

TODAY'S CATHOLIC

THE SYNOD IN THE ARCHDIOCESE OF SAN ANTONIO

What is a Synod?

The archdiocesan Synodal process will be conveyed and led by Archbishop Gustavo García-Siller, MSPS, in special gatherings of clergy and faithful to offer him assistance in setting the direction for the future of our local Church. The outcomes do not include addressing doctrinal questions or Church teaching. Instead, it will be focused on pastoral planning, touching on all elements of the local Church. Before discerning its implementation, the archbishop, along with the Synod Steering Committee, will listen to recommendations and suggestions of the faithful.

To have a Synod means “to walk together.” A Synod is a dynamic archdiocesan planning activity. While it is centrally enabled (by a bishop or the pope), it is also locally guided by leaders at every level (pastors, parish leaders, and the faithful). The Synod strives for listening to the real questions and authentic needs of the local Church and sifts for the real issues with a wider vision where subsidiarity and creativity are greatly needed, encouraged, and embraced.



LIVING AS A SYNODAL CHURCH
COMMUNION. PARTICIPATION. MISSION.

“One listening to the others ... and all listening to the Holy Spirit. ... It is toward this (a Synodal Church) that we must go, or rather, that the Spirit asks us to go.”

—POPE FRANCIS

Archdiocesan preparation for the Synodal process

Although many gatherings have already happened, the Synodal process in the Archdiocese of San Antonio will begin officially with the opening Mass at San Fernando Cathedral on Sunday, October 17. It will continue through a special iteration of the Archdiocesan Assembly Convocation on November 6 and additional listening and interactive sessions with the People of God throughout the archdiocese in the following months. Additional details will be forthcoming.

The unfolding of the synodal process at the local level will 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.

Theme of this Synod:

For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation and Mission

The three dimensions of the theme of the Synod are **communion**, **participation**, and **mission**. These dimensions are interrelated – each of them enriches and orients the other two. There is a dynamic relationship between them; when one is articulated, all three must be kept in mind.

• **COMMUNION:** By his gracious will, God gathers us together as diverse peoples of one faith. 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 sense of the faith that we all share. We all have a role to play in discerning and living out God’s call for his people.

• **PARTICIPATION:** This 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. In a Synodal Church the whole community, in the free and rich diversity of its members, is called together to pray, listen, dialogue, discern and offer advice on making pastoral decisions which correspond as closely as possible to God’s will. Genuine efforts must be made to ensure the inclusion of those at the margins or who feel excluded.

• **MISSION:** The Church exists to evangelize. 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, 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.

Additional information on meetings and ways to actively participate will be featured in the next October 22 edition of Today’s Catholic newspaper.

Understanding the Synod

1. What is a Synod?

A Synod is a council of a church, usually convened to decide an issue of doctrine, administration or application. The word Synod is from the Greek *synodos* 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).

2. What is a Synod of Bishops and why do they happen?

At the end of the Second Vatican Council, St. Pope Paul VI sensed the need for the Roman pontiff to continue meeting periodically with the bishops of the world, which is why, on Sept. 15, 1965, he established a new entity within the Church called the Synod of Bishops. The Synod of Bishops is a permanent institution that forms part of the Church's long tradition of organizing ecclesial assemblies to deliberate on the most pressing issues of a particular place and time. Since its establishment in 1965, the popes have called for and lead a total of 15 General Ordinary Assemblies, three General Extraordinary Assemblies, and 11 Special Assemblies of the Synod of Bishops. The topics of each assembly are selected by the pope. The most recent General Assemblies have been on Youth, Family, New Evangelization, the Word of God, and the Eucharist.

3. Who leads a Synod of Bishops?

To answer this question, keep in mind that a Synod of Bishops includes three stages: a preparatory phase, in which the consultation of the People of God on the theme indicated by the pope takes place throughout the world under the direction of each local bishop; a celebratory phase, during which the representatives of the bishops of the world meet in Rome with the pope; and an implementation phase, during which each diocese puts the conclusions of the Synod approved by the pope into practice. The entire process is led by the pope with the assistance of the General Secretariat for the Synod of Bishops. For the most part, the preparatory and implementation phases of the synod are led by each diocesan bishop in close collaboration with the national bishops conference and the Vatican.

