
Pope Francis: Synod of Bishops from October 2021 to October 2023, in the Vatican and in local churches

The next Synod of Bishops will be inaugurated by Pope Francis in the Vatican on October 9 and 10. It will be held in three stages from October 2021 to October 2023 at the Vatican and in every local church. The General Secretariat for the Synod of Bishops announced the new synodal itinerary on Friday. On April 24, 2021, Pope Francis approved a new synodal programme for the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, initially scheduled for October 2022, with the theme: *“For a synodal Church: communion, participation and mission.”* The new path leading up to the Synod was proposed by the General Secretariat for the Synod of Bishops, with the consent of the Ordinary Council. *The path leading up to the celebration of the Synod, that will begin on Sunday, October 17 in all local churches, under the guidance of the local bishop, comprises three phases, from October 2021 to October 2023, including a diocesan phase and a continental phase that will give life to two different Instrumentum Laboris, culminating in the final phase at the level of the Universal Church.* The Synod of Bishops “is the dynamic point of convergence that calls for mutual listening to the Holy Spirit at every level of the life of the Church”, as Pope Francis recalled in his address at the Ceremony Commemorating the 50th anniversary of the institution of the Synod of Bishops, on 17 October 2015. “The articulation of the different phases of the synodal process will help to make possible a true listening to the People of God to ensure the participation of all in the synodal process”, writes the Synod of Bishops: *“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.”* **The diocesan phase.** The objective of the diocesan phase (October 2021-April 2022) is to consult the People of God, “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 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, “to ensure consultation and participation of all”, reads the statement released today. Before October 2021 each bishop will appoint a diocesan contact person (and eventually a team) for the synodal consultation. “They shall be a point of reference and link with the Episcopal Conference and will accompany all the stages of the consultation process in the local church.” Each Episcopal Conference will also appoint a contact person (and eventually a team) “responsible for liaising with both diocesan officials and with the General Secretariat for the Synod of Bishops” – also by October 2021. Consultation with the People of God in each particular Church will conclude with a pre-synodal meeting, which will be the culmination of diocesan discernment. After the conclusion of the diocesan phase, each particular Church will submit their contributions to their Episcopal Conference, after which a period of discernment will begin for Episcopal Conferences gathered in assembly meetings. The 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. By September 2022 the General Secretariat for the Synod of Bishops will proceed with the drafting of the first Instrumentum Laboris. **Second and third phase.** The second phase of the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops will take place from September 2022 to March 2023. In September 2022 the General Secretariat for the Synod of Bishops will publish and release the first Instrumentum Laboris. Each International Reunion of Episcopal Conferences will appoint a contact person to liaise with both the Episcopal Conferences and the General Secretariat for the Synod of Bishops by that date. The criteria for the participation of the residential bishops and other members of the People of God is to be established. The Assemblies will conclude with the drafting of a final document to be sent to the General Secretariat for the Synod of Bishops by March 2023. The Synod will enter the third and final Universal Church Phase in October 2023. The General Secretariat for the Synod of Bishops will send the second Instrumentum Laboris to the participants of the Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops. Celebration of

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

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