reason, the theme of the next Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops is, *For a Synodal Church: communion, participation and mission*.
2. Indeed, *synodality* refers to the very essence of the Church, her constitutive reality, and is thus oriented towards evangelization. It is an ecclesial way of being and a prophetic example for today's world. “For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many are one body, so it is with Christ.” (1 Cor 12:12). In a similar way, Augustine speaks of the *Whole Christ* (cf. *Sermon 341*), head and members who form an indivisible and inseparable unity. Only in union with Christ the head, is it possible to understand the plurality of the members of the body, which enriches the Church, overcoming any temptation to uniformity. Since this is a unity in plurality in the power of the Spirit, the Church is called to open new paths whilst embarking on that same journey.
3. **The Synod of Bishops** is the dynamic point of convergence that calls for mutual listening to the Holy Spirit at every level of the Church's life (cf. *Address of His Holiness, Pope Francis, Ceremony Commemorating the 50th anniversary of the institution of the Synod of Bishops, 17 October 2015*). It is not just an event, but also a process that involves in synergy the People of God, the College of Bishops and the Bishop of Rome, each according to their proper function (cf. *Address by Cardinal Mario Grech to the Holy Father in the Consistory for the creation of new cardinals, November 28, 2020*).

PROMGRAMME FOR THE CELEBRATION OF THE SYNOD

4. Considering that the local churches, in which and from which the one and only Catholic Church exists, contribute effectively to the good of the entire mystical

body, which is also the body of the churches (cf. *Lumen Gentium* 23), the fullness of the synodal process can only truly exist if the local churches are involved that process. For a genuine participation of the local churches, there also must be the involvement of other ecclesial bodies in this process, such as, the Synods of the Eastern Catholic Churches, the Councils and Assemblies of the Churches *sui iuris*, and Episcopal Conferences, with their own national, regional, and continental entities.

5. This synodal journey will begin with a solemn opening and consist of three phases:

5.1. OPENING OF THE SYNOD: October 2021

This synodal journey will commence both in the Vatican and in the local churches.

5.1.1. Official Opening with the Holy Father in the Vatican: 9-10 October 2021.

- a. Opening session and time for reflection
- b. Liturgical prayers and celebration of the Eucharist

5.1.2. Official Opening in each local church: Sunday 17 October 2021.

The local diocesan bishop will celebrate the same programme:

- a. Opening session and time for reflection
- b. Liturgical prayers and celebration of the Eucharist

5.2. PHASE IN THE LOCAL CHURCHES AND OTHER ECCLESIAL REALITIES: October 2021-April 2022

The objective of this phase is to consult the People of God (cf. *Episcopalis Communio*, 5,2) so that the synodal process is carried out through listening to all of the baptised, who are the subject of the *sensus fidei* – infallible – *in credendo*.

The following program will facilitate the consultation and participation of all.

GENERAL SECRETARIAT FOR THE SYNOD OF BISHOPS:

5.2.1. The General Secretariat for the Synod of Bishops will send a Preparatory Document, accompanied by a Questionnaire and a *Vademecum* with proposals for consultation in each local church.

5.2.2. The Dicasteries of the Roman Curia, the Union of Superiors General - International Union Superiors General (USG - UISG) and other Unions and Federations of Consecrated life, international lay movements, and University - Faculties of Theology will also receive this Questionnaire and *Vademecum*.

LOCAL CHURCHES AND EPISCOPAL CONFERENCES OR CORRESPONDING BODIES:

5.2.3. Each bishop will appoint a diocesan contact person (team) for the synodal consultation; they shall be a point of reference and link with the Episcopal Conference. They will accompany all the stages of the consultation process in the local church. *(Before October 2021)*

5.2.4. Each Episcopal Conference (or corresponding body) will also appoint a contact person responsible for liaising with both diocesan officials and with the General Secretariat for the Synod of Bishops. *(Before October 2021)*

LOCAL CHURCHES:

5.2.5. Consultation in the local churches will include those groups of participation as envisioned in *Episcopalis Communio*, without excluding other modalities deemed appropriate for the consultation to be real and effective (cf. *Episcopalis Communio*, 6).

5.2.6. Consultation with the People of God in each local church will conclude with a **pre-synodal meeting**, which will be the culmination of diocesan discernment.

5.2.7. At the conclusion of the diocesan phase, each local church will submit their contributions to their Episcopal Conference on a date determined by the Episcopal Conference itself. The Eastern Churches will submit their contributions to their corresponding bodies.

EPISCOPAL CONFERENCES OR CORRESPONDING BODIES:

5.2.8. A period of discernment will begin for bishops gathered in an assembly (Episcopal Conference). They will listen to what the Spirit has inspired in the churches entrusted to them.

5.2.9. Participants in the discernment period and the drafting of the synthesis include the contact person of the Episcopal Conference with regard to the synodal process and their team, as well as those representatives elected to participate in the Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod, following their ratification by the Holy Father.

