

Synod of Bishops to take up theme of synodality in 2022

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By Christopher Wells

Pope Francis has chosen “For a synodal Church: communion, participation, and mission” as the theme for the next Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops.



Bishops at the most recent meeting of the Synod of Bishops, the Special Assembly for the Pan-Amazon Region

In a formal declaration released on Saturday morning, Cardinal Lorenzo Baldisseri, the Secretary General of the Synod of Bishops, announced that Pope Francis will convene the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops in October 2022, with the theme, “For a synodal Church: communion, participation and mission”.

Synodality: the path of the Church in the third millennium

The topic of synodality has been an important feature in Pope Francis’ pontificate. In October 2015, on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the establishment of the Synod of Bishops by St Paul VI, Pope Francis said, “From the beginning of my ministry as Bishop of Rome, I sought to enhance the Synod, which is one of the most precious legacies of the Second Vatican Council... it is precisely this path of synodality which God expects of the Church in the third millennium”. More recently, speaking to the International Theological Commission in 2018, the Holy Father said the theme of synodality “is very close to my heart: synodality is a style, it is walking together, and it is what the Lord expects of the Church in the third millennium”.

To foster unity and assist the Pope

The Synod of Bishops was established by Pope St Paul VI toward the end of the Second Vatican Council. According to the Code of Canon Law, the synod is “a group of bishops who have been chosen from different regions of the world and meet together 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”.

Normally, the Synod of Bishops meets for Ordinary General Assemblies every 3-4 years, with other meetings (Extraordinary General Assemblies or Special Assemblies) taking place at the discretion of the Pope.

An Extraordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops was convoked by Pope Francis in 2014 on “The Pastoral Challenges of the Family in the Context of Evangelization”; one year later, the Ordinary General Assembly considered the topic of “The Vocation and Mission of the Family in the Church and in the Contemporary World”. In 2018, the Ordinary General Assembly focused on “Young People, Faith, and Vocational Discernment”.

Most recently, in October of 2019, Pope Francis called a Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops for the Pan-Amazon region, “to identify new paths for the evangelization of God’s people in that region”.