

*“Everything I Know  
About the Synod”*

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By Father Leo Hausmann

OR

“This Is Going To Be a  
Very Short Presentation”

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OR

“I Had No Idea What I  
Was Getting Into!”

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# What is a Synod of Bishops?

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- The Synod of Bishops is considered as an advisory body for the pope, by which the bishops render cooperative assistance to him in exercising his office.
- In the 1983 Code of Canon Law, it is described as:

"a group of bishops who have been chosen from different regions of the world and meet at fixed times to foster closer unity between the Roman Pontiff and bishops, to assist the Roman Pontiff with their counsel in the preservation and growth of faith and morals and in the observance and strengthening of ecclesiastical discipline, and to consider questions pertaining to the activity of the Church in the world."

# 16th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops

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- commonly referred to as the **"Synod on Synodality"**
- its theme is:  
**"For a synodal Church:**
  - **communion, participation and mission"**

# A Changed from Tradition: Two Sessions Instead of Just One

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- In a change from recent synods, Pope Francis has broken the general assembly into two sessions, one that was held in October 2023 and the second to be held in October 2024.
- According to Cardinal Mario Grech, the head of the Vatican's synod office, conclusions will be reached only after the second session in 2024.

# The Synod on Synodality Has Been Underway Since October 2021.

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- **Moment of Reflection for the beginning of the Synodal Process**
  - The synodal process began on October 9, 2021 in the new Synodal Hall in Vatican City. The **Moment of Reflection** was attended by representatives of the People of God, including delegates from the International Reunions of Bishops' Conferences and similar bodies, members of the Roman Curia, fraternal delegates, delegates from consecrated life and ecclesial lay movements, the youth council, etc...
  - On October 10, 2021 Pope Francis celebrated the opening Mass at St. Peter's Basilica in Rome

# Some Excerpts from the Pope's Homily at the Opening Mass

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- “A certain rich man came up to Jesus ‘as he was setting out on his journey’ (*Mk 10:17*). The Gospels frequently show us Jesus “on a journey”; he walks alongside people and listens to the questions and concerns lurking in their hearts. He shows us that God is not found in neat and orderly places, distant from reality, but walks ever at our side.”
- “Celebrating a Synod means walking on the same road, walking together. Let us look at Jesus. First, he *encounters* the rich man on the road; he then *listens* to his questions, and finally he helps him *discern* what he must do to inherit eternal life. *Encounter, listen and discern*. I would like to reflect on these three verbs that characterize the Synod.”



# Some Excerpts from the Pope's Homily at the Opening Mass (Continued)

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- “The first is *encounter*. The Gospel passage begins by speaking of an encounter. A man comes up to Jesus and kneels down before him, asking him a crucial question: “Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” (v. 17)...The Lord does not stand aloof... Instead, he is completely present to this person. He is open to encounter... He knows that someone’s life can be changed by a single encounter... encounters that uplift and bring healing. As we initiate this process, we too are called to become experts in the *art of encounter*. Not so much by organizing events or theorizing about problems, as in taking time to encounter the Lord and one another.”

# Some Excerpts from the Pope's Homily at the Opening Mass (Continued)

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- “The second verb is *listen*. True encounter arises only from listening. Jesus listened to that man's question and to the religious and existential concerns that lay behind it... he did not pretend to respond politely, simply as a way of dismissing him and continuing on his way... Most importantly, he is not afraid *to listen to him with his heart* and not just with his ears... whenever we listen with the heart: people feel that they are being heard, not judged; they feel free to recount their own experiences and their spiritual journey.”
- “Let us ask ourselves frankly during this synodal process: Are we good at listening? How good is the “hearing” of our heart?... It is a slow and perhaps tiring exercise, this learning to listen to one another – bishops, priests, religious and laity, all the baptized – and to avoid artificial and shallow and pre-packaged responses. The Spirit asks us to listen to the questions, concerns and hopes of every Church, people and nation... Let us not soundproof our hearts; let us not remain barricaded in our certainties. So often our certainties can make us closed. Let us listen to one another.”

# Some Excerpts from the Pope's Homily at the Opening Mass (Continued)

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- “Finally, *discern*. Encounter and listening are not ends in themselves, leaving everything just as it was before. On the contrary, whenever we enter into dialogue, we allow ourselves to be challenged, to advance on a journey... we are changed. We see this in today's Gospel. Jesus senses that the person before him is a good and religious man... but he wants to lead him beyond the mere observance of precepts. Through dialogue, he helps him to discern... to discover that he cannot attain happiness by filling his life with more religious observances, but by emptying himself, selling whatever takes up space in his heart, in order to make room for God.”
- “Here is a valuable lesson also for us. The Synod is a process of spiritual discernment, of ecclesial discernment, that unfolds in adoration, in prayer and in dialogue with the word of God... That word summons us to discernment, and it brings light to that process. It guides the Synod, preventing it from becoming a Church convention, a study group or a political gathering, a parliament, but rather a grace-filled event, a process of healing guided by the Spirit... to empty ourselves, to free ourselves from all that is worldly, including our inward-looking and outworn pastoral models; and to ask ourselves what it is that God wants to say to us in this time. And the direction in which he wants to lead us.”