4. What is this Synod on Synodality about and why is Pope Francis asking all Catholics to participate?

Synodality is a process of discernment with the aid of the Holy Spirit, involving bishops, priests, religious, and lay Catholics, each according to their gifts and charisms. In the words of the Holy Father, “Synodality is a style, it is a walk together, and it is what the Lord expects from the Church of the third mil-

lennium.” The Synod of Bishops in Rome, planned for October 2023, will be the culmination of the process of synodality which the Holy Father has described; it is a world-wide event in phases:

Diocesan phase: Consultation and participation of the People of God – After a Solemn Opening with Pope Francis at the Vatican on October 10, 2021, all dioceses throughout the world will then begin their synodal journey on Sunday, Oct. 17. In the Archdiocese of San Antonio, after the opening Mass at the Cathedral of San Fernando on October 17, the process will continue at the Archdiocesan Assembly on Saturday, Nov. 6. The consultation with the People of God in the archdiocese will be carried out under the guidelines provided by the Vatican Secretariat of the Synod, which includes a preparatory document, a handbook, and a questionnaire. Once completed, the results of the archdiocesan consultation will be communicated to the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), which will be collecting results from all U.S. dioceses, as well as from other organizations, such as religious communities and Catholic universities. In the spring of 2022, the U.S. bishops will then convene for a period of discernment and make a synthesis of the results they have received from the People of God throughout the U.S. These results will be sent to the General Secretariat of the Synod at the Vatican by April 2022. The General Secretariat of the Synod will then draft the first Working Document on Synodality (*Instrumentum Laboris*), a synthesis of the contribution of the People of God throughout the world, which will be published and sent to every diocese in September 2022.

5. Why is it important to embrace this call/invitation?

In his address during the 50th anniversary of the institution of the Synod of Bishops, Pope Francis offered three powerful reasons why we should all embrace his invitation to participate in the upcoming synodal process: (1) to grow and thrive in the world we live in, the Catholic Church needs to strengthen cooperation in all areas of her mission, which is why the Church of the third millennium must be a Synodal one; (2) the development of a Synodal church will have a great impact in the field of ecumenism. The more we learn to listen and work together – with and under the pope – the better suited we will be to work and collaborate with other Christians; and (3) the testimony of a Synodal Church will have a positive impact in a world in which small and powerful groups tend to determine the fate of entire peoples.

6. What is its relevance in this historic moment for the universal and local Church?

Pope Francis has called for “a synodal Church, which listens, which realizes that listening is more

than simply hearing. It is a mutual listening in which everyone has something to learn. The faithful people, the college of bishops, the Bishop of Rome: all listening to each other, and all listening to the Holy Spirit, the ‘Spirit of truth.’ This process of mutual listening, dialogue, respect, and communal discernment in decision-making under the guidance of the Holy Spirit is a timely one and rooted in the tradition of the early Church. Synodality continues to be relevant today because done well, it energizes the life and evangelizing mission of the Church. It is a response to God's grace to live as His people in our pilgrim journey towards the fulfillment of the Kingdom. This grace calls all the baptized to pastoral conversion, to “learn to live in communion with the grace received in baptism and brought to fulfillment in the Eucharist: the paschal transition from ‘I’ understood in a self-centered way to the ecclesial ‘we’ ... active agents of the one mission of the People of God.” Without conversion of heart and mind and without the discipline for welcoming and listening to one another, the external instruments of communion are practically useless. The true spirituality of communion, “prompting a trust and openness wholly in accord with the dignity and responsibility of every member of the People of God, supplies institutional reality with a soul.”

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 spirit, the soul of 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 inculturated if they are to be respected and applied.