

# Frequently Asked Questions



## What is a synod?

A synod is a council of the Church, usually convened to decide an issue of doctrine, administration or application. The word synod is from the Greek *σύνοδος* (*sinodos*) 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).

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

At the end of the Second Vatican Council, Saint Pope Paul VI sensed the need for the Roman Pontiff to continue meeting periodically with the bishops of the world, which is why, on September 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, 3 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.

## What is Synodality?

In the words of Pope Francis, a synodal Church is a "listening Church knowing that listening is more than feeling. It is a mutual listening in which everyone has something to learn. We must all listen to the Holy Spirit, the spirit of Truth to know what the Spirit is saying to the Church. [...] This is what the Lord expects from the Church of the third millennium." (Address at the commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the Synod of Bishops, 17 October 2015)

Synodality provides opportunities to listen to the Holy Spirit and the People of God in order to discern together and walk forward on a common path, accompanying each other on the spiritual journey as we live out our missionary call to personal discipleship with our Lord.

## What is the current Synod?

In the ceremony to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the institution of the Synod of Bishops in October 2015, Pope Francis declared that "the world in which we live, and which we are called to love and serve, even with its contradictions, demands that the Church strengthen cooperation in all areas of her mission." ([For a Synodal Church handbook](#)) This call to cooperate in the mission of the Church is addressed to the entire People of God. In April 2021, Pope Francis initiated a synodal journey of the whole People of God, to begin in October 2021 in each local Church and culminating in October 2023 in the Assembly of the Synod of Bishops.

## What is the goal of this Synod?

The objective of this Synodal Process is not to provide a temporary or one-time experience of synodality, but rather to provide an opportunity for the entire People of God to discern together how to move forward on the path towards being a more synodal Church in the long-term.

Pope Francis characterizes the two interrelated goals of this process of listening: "to listen to God, so that with him we may hear the cry of his people; to listen to his people until we are in harmony with the will to which God calls us."

## Why are we participating in a Synod at this time?

In October 2015, Pope Francis stated that "the world in which we live, and which we are called to love and serve, even with its contradictions, demands that the Church strengthens cooperation in all areas of her mission." This process is especially important during times of changes in Church and society. We must reflect on the signs of the times in light of the Gospel.

"The decision to 'journey together' is a prophetic sign for the human family, which needs a shared project capable of pursuing the good of all... We need to let ourselves be educated by the Spirit to a truly synodal mentality, entering with

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courage and freedom of heart into a conversion process that is indispensable for the 'continual reformation of which [the Church] always has need, in so far as she is a human institution'" (Synod 2023 Preparatory Document, no. 9).

## Who can participate?

All the baptized are invited to participate in this Synodal Process. Special care should be taken to involve those persons who may be at risk of being excluded: persons with disabilities, migrants, refugees, the elderly, people who live in poverty, inactive Catholics, etc.

## What is the role of the Archdiocese?

Each diocese will carry out the Synodal Process in a way that best responds to their local circumstances. In the Archdiocese of San Francisco, we are working with Catholic Leadership Institute to implement the Disciple Maker Index (DMI) survey at every parish in the Archdiocese from January 15 to February 15. The DMI survey is a nationally recognized survey administered at parishes around the United States and Canada since 2013 by The Catholic Leadership Institute. The results from this survey will provide baseline feedback from which content for engagement sessions will be developed in February and March. Maximum participation will be encouraged through all Archdiocesan structures and communication channels to involve the greatest number of people as possible.

## What is the role of the parish?

Every parish in the Archdiocese will be offering the Disciple Maker Index (DMI) survey from January 15 to February 15 both online as a link from individual parish websites and as a hardcopy survey that can be filled out in-person at all parishes. Parishioners should take the DMI through their parish so the data can accurately reflect the feedback from each parish community. Parishes will provide a link on their website and make hardcopy surveys available through February 15. You can also take the survey through the Archdiocesan website at [www.sfarch.org/synod](http://www.sfarch.org/synod) by clicking on the link for your home parish.

## How can I participate?

There will be a variety of ways for people to get involved in the Synod Process, as individuals or as part of your parish community. We encourage everyone to participate in any additional informal activities for formation, fellowship and prayer, that are organized at the parish. The two primary ways you can participate are:

- Participate in the Disciple Maker Index Survey which will be offered at every parish in the Archdiocese from January 15 to February 15. This is an opportunity for every Catholic to provide personal feedback towards this process.
- Attend one of many Engagement Sessions held in-person and virtually throughout the Archdiocese in February and March. These facilitated sessions will allow the People of God to engage with one another and listen to each other's journey. For more information and a schedule of engagement sessions, go to [www.sfarch.org/synod](http://www.sfarch.org/synod)

## 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 Holy Spirit which enlivens 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 enculturated if they are to be respected and applied.

In this way, it can be seen that the synodal process not only has its point of departure, but also its point of arrival in the People of God, upon whom the gifts of grace bestowed by the Holy Spirit through the Synod of Bishops must be poured out.