



Synod on Synodality - Journeying Together

Frequently Asked Questions

1. What is the Synod on Synodality?

Pope Francis will invite bishops from across the world to Rome in October 2023 for the Synod on Synodality, to discern ways to engage more people in the decision-making processes that affect the whole Church. The theme is: *"For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, and Mission."* Leading up to this gathering, local dioceses will consult with local Catholics and others to create a report to submit to their national bishops' conference, which will then contribute to a report to be presented to Pope Francis.

2. What is a Synod?

The words "synod" and "synodality" have three main uses in the Church:

1. "Synod" as used in phrases like "the Synod of Bishops" refers to a *standing body* of bishops who, for example, aid the Pope in listening to and guiding the Church.
2. More often "synod" refers to an *event*, a gathering, most often of bishops, to discuss challenges that the Church faces and to discern together how to move forward.
3. Finally, "synodality" refers to a style that characterizes the life of the entire Church, a habit of mutual listening, dialogue, and collective discernment. This style is most apparent during synods but ought to characterize the life of the Church in all times and at every level.

3. What is Journeying Together all about?

Journeying Together is a listening and sharing opportunity for the Diocese of St. Petersburg that seeks to discern how the Holy Spirit is leading the Church to move forward. This initiative is part of a global consultation process led by Pope Francis known as the Synod on Synodality.

Journeying Together is our diocesan process through prayer and reflection, rooted in the encounter with Jesus in the Sacred Scriptures and the liturgical life of the Church, and inspired by an openness to the movement of the Holy Spirit, which enables us to hear the Spirit speaking to us.

4. Is this new?

The entire history of the Catholic Church shows us a Church that journeys together. Jesus Christ walked with his apostles and disciples from town to town. The early Christian community gathered together for prayer, worship and consultation. In this diocese, we already have the experience of journeying together through listening, as with Bishop Parkes' Listening Sessions in 2017 and 2018.

The Second Vatican Council reinvigorated synodal processes in the Church, for example, by establishing the Synod of Bishops. While the Synod on Synodality will culminate in Rome in October 2023 with a gathering mostly of bishops from across the world, recent synods have encouraged bishops to seek input from their local Church. The process for *this* synod is new in commissioning a more intentional process of "journeying together" at the local (diocesan) level.

5. Why now?

Pope Francis is reading the signs of the times and is seeking to develop "synodality" as a tool for the bishops in their role of governing the Church. In a world hurting from a pandemic, extreme weather conditions, massive migration, poverty, violence and moral relativism, the Church is asking us to "walk by faith" (2 Corinthians 5:7) and pray for guidance from the Holy Spirit.

Pope Francis has called this moment in human history "a time of reckoning." The themes from the Synod on Synodality can help us to understand why now is the right time to consider synodality more deeply:

a. Communion – Amidst so much suffering and isolation, we see clearly that we must come together as communities in the local Church. In prayerful communion, we gain insight into the ways of the Holy Spirit. When the Church gathers for the Eucharist, the mission of the Church is best understood. Thus, the life of the ecclesial communities and parishes, the importance of which we recognize now more than ever, roots and orients our practice of synodality and propels us forward.

b. Participation – This moment in which the Church responds to the global pandemic calls for the Church to look forward, not backwards, and to revitalize its mission of bringing the Good News to all. To undertake this mission, all the local Churches (dioceses) must reflect on the insights that the Holy Spirit has given to their faithful. The gentle call of invitation to the full practice of Catholic life, with the Eucharist at the center of all the Church does, is an integral part of this "walking together."

c. Mission – By reading the signs of the times and listening to what the Holy Spirit has spoken in the hearts of the faithful, dioceses will gain a deeper understanding of the mission entrusted to each of them. Like a mosaic, the vision for each diocese is formed through attention to the needs of the faithful, to the need for renewal, and to the life of the local community who gathers in response to the gentle invitation of the Lord to worship Him, to be sanctified by Him, and to speak, individually and collectively, with the prophetic voice of His Holy Spirit.

The synodal process is a pilgrimage of the whole People of God in discerning the way forward for the Church, locally and worldwide, at this moment in time. Anyone who has been on a pilgrimage knows that the journey there is not just travelling, but an integral part of the whole. The culmination of the synodal process in 2023 will be an important moment in the pilgrimage but not an end point.

6. What difference will it make?

By listening to Catholics, non-Catholics and even people with no faith, Pope Francis and bishops from across the world are hoping to revitalize the Church at a critical time in human history. The fruit of this process will be a Spirit-inspired vision for the future of the Church, and the process itself should serve as a prophetic witness to the human family and as encouragement to unite around a common goal.

7. Why include non-Catholics?

This process actively seeks the participation of non-Catholics and even non-Christians for several reasons. First, as the diocesan vision and mission attest, the Church cares for all people, not only those who currently identify as Catholic. As Pope Francis has said on multiple occasions, we are all in the same boat...We are one human family living in our common home. (*Laudato Si'* and *Fratelli Tutti*). Second, those who are not practicing Catholics have interactions with the Catholic Church at the institutional, local, and personal levels that can provide insights to the Church that come from the perspective of distance. Most importantly, the history of the People of God shows time and again that the Holy Spirit often moves in unexpected ways (e.g. Jesus and the Centurion, Matthew 5:8-13); we should be open to discerning movements of the Spirit from the most unlikely of sources.

8. Is this just another listening session?

The purpose is not to collect everyone's individual opinions, but rather to hear what the Holy Spirit is saying to us through our prayers and reflections. Listening to each other is very important. Pope Francis has said that during the Synod of Bishops gathering: "We listen, we discuss in groups but above all we pay attention to what the Spirit has to say to us." This discernment is not an activity done in isolation. Mutual listening and reflection are vital, as what is proposed grows from the unity and conviction that comes from the lived practice of faith within the community.

The process of spiritual discernment calls for everyone's participation. The Church asks everyone to be open to the Holy Spirit, to discern where the local Church is being led in its own context. The Church asks bishops to listen carefully to the views of the faithful and asks the faithful to respect the authentic role of the bishop as one who governs the local Church and promotes communion. Discernment is always oriented towards the mission of the universal Church which continually moves towards Christ, the Way, the Truth, and the Life, who calls his people into a unity of purpose.

9. How will my feedback be used?

Pope Francis says: "what is under discussion at synodal gatherings are not the traditional truths of Christian doctrine. The Synod is concerned mainly with how teaching can be lived and applied in the changing contexts of our time." Therefore, all topics can be raised, but it is important to realize that not all topics will form part of the ongoing discussion.

The synodal process is not about a democratic debate. It is place of respectful mutual listening and experiencing the call of the Holy Spirit to move in new ways. Again, the Pope is clear on this: "Another temptation that so often confuses people is treating the synod as a kind of parliament underpinned by a 'political battle' in which in order to govern one side must defeat the other...this goes against the spirit of the synod as a protected space of community discernment."

What the synodal process will do is embed at all levels of the Church a new way of listening and hearing, of discernment and action, which remains faithful to the truths received but expresses them in the context of a particular time.

10. How do I participate?

Plans are underway for events where people can gather together for prayer, discernment and reflection. We will post local events on www.JourneyingTogether.org. You can also visit the website to sign up for our email list to stay informed.

11. What is the timeline?

Local events and discernment opportunities will take place from December 2021 through February 2022.

12. Where do I get more information?

We have created a website: www.JourneyingTogether.org with many resources, dates and opportunities for participation. Also, if you have specific questions, contact us at Journey@dosp.org.