

In the Catholic Church, the **Synod of Bishops**, established in 1965 by Pope Pius VI at the beginning of the Second Session of the Vatican II Council, is the institution of **periodic meetings of bishops**. According to the Vatican II's "Decree on the Bishops' Pastoral Office in the Church", a synod is called by the pope to assist him in governing the Church. It demonstrates the responsibility of bishops (as a body) for the universal church, in addition to their individual responsibilities in their respective home dioceses.

A synod, a permanent **consultative body of (appointed) bishops**, delegates elected by national episcopal conferences and some ex officio members, from all over the world, works with the pope in a collaborative fashion. The fruit of Vatican II, synods were set up to provide continuity for its implementation, but it does not have the authority of an Ecumenical Council, unless the Pope grants it deliberative vote in certain cases.

The synod's purpose is to discuss **major concerns of the Church**. Issues discussed by synods have included: priestly ministry; the practice and principle of collegiality; the church's obligations in promoting social justice. Pope Francis held synods on the topics of the family (2014), on youth (2018), and on the Church in the Pan-Amazonia (2019).

From the beginning of his papacy, Pope Francis often expressed his desire to strengthen the collaboration of Bishops in the Church's governance, the recognition of the laity and their gifts in the Church, and the role of the Holy Spirit, that is, listening to the "signs of the times" within the tradition of Scripture and of the Church.

Procedures for synods are incorporated in Canon Law. On September 15, 2018, Francis approved the new apostolic constitution "Episcopal Communion" that states that a Synod's final document, if approved by the members with "moral unanimity" and, if the Pope has "granted deliberative power to the Synod Assembly," becomes part of the **Ordinary Magisterium of Catholic Teaching** once it has been ratified by him.

And this is important. The laity are encouraged to participate locally and to send their contributions to the synod. This may be the greatest achievement of Pope Francis – the creation of a "**Synodal Catholic Church**", where synods serve as a platform for open and energetic debate among all the faithful. The theme for the 2023 Synod is "For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, and Mission", with a 3-year path (process) at every level of the Church.

The first is the **diocesan level**. Bishop Crosby has set up a process of consultation. As he says: "*I am going to share my voice; will you share yours?*" Our input will be taken to the national and continental levels, and then to Rome for the Synod in 2023.

Please participate: go to the parish or diocesan website: and complete the survey.

<https://hamiltondiocese.com/synod/#resources>.

I pray for you and for a successful parish involvement.

Blessings.

Fr. Brian