# The Consultation Process Begins in Dioceses Around the World

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- After the October 2021 opening of the synodal process the diocesan phase ran until April 2022.
- According to Vatican documents, the “fundamental questions” that were to be considered by the dioceses and the bishops over the multi-year process were: “A synodal Church, in announcing the Gospel, ‘journeys together.’ How is this ‘journeying together’ happening today in your local Church? What steps does the Spirit invite us to take in order to grow in our ‘journeying together?’”

# The Diocesan Phase of the Synod

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- A *Preparatory Document* and *Vademecum* was provide to the individual dioceses around the world with information about the current Synod and offering guidelines for organizing the consultation process. These documents were to be applied differently in diverse contexts, depending on the current realities and challenges in the local Church and in society, as well as any concurrent or recent synodal processes occurring in the diocese.

# Beginning the Synodal Process in the Diocese of Rapid City

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- At the time of the announcement of the Synod on Synodality, the Diocese of Rapid City had already set out on its own journey of a strategic planning process. At the parish level this process included parish meetings across the diocese.
- Bishop Peter stated about the strategic planning process, “This planning process will be centered on how our parishes can not only survive in these challenging times, but how our parishes and diocese can thrive.”
- Town hall meetings were held in each of the parishes of the diocese seeking parishioners’ input regarding strengths and weakness in our parishes and diocese, as well as ideas of how our parishes can work together to become stronger, not only to survive but to thrive.
- Bishop Peter discerned that the synodal process and the Flourishing Families process could be nicely combined to meet both objectives.
- Synod questions were asked in conjunction with the questions about the strategic planning.

# Synod Synthesis

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- After all the data was collected from the parish meetings in the Diocese of Rapid City, it was synthesized and grouped into five categories: God Speaks, Welcoming, Joyful Witness, Communication, and the Eucharist.

# On to the First General Session

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- The Synod Synthesis of the Diocese of Rapid City was gathered together with the reports of the other diocese around the world as a starting point for the First General Assembly.



# The First General Session Concluded

## October 29, 2023

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- The first general session of the Synod on Synodality ran from October 4<sup>th</sup> to October 29, 2023 at Vatican City.
- Is the Synod on Synodality controversial?
  - “The finalization of the document was not without its challenges. “A draft text, a copy of which was obtained by *The Pillar*, reportedly prompted more than 1,000 requests for amendments,”<sup>4</sup> writes Luke Coppen. This fact is not surprising; it was already obvious from earlier reports that the synod membership was divided on key, controversial questions. As a result, “absent from the summary report are definitive conclusions on same-sex blessings, women’s ordination, and a handful of other hot-button topics that have drawn the lion’s share of media attention during this year’s assembly,” notes Courtney Mares. (Excerpt from [www.wordonfire.org](http://www.wordonfire.org))

# A Synodal Church in Mission: Synthesis Report

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- The Synthesis Report of the First Session of the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, entitled "A Synodal Church in Mission," was approved by the members of the assembly on October 28, 2023.
- This report can be found on the USCCB website.
- The document's nature is not a magisterial text with any teaching authority. Neither is it a juridical document implementing any changes to canon law or Church governance. It is merely a document summarizing the results of the conversations that took place during the assembly's small-group and plenary sessions. The text is an interim document, since the synod is not completely over. It will go back to local churches around the world for further consideration and input for the next phase of the synodal process and the next session in Rome in Oct. 2024.

# Who are the American Cardinals and Bishops participating?

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- Nearly a third of the 364 voting delegates in the 16th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops were chosen directly by Pope Francis, including the American Jesuit Father James Martin, a frequent commentator on LGBTQ outreach, former prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith Cardinal Gerhard Ludwig Müller, Cardinal Blase Cupich of Chicago, Cardinal Wilton Gregory of Washington, D.C., Archbishop Paul Etienne of Seattle, Cardinal Sean O'Malley of Boston, and Cardinal Robert McElroy of San Diego.

