



# Synod of Bishops

How they work

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FutureChurch

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# History

- Vatican II – bishops wanted to institutionalize a method for making their role in governance more effective
- Melkite Patriarch Maximos VI suggested a synod modeled after Eastern churches- supreme executive and decision making body council of the universal church
- Paul VI – wanted bishops to **have limited authority**– *Christus Dominus*
- Synod of Bishops is not a Curial office

# Circumscribed Role of the Synod – in relation to Pope

- Strictly advisory to the pope unless he deems it otherwise
  - Pope calls synod
  - Pope specifies issues (receives suggestions from bishops)
  - Pope determines agenda
  - Pope presides over session
  - Pope can suspend or dissolve it
  - Pope approves recommendations
- Pope determines scope and authority of the synod

# Three types of synods

- Ordinary
- Extraordinary
- Special
- Membership and operations depends on the synod type

# Ordinary

- Most common
- One every four years
- Pope ratifies delegates
- Makes recommendations to GS for topics at next synod, delegates, episcopal conferences, curial offices)
- Bishops' conferences elect one to four bishops some who are experts on the topic
- Union of Superiors General – elects ten priests (usually superiors general)
- Patriarchs (n14) ex-officio
- Cardinals as heads of curial offices (n30)
- 15% appointed by Pope

# Topics of Ordinary & Extraordinary Synods

## ORDINARY

- Priests
- Families
- Laity
- Religious
- Faith
- Justice
- Evangelism
- Catechesis
- Reconciliation and penance

## EXTRAORDINARY

- Collegiality of bishops with pope, roles of episcopal conferences
  
- Anniversary of VII

# Extraordinary Synod

- Least common (1969, 1985, 2014)
- Smaller (n146, n165)
- Less representative than ordinary
- Presidents – bishops' conferences
- Curial officials
- Patriarchs
- Three from Union of Superior Generals
- Fewer than 15% papal appointees

# Special Synod

- Regional issues
- Often take place in Rome
- Bishops, patriarchs, religious, heads of curial offices, cardinals, additional delegates
- Rules for electing delegates vary according to need



# Council of the Synod Secretariat

- Delegates from ordinary synod elect 12 members to serve on Council of General Secretariat of Synod of Bishops for next synod
- Studies and makes recommendations to Pope on topics
- 3 from each continent: Asia, Africa, Europe, Americas
- Pope appoints 3 additional members
- CDF always appointed

# Special synods

- Have their own pre-synodal councils
- Appointed by Pope

## 1960s and 70s

The Synod of the Bishops has held the following assemblies:

Year	Type	Number	Topic	Concluding document or apostolic exhortation
1967	Ordinary General	I	Preserving and Strengthening the Catholic Faith	
1969	Extraordinary General		Cooperation between the Holy See and the Episcopal Conferences	
<a href="#">1971</a>	Ordinary General	II	The Ministerial Priesthood and Justice in the World	<a href="#"><i>Justice in the World</i></a> , Rome, IT: The Vatican
1974	Ordinary General	III	Evangelization in the Modern World	<a href="#">Montini, Giovanni Battista Enrico Antonio Maria (1975-12-08)</a> , <a href="#"><i>Evangelii nuntiandi</i></a> (Apostolic exhortation), Rome, IT: The Vatican
1977	Ordinary General	IV	Catechesis in Our Time	<a href="#">Wojtyła, Karol Józef (Charles Joseph)</a> , <a href="#"><i>Catechesi tradendae</i></a> (Apostolic exhortation), Rome, IT: The Vatican

# 1980s

1980	Special		Netherlands	(1980-01-30), <a href="#"><u>Conclusions of the Special Synod of the Bishops of the Netherlands</u></a> , Rome, IT: The Vatican
1980	Ordinary General	V	The Christian Family	(1981-11-22), <a href="#"><u>Familiaris consortio</u></a> (Apostolic exhortation), Rome, IT: The Vatican
1983	Ordinary General	VI	Penance and Reconciliation in the Mission of the Church	(1984-12-02), <a href="#"><u>Reconciliatio et paenitentia</u></a> (Apostolic exhortation), Rome, IT: The Vatican
1985	Extraordinary General		The Twentieth Anniversary of the Conclusion of the Second Vatican Council	
1987	Ordinary General	VII	The Vocation and Mission of the Lay Faithful in the Church and in the World	(1988-12-30), <a href="#"><u>Christifideles laici</u></a> (Apostolic exhortation), Rome, IT: The Vatican

1990s

1990	Ordinary General	VIII	The Formation of Priests in Circumstances of the Present Day	(1992-03-25), <a href="#"><i>Pastores dabo vobis</i></a> (Apostolic exhortation), Rome, IT: The Vatican
1991	Special	I	Europe	
1994	Special	I	Africa	(1995-09-14), <a href="#"><i>Ecclesia in Africa</i></a> (Apostolic exhortation), Rome, IT: The Vatican
1994	Ordinary General	IX	The Consecrated Life and its Role in the Church and in the World	(1996-03-25), <a href="#"><i>Vita consecrata</i></a> (Apostolic exhortation), Rome, IT: The Vatican
1995	Special		Lebanon	(1997-05-10), <a href="#"><i>Ecclesia in Libanon</i></a> (Apostolic exhortation), Rome, IT: The Vatican
1997	Special		America	(1999-11-22), <a href="#"><i>Ecclesia in America</i></a> (Apostolic exhortation), Rome, IT: The Vatican
1998	Special		Asia	(1999-11-06), <a href="#"><i>Ecclesia in Asia</i></a> (Apostolic exhortation), Rome, IT: The Vatican
1998	Special		Oceania	(1999-11-06), <a href="#"><i>Ecclesia in Oceania</i></a> (Apostolic exhortation), Rome, IT: The Vatican
1999	Special	II	Europe	(2003-06-28), <a href="#"><i>Ecclesia in Europa</i></a> (Apostolic exhortation), Rome, IT: The Vatican

