

FOR A SYNODAL CHURCH: COMMUNION, PARTICIPATION, AND MISSION

Dear Deanery Participants in the Diocesan Phase of the
2021– 2023 Synod on Synodality,

Thank you for your involvement as we participate in this synodal process initiated for the Universal Church by the Holy Father, Pope Francis, and for our local Church by Bishop William P. Callahan. This consultation is part of a process that will lead up to the October 2023 Synod of Bishops, after which will be implemented the feedback from consultations such as these held throughout the world.



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It should be noted from the outset that this process of listening and engaging is not about the teachings of the Church. Those will not change. Instead, it is about responding to Pope Francis' invitation to reflect on a theme integral to the Church's life and mission: *"It is precisely this path of synodality which God expects of the Church of the third millennium."* Those participating in this conversation will have an opportunity to respond to the fundamental question of how each of us, faithful to our vocations, walks together in a continuous dialogue of truth and love and in fulfillment of the Church's mission. This journey follows the Church's "renewal" proposed by the Second Vatican Council. By journeying together and reflecting together on the journey that has been made, the Church will be able to learn through her experience which processes can help her to live communion, to achieve participation, to open herself to mission. "Communion, participation and mission" are inseparable keys to this process and are to remain at the heart of our conversations throughout this process.

While this consultation is part of a specific process, our Church has always been synodal, including here in our diocese. Therefore, you are invited to see this as a dialogue begun for this Synodal Process, but also one that should be ongoing and continued, whether formally or informally, among individuals or groups.

While it is easy for us to reflect on the fundamental question that will be posed to us, let us remember that we do so in times of global tragedy, as evidenced by the COVID-19 pandemic. Within this context, synodality represents the path by which the Church can be renewed by the action of the Holy Spirit, by listening together afresh to what God has revealed to us in Christ Jesus. It compels us to imagine the future of the Church and to be a prophetic witness to the human family, which needs to be united around a common goal. Thank you again for your participation.

Yours in Christ,

The Pastors of the Marshfield Deanery Parishes

A synodal Church is a Church which listens, which realizes that listening is more than simply hearing. It is a mutual listening in which everyone has something to learn. The faithful people, the college of bishops, the Bishop of Rome: all listening to each other, and all listening to the Holy Spirit, the "Spirit of truth," in order to know what he "says to the Churches." Our gaze also extends to humanity as a whole. A synodal Church is like a standard lifted up among the nations in a world which—while calling for participation, solidarity and transparency in public administration—often consigns the fate of entire peoples to the grasp of small but powerful groups. As a Church which "journeys together" with men and women, sharing the travails of history, let us cherish the dream that a rediscovery of the inviolable dignity of peoples and of the function of authority as service will also be able to help civil society to be built up in justice and fraternity, and thus bring about a more beautiful and humane world for coming generations.

—Pope Francis, Address of October 17, 2015

Pope Begins Synod Process with Local Consultation

Taken from an article by Cindy Wooden, Catholic News Service.

Pope Francis has called for widespread consultations with laypeople throughout the world as part of the preparation process for the next general assembly of the Synod of Bishops to be held in October 2023.

Cardinal Mario Grech, secretary-general of the Synod of Bishops issued a statement last May explaining that the 2023 general assembly of the Synod of Bishops would include consultation on the diocesan, national, and regional levels.

The theme chosen by Pope Francis for the gathering is: "For a synodal church: communion, participation and mission."

The pope formally opened the synod process at the Vatican on October 9-10 last year and currently every bishop is implementing it in his own diocese. This diocesan phase will go through June of this year and feature consultation with local Catholics.

"For a long time, there was talk of communion as a constitutive element of the church," Cardinal Grech told Vatican News. However, he said, for there to be true communion within the church everyone must participate, "each according to his or her own function: people of God, College of Bishops, bishop of Rome."

"Perhaps in the past there has been so much insistence on the *communio hierarchica* (communion of the hierarchy) that there arose the idea that unity in the church could only be achieved by strengthening the authority of bishops," Cardinal Grech said. While that may be an important emphasis when faced with dissent, "that cannot be the ordinary way of living ecclesial communion, which requires circularity, reciprocity, journeying together with respect to the various functions of the people of God."

"The Second Vatican Council teaches that the people of God participate in the prophetic office of Christ," he added. "Therefore, we must listen to the people of God, and this means going out to the local churches."

"The governing principle of this consultation of the people of God is contained in the ancient principle *Quod omnes tangit ab omnibus approbari debet* (that which touches upon all must be approved by all). "This is not about democracy, or populism, or anything like that. Rather, it is the church that as the people of God, a people who by virtue of baptism, is an active subject in the life and mission of the church."

Listening to every Catholic is "the true 'pastoral conversion' of the church," Cardinal Grech said. "God willing, one of the fruits of the synod is that we might all understand that a decision-making process in the church always begins with listening, because only in this way can we understand how and where the Spirit wants to lead the church."

Once the diocesan consultations have concluded, members of national bishops' conferences will have "a period of discernment" so they can "listen to what the Spirit has inspired in the churches entrusted to them." A synthesis of that reflection will then be sent to the Vatican's synod secretariat.

"All the listening sessions and discernment are meant to assist the bishops who will meet at the general assembly of the synod in October 2023," the cardinal said.

"We must not forget that the moment of discernment is entrusted above all to those bishops who are gathered in the assembly," he said. "Some may say that this is clericalism," but the cardinal said it is not, because in the church, bishops have "a function of discernment, which belongs to them because of the ministry they carry out for the good of the church."