



Journeying Together

Pope Francis has called the entire Catholic Church to participate in the upcoming Synod of Bishops. The upcoming Synod is entitled: “*For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, and Mission*,” and invites the laity to fulfill their vital role in the Church by helping to guide her into the future.

The word “synod” literally means, “journeying together.”

History

The Church journeying together in a Synod is an ancient practice in Christianity rooted in Scripture. In the Acts of the Apostles (Chapter 15), we hear about Peter and Paul being “welcomed by the church, as well as by the apostles and the presbyters” (Acts 15: 4) to listen, discuss, and discern together how to reconcile Jewish and Gentile religious practices. It was after much listening, discussion, and prayerful silence listening for the voice of the Holy Spirit, did the early Church discern how to proclaim the Gospel to all people.

Several Church Fathers wrote about Synodality in the early Church (c. 30 AD- c. 500 AD), including St. John Chrysostom who wrote that the “Church and Synod as synonymous” (Commentary on Psalm 149 see *Preparatory Document* no. 11). Local Churches gathered together with their bishops to discuss matters related to their local situation throughout the first millennium. This local practice grew to provincial (regional) and universal (ecumenical) councils that would gather bishops, clergy, religious and laity together.

The practice of Synodality continued into the second millennium, even as decision-making was reserved more and more to bishops and the Holy See. The Second Vatican Council, an ecumenical council, emphasized the communion of the Church and reclaimed the image

Pope Francis has called all of us to journey together, guided by the Holy Spirit.

Rather than simply meeting of bishops with oral presentations and written reports, this synod starts with you. Each of us are being called to listen to one another, discern, dialogue, and pray... together! We will share our vision of the Church with the Holy Father!

of the Church as the Pilgrim People of God journeying together towards holiness. “...there is but one People of God, which takes its citizens from every race, making them citizens of a kingdom which is of a heavenly and not an earthly nature. For all the faithful scattered throughout the world are in communion with each other in the Holy Spirit...” (*Lumen Gentium* no. 13).

St. Pope Paul VI created the modern structure of the Synod of Bishops in 1965 after the close of the Second Vatican Council. Pope Paul wanted to ensure that the collaboration and dialogue between bishops, theologians, religious and the lay faithful continued after the Second Vatican Council. Since 1967, the Church has held a Synod of Bishops roughly every 2-3 years to examine an issue affecting the Church. At each of these Synods since 1967, bishops have consulted with members of the clergy, religious and the laity. In fact, at these Synods, priests, deacons, religious and laity have been present and have addressed the bishops and Pope. While the “new” aspect of this modern Synod, “*For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, and Mission*” is asking each diocesan bishop to listen and consult with his flock, the Synodal process of listening and consulting with the entire People of God is an ancient practice of the Church.