## Most recent

2001	Ordinary General	X	The Bishop: Servant of the Gospel of Jesus Christ for the Hope of the World	(2003-10-16), <a href="#">Pastores gregis</a> (Apostolic exhortation), Rome, IT: The Vatican
2005	Ordinary General	XI	The Eucharist: Source and Summit of the Life and Mission of the Church	<a href="#">Ratzinger, Joseph</a> (2007-02-22), <a href="#">Sacramentum caritatis</a> (Apostolic exhortation), Rome, IT: The Vatican
2008	Ordinary General	XII	The Synod on the Word of God in the Life and Mission of the Church	(2010-09-30), <a href="#">Verbum Domini</a> (Apostolic exhortation), Rome, IT: The Vatican
2009	Special	II	Africa	(2011-11-19), <a href="#">Africae munus</a> (Apostolic exhortation), Rome, IT: The Vatican
2010	Special		Middle East	(2012 Feb 9), <a href="#">Ecclesia in Medio Oriente</a> ( <a href="#">PDF</a> ) (Apostolic exhortation), Rome, IT: The Vatican
2012	Ordinary General	XIII	The New Evangelization for the Transmission of the Christian Faith	
2014	Extraordinary General		The Pastoral Challenges of the Family in the Context of Evangelization	October 5 – 19, 2014
2015	Ordinary		Continuation of 2014 Extraordinary synod on the pastoral challenges of the Family	October 2015

- General Secretary
  - Has access to pope
- Council of 15
  - Selected geographically and appointed by Pope
- President
  - Chairs synod meetings
- Relator
  - Facilitates synod discussions
- Special Secretary
  - Works with relator
- Group Relator
  - Facilitates discussions in synod groups
- Delegates
  - Bishops, voting members
- Observers
  - Appointed
- Periti
  - Experts appointed

## Who's who

at the synod

- Prepares for synod
- Function of synod while in session
- Post-synodal work
- Archives and retrieves institutional memory

## General Secretariat and 15 member council

Prep for the Synod



- General Secretariat completes staff work
- Council makes decisions subject to papal approval
  - makes suggestions for improvements
  - meets 2 – 3 times/year
- Council meetings chaired by General Secretary
  - Presentations & round table discussions
  - Language groups – docs in Italian
  - Voting is rare – shared discussion

## General Secretariat and the Council

How they work

Development of topics for Synod  
and the process for input

General Secretary & Council propose topics based on bishop input at prior synod

Pope approves topics

General Secretary & Experts draw up *lineamenta* – topic, questions, 7 languages

Pope approves *lineamenta* and General Secretary sends out to bishops' conferences (usually six – nine months for input)

Bishops can consult or not. Curia provides input (usually CDF) and sometimes hold pre-synod symposiums

Responses from *lineamenta* sent to General Secretary

Development of topics for Synod  
and the process for input

GS divides responses into "official" and "unofficial"  
Official responses comes from episcopal conferences,  
Roman curia, USG. Unofficial, single bishops, others

GS (with extra staff) analyzes responses and sends to  
Council members.

Council members meet to devise *Instrumentum laboris*.  
Language groups make recommendations for assembly.  
GS creates final and it goes to Pope for approval.

*Instrumentum laboris* goes to delegates and is made  
public.

30 days before synod, a report written by the relator on  
the topic is distributed to delegates

The Council to the Secretariat dissolves at the start of the  
synod

# Synod

Sessions closed to public

Bishops and experts (periti), priests, religious, laypersons and non-Catholic observers appointed by Pope can attend, address the assembly, participate in small group meetings, but cannot vote

*A president appointed by the Pope chairs the meetings*

General Secretary gives a report on last synod

Relator summarizes

Each delegate can give 8 minute speech

Bishops speak for their conference and not just for themselves

Speeches go on for 2 weeks – Relator summarizes

## Synod

Bishops go into small groups using the report of the relator for discussion

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Groups are divided by language

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Each group selects a moderator to chair

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Each group selects a group relator who shares group views with assembly

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Relator shares small group reports – individual responses ensue

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Groups then make a series of recommendations or propositions for the pope

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In last week, propositions are consolidated by drafting commission – president, relator, secretary, group relators, assistants

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Draft given to assembly for debate – changes made

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Assembly votes

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Amendments are added – whatever is amended is the decision of the commission.

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Final approval

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Post Synod

Approved documents to go Pope for approval

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Propositions are supposed to be secret but are often leaked

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Synod adopted the practice of issuing a short pastoral message to the people of God and making a series of recommendations to the pope who writes the apostolic exhortation selects a group relator who shares group views with assembly

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Synod recommends ways to implement proposals

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Papal approval and interest in implementation are critical for new proposals to be initiated

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