

What is a Synod?

A synod is a gathering, traditionally of Bishops, that helps the Church to walk forward together in the same direction. The word “synod” comes from the Greek *syn-hodos*, meaning the “same way” or the “same path”. Synods were common in the first centuries of Christianity, giving bishops the opportunities to meet and discuss issues of importance for the life of the Church.

In 1965, Pope Paul VI instituted the Synod of Bishops at the universal level of the Church. He wanted a way of continuing the fraternal, collegial exchange that had been experienced at the Second Vatican Council, where bishops from across the globe had gathered together. Since then, synods have been organised every two or three years bringing together bishops, experts and various delegates to discuss various topics. This Synod is different.

What’s unique about this synod on synodality?

Unlike past synods, this one isn’t about addressing a particular issue, but about becoming who God calls us to be as a Church, all of us together, amidst the reality of today’s world!

The Synod started in October 2021 and is totally unprecedented, for at least three reasons:

- 1 It is no longer only a one-month Synod of Bishops, but a two year synodal process for the entire People of God, all the baptised. All are invited and no-one is to be left behind or excluded.
- 2 It is a synod that aims on giving the entire Church a lived experience of synodality. It’s not just about filling in a questionnaire but gathering the fruits of what the Holy Spirit is saying to us here and now.
- 3 The aim of the synod is not to just talk about synodality, but to put synodality into practice from now onwards, in every diocese, parish and country across the whole world. This calls all of us, at every level of the Church, to renew our way of being and working together moving forward.

What exactly is ‘synodality’?

Fundamentally, synodality is about journeying together. This happens through listening to one another in order to hear what God is saying to all of us. It is realising that the Holy Spirit can speak through anyone to help us walk forward together on our journey as the People of God.

The point is not that we take two years to understand some new buzzword that will soon fade. Synodality is no passing phase! Rather “walking together” is at the heart of what the Church is all about, as the People of God on pilgrimage in the midst of the world. In a sense, synodality is a way of renewing the Church from her deepest roots, in order to be more united with one another and better carry out our mission in the world. It highlights the fact that we all have something precious to contribute to the Body of Christ. In this way, a ‘synodal Church’ is a Church that listens. “It is a mutual listening in which everyone has something to learn. The lay faithful, the bishops, the pope: all listening to each other, and all listening to the Holy Spirit, the “Spirit of Truth”, in order to know what He is saying to the Church.

The path to a Church that listens and walks together, starts with you and me. Let’s walk forward together.

Holy Spirit of God, lead the Church on our pilgrim path as we listen to You speaking through one another. Enkindle Your love in our hearts to walk forward together as a Church that accompanies all of humanity on our common journey to You.