5.2.10. This synthesis will be sent to the General Secretariat for the Synod of Bishops along with the contributions of each of the local churches. *(Before April 2022)*

OTHER CONTRIBUTIONS:

5.2.11. The Dicasteries of the Roman Curia, the University - Faculties of Theology, the Union of Superiors General - International Union Superiors General (USG – UISG) and other Unions and Federations of Consecrated life, and international lay movements, shall also provide their own contributions to the General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops. *(Before April 2022)*

GENERAL SECRETARIAT FOR THE SYNOD OF BISHOPS:

5.2.12. The General Secretariat for the Synod of Bishops will proceed with the drafting of the first *Instrumentum Laboris*. (Before September of 2022)

5.3. CONTINENTAL PHASE: September 2022 - March 2023

The purpose of this phase is to promote dialogue at the continental level about the text of the first *Instrumentum Laboris* and deepen discernment within the specific cultural context of each continent.

GENERAL SECRETARIAT FOR THE SYNOD OF BISHOPS:

5.3.1. The General Secretariat for the Synod of Bishops will publish and send the first *Instrumentum Laboris*. (September of 2022)

INTERNATIONAL REUNIONS OF EPISCOPAL CONFERENCES:

5.3.2. Each International Reunion of Episcopal Conferences will also appoint a contact person to liaise with both the Episcopal Conferences and the General Secretariat for the Synod of Bishops. (Before September 2022)

5.3.3. Pre-synodal discernment in the continental Assemblies. The criteria for the participation of the residential bishops and other members of the People of God is to be established.

5.3.4. The Assemblies will conclude with the drafting of a final document to be sent to the General Secretariat for the Synod of Bishops. (March 2023)

OTHER CONTRIBUTIONS:

5.3.5. At the same time as the pre-synod meetings at the continental level, it is recommended that international assemblies of specialists also be held, who may send their contributions to the General Secretariat of the Synod. (March 2023)

GENERAL SECRETARIAT OF THE SYNOD:

5.3.6. The General Secretariat for the Synod of Bishops will proceed to draft the second *Instrumentum Laboris*. (Before June 2023)

5.4. UNIVERSAL CHURCH PHASE: October 2023

5.4.1. The General Secretariat for the Synod of Bishops will send the second *Instrumentum Laboris* to the participants of the General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops.

5.4.2. Celebration of the Synod of Bishops will take place in Rome according to the norms established in the Apostolic Constitution *Episcopalis Communio*. (October 2023)

6. The articulation of the different phases of the synodal process makes possible a real listening to the People of God including all bishops at the different levels of ecclesial life (local churches, Episcopal Conferences or corresponding bodies, and International Reunions of Episcopal Conferences). In this way, the participation of all in the synodal process is guaranteed and the exercise of collegiality is configured within the exercise of synodality, as emphasized by Pope Francis on the 50th anniversary of the institution of the Synod of Bishops.
7. In a spirit of collaboration, the General Secretariat of the Synod is open to clarify and accompany any moment of this synodal process, which must be, essentially, a spiritual event of discernment. “One listening to the others; and all listening to the Holy Spirit.”(*Discourse of Pope Francis on the Commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the institution of the Synod of Bishops, 17 October 2015*).



Mario Card. Grech
General Secretary

Vatican, 21 May 2021

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**PHASE IN THE LOCAL CHURCHES
AND OTHER ECCLESIAL REALITIES**

October 2021-April 2022

GENERAL SECRETARIAT FOR THE SYNOD OF BISHOPS	LOCAL CHURCH AND OTHER ECCLESIAL BODIES	EPISCOPAL CONFERENCES (OR SYNODS OF EASTERN CHURCHES)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preparatory document • Questionnaire • <i>Vademecum</i> for consultation (September 2021) 		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appointment of diocesan contact person • Eventual appointment of a team (before or October 2021) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appointment of contact person for the Episcopal Conference • Eventual appointment of a team (before October 2021)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consultation with the Dicasteries of the Roman Curia • Consultation with the International Union of Superiors General and Major Superiors of Consecrated Life • Consultation with associations of the faithful • Consultation with Faculties and Universities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote and organize consultation with the People of God (Process to be established by the local church; possible dialogue in the Episcopal Conference) 	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pre-synodal meeting for discernment at the diocesan level (after consultation with the People of God) 	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Submission of the synthesis of the diocesan contributions to the General Secretariat for the Synod of Bishops and the Episcopal Conference (Deadline to be decided by the Episcopal Conference) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discernment of the Episcopal Conference: work on the contributions sent by the local churches (Process to establish the Episcopal Conference)
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Submission of the synthesis of the Episcopal

		Conference to the General Secretariat for the Synod of Bishops (April 2022)
• Drafting of the First <i>Instrumentum Laboris</i> (September 2022)		• Appointment of representatives to the General Assembly

CONTINENTAL PHASE
September 2022 - March 2023

GENERAL SECRETARIAT FOR THE SYNOD OF BISHOPS	INTERNATIONAL REUNIONS OF EPISCOPAL CONFERENCES
• Release of the first <i>Instrumentum laboris</i> (September 2022)	• Appointment of a continental responsible (referent) • Possible formation of a team (before September 2022)
	• Discernment in Continental Assemblies (process to be decided by the International Reunions of Episcopal Conferences)
• International Assemblies of Specialists	
	• Drafting of the final document (before March 2023)
	• Submission of the document to the General Secretariat for the Synod of Bishops (March 2023)
• Drafting of the Second <i>Instrumentum laboris</i> (June 2023)	

PHASE OF THE UNIVERSAL CHURCH
October 2023

• XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops (October 2023)
