



Journeying Together

Being Part of the 2021-2023 Papal Synod

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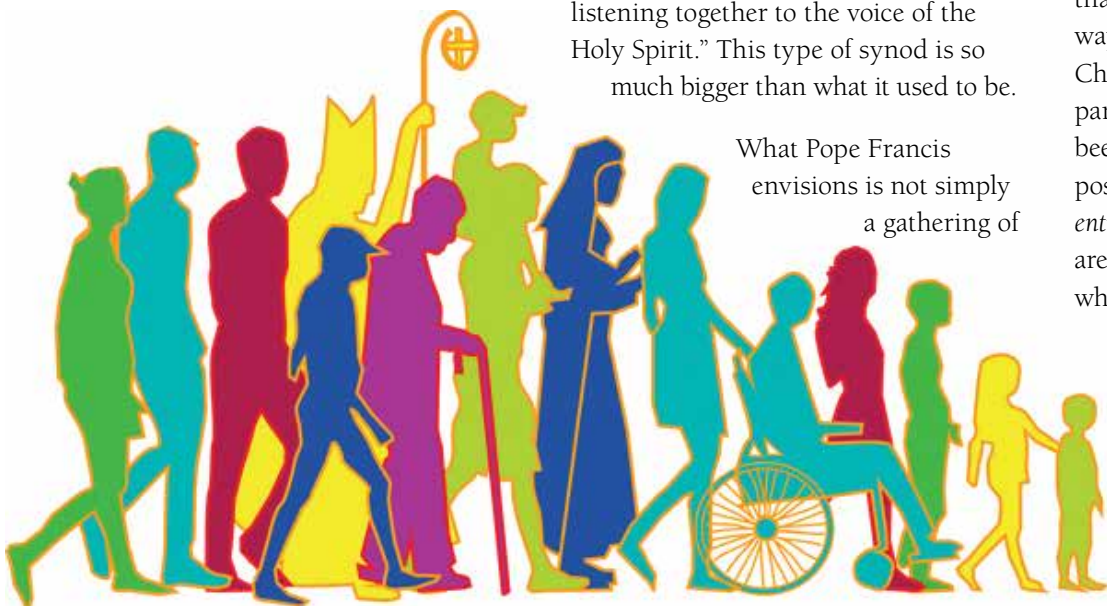
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While I have long been familiar with the word “synod,” which I understood to be a gathering of bishops who discerned concerns or issues of the Church, the first time I heard the word synodality was when I was invited to serve on the Synodality Committee for our congregation in 2021. Since then, I’ve learned that my past understanding of a synod, compared to Pope Francis’ vision, was inadequate, narrow and limited. “Synodality,” as explained by Pope Francis is, “the way of being the Church today according to the will of God, in a dynamic discerning and listening together to the voice of the Holy Spirit.” This type of synod is so much bigger than what it used to be.

What Pope Francis envisions is not simply a gathering of

bishops but a real participation of the whole people of God. “Enabling everyone to participate is an essential ecclesial duty!” the Pope proclaimed. A synod calls us to “journey together.” We are being called to a way of being Church based on our belief that each of us possesses the gift of the Spirit. Together we are called to listen to one another and discern where the Spirit is leading the Catholic Church.

Pope Francis is very serious about listening to everyone and discerning with everyone. It cannot be overstated that Francis is using this synod as a way to move us forward, together, as Church, to a new moment. Fostering wide participation in the synodal process has been emphasized by the Vatican: “It is not possible to listen to the *living voice of the entire people of God* unless special efforts are made to actively reach out to people where they are at, especially those who are often excluded or not involved in the life of the Church. There must be a clear focus on the participation of the poor, marginalized, vulnerable, and excluded, in order to listen to their voices and experiences.” Everyone is invited.



The questions posed by this Synod are very basic. The first is: how is the journeying together happening today in your local church? We are asked to respond, not from an academic or intellectual perspective, but out of our personal real-life experience. Pope Francis says, “Do we allow people to express themselves, to walk in faith even though they have had difficulties in life, and to be part of the life of the community without being hindered, rejected or judged?” He reminds us that, “we are called to become experts in the art of encounter. . . We need to be sensitive to the questions of our sisters and brothers, to let ourselves be enriched by the variety of cultures, charisms, vocations, and ministries” and to recognize that “every encounter. . . calls for openness, courage and a willingness to let ourselves be challenged.” These questions ask us to think deeply of how we are interconnected and in community with each other.

The second question of this Synod underscores our belief that we hear the Spirit through one another and that the Spirit is expressed in different cultures and contexts: What steps does the Spirit invite us to take in order to grow our journeying together? It is our responses to these questions that are vital to this Synodal process.

Journeying together recognizes that we are all people of God, participating together in the Church. It is important that everyone is given a chance to speak, and to be listened to. Diocese and parishes all over the world are urged to invite and gather people for discussion and input. Letters of invitation were sent to organizations of priests, sisters, and brothers requesting they develop processes for their members to participate. Universities, assemblies, groups of all kinds, especially young adults and youth, were asked to participate. Finally, with the goal to hear all voices, any group or individual may send their responses directly to Rome.

Pope Francis has said that this Synod has three key words: *communion, participation, and mission*. It offers us an opportunity “to become a Church of closeness, where we listen to each other’s hopes and crises of faith present in different parts of our world. . . With attitudes of compassion and tender love.” Francis urges us not to forget “God’s style: closeness, compassion and tender love.”

As a congregation, there are two lenses that are guiding our participation. First, we share our insights through the prism of our mission of unity. Second, we offer insights as vowed

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and associate members of the Congregation of St. Joseph along with those with and to whom we minister.

People everywhere are encouraged to participate in the synodal process in their own diocese. In addition to our own participation, the congregation is hoping to bring together and facilitate other groups who may not be included in the diocesan gatherings. We hope to provide a safe place for people to offer their thoughts and insights, especially those who are poor, marginalized, vulnerable, and excluded. As sisters and associates, we welcome the invitation to participate and also recognize our responsibility to share our real-life experience of Church, and to discern with others where the Spirit is calling the people of God.

The Synod documents assert, “The purpose of the Synod. . . is not to produce documents, but to plant dreams, draw forth prophecies and visions, allow hope to be nourished, inspire trust, bind up wounds, weave together relationships, awaken a dawn of hope, learn from one another, and create a bright resourcefulness that will enlighten minds, warm hearts, give strength to our hands.”

We look forward to joining with many other voices and answering the call of Pope Francis to “be open to the surprises of the Holy Spirit.” ■



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