# Who are the American Cardinals and Bishops participating? (Continued)

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- In addition, the U.S. bishops' conference has elected five members to attend the synod assembly: Cardinal Timothy Michael Dolan of New York; Bishop Daniel Flores of Brownsville, Texas; Bishop Robert Barron of Winona-Rochester, Minnesota; Bishop Kevin Rhoades of Fort Wayne-South Bend, Indiana; and Archbishop Timothy Broglio, president of the U.S. bishops' conference.
- Also, Irish-American Cardinal Kevin Farrell will participate as a delegate from the Roman Curia and Cardinal Joseph Tobin of Newark, New Jersey, is automatically a delegate as an ordinary member of the synod council.

# Laity as Full Members

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- For the first time, laypeople will not only participate in the Synod of Bishops assembly but also will be full members, with the ability to vote on a final document at the end of the process in October 2024.

# Who are the American laity participating?

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- Among the lay delegates selected by the pope are Americans Cynthia Bailey Manns, the director of adult learning at St. Joan of Arc Catholic Community in Minneapolis, and Wyatt Olivas, a young adult musician from Cheyenne, Wyoming.

# Pope requests youngest Synod member be excused from classes

- Wyatt Olivas, a 19-year-old student at the University of Wyoming, asked Pope Francis to sign a letter requesting he be excused from classes in order to rest after four weeks of work at the Synod General Assembly.



# Wyatt Olivas

- The young man, a student at the University of Wyoming in Laramie, a missionary at the Catholic youth program Totus Tuus, and a catechist in his home diocese of Cheyenne, was to leave Rome on Monday, 30<sup>th</sup> of October. He was supposed to show up in the lecture room, which is a three-hour drive away, potentially with snow on the road, as early as Tuesday morning.
- Half-jokingly, Wyatt decided to draft a letter explaining to his professors that he needed to recover from his work at the Vatican before resuming classes. He wrote: "Wyatt has pinky promised to return to his classes and complete his work, and we trust that he will keep his word.... Therefore, we kindly request that he be excused from his classes for a short period." The Pope signed it "Francis".





# Cynthia Bailey Manns

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Cynthia Bailey Manns is the director of adult faith formation at St. Joan of Arc Catholic Community in Minneapolis. Archbishop Bernard Hebda put forward her name as a possible participant. When two emails inviting her to the synod went unanswered—she later learned they ended up in her spam folder. She was then contacted by phone and she accepted the invitation.

# Cynthia Bailey Manns (Continued)

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- Ms. Bailey Manns joined St. Joan's in 2016, when asked by the pastor to be the spiritual director for the parish.
- Through her work, Ms. Bailey Manns, 65, said she is able "to hear all of the stories of how God is working in people's lives."
- She appreciates the diverse life experiences that comprise the parish, ticking off the various types of ministries the parish offers. "From our L.G.B.T.Q. groups, from our elders as they age...from our Black Catholics...[and from] people who have endured sexual abuse...separated and divorced and remarried people in the church who feel somewhat on the margins," she said.

# Cynthia Bailey Manns (Continued)

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- Some of the Masses are unique and boldly contemporary, with lay guests and parishioners offering short reflections before Mass. These liturgies are held in a gymnasium, with rows of folding chairs filled by parishioners, some of whom travel in from the neighborhood and others from far-flung suburbs. The music is contemporary, projectors display lyrics and readings, and the lay staff are present and visible on Sundays.
- But that is just one side of the parish. St. Joan's seeks to offer something for everyone, including eucharistic adoration in the chapel, Masses held in the traditional church and Scripture study groups for men and women.

# What is the next step in the synodal process?

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- Dioceses across the U.S. are asked to hold additional listening sessions in the next few months, following a request from the Vatican's Secretariat for the Synod of Bishops.
- In a Jan. 2 letter, Bishop Daniel E. Flores of the Diocese of Brownsville, Texas -- who coordinates the U.S. bishops' synod process -- said his team is requesting "each diocese hold 2-3 listening sessions regarding the guiding questions" posed by the synod secretariat.

# The Two Guiding Questions:

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- The two guiding questions were phrased by Bishop Flores and the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops Synod Team as follows:
- "Where have I seen or experienced successes — and distresses — within the Church's structure(s)/organization/leadership/life that encourage or hinder the mission?"
- "How can the structures and organization of the Church help all the baptized to respond to the call to proclaim the Gospel and to live as a community of love and mercy in Christ?"

## The next step in the synodal process (Continued from Above)

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- Bishop Flores asked that each diocese summarize responses to those questions in a 3–5-page document and send it to the USCCB by April 8. The diocesan summaries will inform the USCCB’s summary, which is due to the synod secretariat in May.
- Bishop Flores noted that in addition to the listening sessions, “we are encouraged to continue ongoing engagement with the People of God in the dynamism of a synodal style.”
- To that end, dioceses may also include with their submissions “a two-page testimony of best practices for synodality” they have developed, the bishop explained.

**THE END!**