



Communicating about the Synod on Synodality

As you prepare to release your local synthesis report, work with your Bishop, as well as diocesan communications director, to fine-tune these suggestions to fit the experience within your (arch)diocese. Consider **creating a fact sheet** with the basic information as well as an example or two from your (arch)diocese to share with the media. If you have any questions, please contact synod@uscbb.org.

Main Messages:

- Through the Synod on Synodality, the Catholic Church is currently engaging in a global listening process open to everyone and aimed at renewing our ability to live out our mission and build up our communion in our own particular times and places.
- Dioceses throughout the country have just completed a more than eight-month-long process of listening, which will help to inform the next phases of the multi-year process set out by the Vatican. While the objectives for the Synod are clear, and the larger global process is ongoing, any immediate changes are not guaranteed. It is for each diocese and parish to dialogue and discern any insights, opportunities, and challenges.

Supporting Messages:

- This Synod is an invitation to engage with those on the margins of our Church and society, an opportunity to encounter those who may disagree with us or think differently than us. Everyone's voice and experience are vital to the path we are asked to walk together throughout this process.
- This time of listening and dialogue is an invitation to adopt an orientation of welcome and understanding, to return to our mission, and build communion. As we do so we can both strengthen our faith and remain true to our teachings while deepening our relationships with all the People of God.
- This synod is an invitation to really listen to the lived experiences of the whole of the People of God and discern, together, where the Spirit is calling us as a Church. This may not always be a straightforward process and does not have any set outcomes or intended benchmarks.

Frequently Asked Questions:

What is a Synod?

- A synod is a gathering of the faithful with their pastors in order to listen to what the Holy Spirit is saying to the Church. Synods have taken many forms in church history and they are already practiced in the Church at all levels: from local parish councils and national assemblies to the Synod of Bishops, when bishops from across the world gather in Rome with the Pope.
- Synod-type mechanisms (listening, dialogue, discernment) have always taken place in monasteries and religious houses when faced with decisions and choices; it is what happens at conclaves to elect popes.

What makes this Synod unique?

- This is the longest and broadest consultation of the faithful ever undertaken by the Catholic Church. Both the baptized People of God and our larger communities have been asked to engage in an exercise of listening and discernment, of walking together.

- The aim of the synod is to help the Church become more synodal, more of a listening Church in which all the baptized are recognized as subjects and take part in the mission of the Church. All the baptized are explicitly invited to take part, but they are also asked to reach out to their local communities, and no one is excluded.

Will this Synod result in a Change in Church Teaching?

- This Synod is an open-ended process, the outcome of the consultation of the People of God is unknown. Although the objectives of the synod are clear – to build communion, enable participation, and strengthen our mission – the outcome is not.
- While the Synod will produce documents, producing documents is not the aim. While votes will probably take place at the conclusion of the three-year process, those votes will largely be a demonstration of the emergence of consensus.

How did dioceses gather feedback?

- Dioceses utilized several different tools and opportunities to gather feedback: in-person and online group listening sessions, one-on-one meetings, targeted outreach efforts, online surveys, and others.

How many dioceses are participating?

- 176 of the United States' 196 (arch)dioceses and (arch)eparchies – nearly 90% – have appointed Synod coordinators and more may be planning to submit synthesis reports as part of the local consultation phase.

What does the rest of the process look like?

- Sixteen regional teams will work on drafting regional synthesis reports from the individual diocesan reports, which then will contribute to a national synthesis phase in which a national writing team will draft a complete report that will be submitted to the Vatican in August.
- Following the conclusion of the local consultation phase, the Vatican will use the synthesized reports from bishops' conferences around the world to develop a working document to guide continental or regional ecclesial assemblies that will take place by March 2023.
- Those assemblies will produce another set of documents that will help in the drafting of a second working document for the Synod of Bishops in October 2023.

Tips when engaging the media:

- Don't try to communicate too much – have three main points that are highlighted throughout the conversation. What do you want the headline to be?
- Focus on the local experience in your (arch)diocese. Have one or two examples from your consultation process ready to share with the media.
- Start with your most important message and REPEAT as often as you can. Tell a story, don't just make an argument.
- Pause before answering tough questions. Stop. Think. Respond confidently and clearly. Stop talking after you have conveyed your main message.
- Use strong, confident, clear language. Avoid jargon and be willing to give honest answers. Respond to challenging questions calmly, and do not appear confrontational.
- Don't let the way the question is asked dictate your response. Refer to your three main message points – respond in a way that brings your main theme to the forefront.



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