

# Faith Formation Synod on Synodality

S T . I G N A T I U S L O Y O L A P A R I S H

## UPCOMING SYNOD

SYNOD	
WORKING PAPER	
APOSTOLIC EXHORTATION	
PREPARATORY DOCUMENT	
APOSTOLIC CONSTITUTION	
PRAYERS	

INSIDE THIS ISSUE:	
Upcoming Synod	1
Previous Synods	1
Following Along	4
Synod Prayer	4

Where do you get your news? Is it local or worldwide? Does it cover just business or does it include social issues as well? Is it right-leaning or left-leaning?

When you are the leader of a world organization, you learn quickly that a wider view of the world is necessary to truly understand the impact of world events on your group. Catholic Relief Services would certainly want to know about the drought in Africa, the problems of shipping in Los Angeles as well as the drop in donations due to coronavirus. All of these will affect your operations.

Now think on a global scale, what should Pope Francis know to guide the worldwide Church? Well there's a lot. And where would he get all that data and information? It's not going to simply be turning on CNN or reading the New York Times.

I can't even imagine the data collection that goes on in the Catholic Church to keep administrators informed. Did you know that in the recent book, Let us Dream, Pope Francis speaks about the needs of the Rohingas as well as the tragedy of George Floyd's death. That's a pretty broad view of the world.

Yet there's more than just the news that makes the outlets. On many occasions Pope Francis made the news by highlighting the plight of those in need. That included his trip to the island of Lesbos to visit refugees, to the border between Mexico and the US (remember build bridges instead of walls), regularly inviting the homeless of Rome in for meals and building showers for them, highlighting the problems of climate change, even promoting vaccines and vaccine needs of the developing countries.

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## Previous Synods

The calling of a synod is nothing new. There have been periodic assemblies of bishops, known simply as the "Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops." While occurring periodically, they often do

have an agenda with a working paper called the Instrumentum laboris. For instance, if you were to click through to the index of synods, [https://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/synod/index.htm](https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/synod/index.htm) you will see many listed. The

one for the eleventh ordinary assembly in 2005 under Benedict XVI was on the Eucharist.

[https://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/synod/documents/rc\\_synod\\_doc\\_20050707\\_instrlabor-xi-assembly\\_en.html](https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/synod/documents/rc_synod_doc_20050707_instrlabor-xi-assembly_en.html)

**Continued page 3**

## U p c o m i n g S y n o d ( c o n t . )

How to keep informed? How to hear the word of God in the onslaught of so much information? Further, Pope Francis wants to take the “pulse” of the Church as well as view the vital signs of the world. How does all this happen? Well one of the key tools, developed during the time of Vatican II, is the concept of a synod. Originally a gathering of bishops from throughout the world to give their perception of news and needs, the synod has become a broader tool, gathering information from all manner of individuals and experts. The Synod on the Amazon was a great example of this, where not only experts but the indigenous peoples spoke to the assembly. Afterwards Pope Francis drafted an apostolic exhortation entitled “Querida Amazon” or “Beloved Amazon” to summarize what was heard as well as to chart a direction for the Church based upon these findings.

What seems to be different about these synods is the way in which Pope Francis tries to listen to those often unheard. The great example of bringing indigenous people to speak and to pray, bringing their cultural symbols (the Pachamama statue which caused quite a stir) shows how Francis feels that the systems, whether the news outlets or the Church’s

own information structure, missed the voice of the people on the margins.

So Pope Francis is calling for a Synod on Synodality, to consider the way of listening, encountering and accompanying the people, especially the people on the margins, that should be our way of proceeding. As I said, Pope Francis was aware of the tragedy of George Floyd, but we did not see a concerted effort in the US by the Catholic Church to address the issues of violence by law enforcement, especially on those people of color and poverty. Instead, much of the Church’s attention and emphasis became politicized, whether that was focus on candidates, masks and vaccines or narrowed “respect life” initiatives. Pope Francis doesn’t want us to simply fall into the trap of polarization and politics, but rather to open ourselves to one another in dialogue and discernment. Ergo, the need for a new way of engaging one another and working with one another to build up the kingdom. Ergo, the Synod on Synodality.

The problem is that many of us are still stuck with our own world view, whether that’s the state of Colorado, our own political party, our particular view of the gospel or the call we feel for a critical issue like homelessness. Pope Francis wants us to hear the voice of God, the call of the Holy Spirit at this time, to see how we might change our own ways of listening, speaking and encountering each other and the world.



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## U p c o m i n g   S y n o d   ( c o n t . )

Quite a big task, but then again,  
**“Nothing is impossible with God.”**

So where does that leave us? Well, if Pope Francis is working to reform the Church by having the Church listen to those on the margins, those not heard by the system, well then maybe this is a call for us individually, as members of the Church, to do likewise. Ask yourself, “How can I open myself to this call of the Spirit?” Might I consider the ways and the places that I get my information, so that I may

not be missing where God is calling me? Maybe I should engage more intentionally with others in the parish, asking where they find the good news, where they find hope, where they find God speaking. Then together, just like the synod of Bishops, we may come together, to journey together, and to discern God’s call today.



## Previous Synods (cont.)

For this particular synod, Pope Benedict did not write a specific apostolic exhortation. But you can see for the next, the twelfth general assembly of the bishops synod, there is a concluding exhortation, *Verbum Domini*, The Word of the Lord, addressed not just to the bishops but to all members of the Catholic Church. [https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/apost\\_exhortations/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_exh\\_20100930\\_verbum-domini.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_ben-xvi_exh_20100930_verbum-domini.html). If you continue to scroll through the lists, you will also see special assemblies and extraordinary assemblies or synods. Pope Francis shows up at the thirteenth ordinary general assembly in 2013, the time of his election. Since then you can scroll and see an extraordinary assembly in 2014 on the family, the fourteenth ordinary assembly in 2015 on the vocation and mission of the family, the fifteenth ordinary assembly in 2018 on young people, the faith and discernment, the special assembly for the Pan-Amazon Region in 2019, and now the sixteenth general assembly in 2021 “For a Synodal Church:

Communion, Participation and Mission.” Hopefully you will notice a change in focus where the attention is more towards the people of God rather than something internal. In September of 2018, Pope Francis made some changes to the Apostolic Constitution of this Synod of Bishops. Reading from paragraph 5-6, one notes that the role of bishop is not only as teacher but as one who listens to the faithful, As Pope Francis puts it, one who leads the sheep, walks in their midst and follows the sheep so that none get lost, never losing the scent of the sheep. This, my brothers and sisters, is a paragraph worth reading and rereading, for it is the pivotal concept for this synod.

[https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost\\_constitutions/documents/papa-francesco\\_costituzione-ap\\_20180915\\_episcopalis-communio.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_constitutions/documents/papa-francesco_costituzione-ap_20180915_episcopalis-communio.html)

So this assembly, this synod, is about the way in which the Church listens to the people, asking who has not been heard

and where is the Spirit calling us to listen for God’s voice.

What a noble goal, I encourage you to take a look at the preparatory document (the working paper) and consider what Pope Francis is hoping for. It is a dream that should give us all hope, no matter how the process may play out locally. I do believe that the Spirit is speaking and will not be hindered. So please, take time to read through the preparatory document, share it with others, and let yourself be lifted up by this daring dream.

<https://www.synod.va/en.html>



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### To Ponder and to Share

Every session of the Second Vatican Council began with the prayer *Adsumus Sancte Spiritus*, the first word of the Latin original meaning, "We stand before You, Holy Spirit,"... As we are called to embrace this synodal path of the Synod 2021-2023, this prayer invites the Holy Spirit to operate within us so that we may be a community and a people of grace.

*We stand before You, Holy Spirit, as we gather together in Your name. With You alone to guide us, make Yourself at home in our hearts; Teach us the way we must go and how we are to pursue it. We are weak and sinful; do not let us promote disorder. Do not let ignorance lead us down the wrong path nor partiality influence our actions. Let us find in You our unity so that we may journey together to eternal life and not stray from the way of truth and what is right. All this we ask of You, who are at work in every place and time, in the communion of the Father and the Son, forever and ever. Amen.*

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**Finding God in All Things**

To follow, consider reading articles from the following websites:

- <https://www.synod.va/en.html>
- <https://www.catholicnews.com/>
- <https://www.ncronline.org/>
- <https://www.chicagocatholic.com/>
- <https://www.americamagazine.org/>

Podcast:

Inside the Vatican from America Magazine

- <https://cms.megaphone.fm/channel/AMMD9157570844?selected=AMMD7082073095>