

XVI General Ordinary Assembly of the Synod of Bishops

Informational Sheet – August 2023

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1. Program – Schedule – Preliminary information

- **Sept. 30:** Ecumenical Prayer Vigil in St. Peter's Square
 - **September 30 (evening) - October 3:** Spiritual Retreat at Fraterna Domus, Sacrofano (near Rome), for Members, Fraternal Delegates and Special Invitees only.
Experts and Facilitators will have a specific program in Rome (directions on this will be communicated at a later date)
 - **October 4 - 29:** XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops at the Vatican.
- **All Participants (Members, Fraternal Delegates, Special Invitees, Experts and Facilitators, staff) are earnestly requested to arrive in time** for the Ecumenical Prayer Vigil.
- The detailed schedule of work will be provided at a later date. Some initial useful directions follow.

Ecumenical Prayer Vigil (Sept. 30 - 5-7 p.m.) St. Peter's Square

- **By 3:30 p.m. on September 30**, all Participants should be in the **Atrium of Paul VI Hall**.
In preparation for the transfer to Sacrofano for the three-day Spiritual Retreat, **Members, Fraternal Delegates and Special Invitees** will drop off there their **personal luggage**. Please remember, to keep and bring with you all necessities for your three-day stay at the Fraterna Domus in Sacrofano.
Following the dropping off of their luggage, all Participants will move from the Atrium of Paul VI Hall to the St. Peter's Square.
See: → [Badges](#)
See: → [Ecclesiastical Attire](#)

- Immediately following the prayer vigil, all Participants will return to the Atrium of Paul VI Hall, where a welcome dinner will be offered by the Italian Bishops' Conference.
- Directly after the dinner, Members, Fraternal Delegates and Special Invitees will transfer by bus to Sacrofano. Details regarding this transport will be provided in due time. Those who intend to reach the Fraterna Domus by their own means are requested to inform the General Secretariat of the Synod by Friday, September 15.

Spiritual Retreat (Sept. 30 evening - Oct. 3 evening) Fraterna Domus, Sacrofano (near Rome)

- The retreat prior to the Assembly is intended to be a time of spiritual preparation and prayer. It is requested that all Participants bring their own **Bible**.
- **For the liturgy**, cardinals, bishops and priests are asked to bring their own **alb and a white stole**.
- Departure from Sacrofano for the return to Rome (Vatican) is scheduled for October 3 after dinner.

XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops (Oct. 4-29) Paul VI Hall.

• **Program, October 4, 2023**

- The day of October 4 will begin with the Opening Mass. All Participants (patriarchs, cardinals, bishops, priests, deacons, seminarians, consecrated men and women and lay men and women) are expected in the Atrium of Paul VI Hall at 8:00 a.m., where the sacristy will also be set up. The celebration will begin at 9:00 am. Participants will have a sector reserved for them. Bishops and priests will be able to concelebrate.
- Immediately after Mass, necessarily at 11:00 a.m., all Participants are expected in Paul VI Hall to receive directions necessary for the smooth functioning of the work.
- This will be followed by lunch in the accommodations of each one.
- Plenary work for the First General Congregation will begin at 4:30 p.m.

• **Program, October 5 to 28, 2023**

- **Monday through Friday**, the work will be held in Paul VI Hall from 8:45 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. and from 4 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. Lunch and dinner will be at the housing facilities.
- On the **Saturdays of October 7, 14 and 21**, we will work until lunchtime. On Saturday, **October 28** we will work both in the morning and in the afternoon.
- Sundays will be dedicated to rest. Should they wish, Members may avail themselves of any invitation extended to visit and bear witness in parishes and/or centers of outreach in Rome.
- One afternoon during the Assembly will be devoted to a **pilgrimage** with different itinerary options. In view of this opportunity, it is recommended that Members have suitable shoes.

• **Program, October 29, 2023**

- The Synod Assembly will conclude with Mass on October 29.

2. How we will work together (methodology)

The entire process of the 2021-2024 Synod is guided by one fundamental question: "How does this 'journeying together,' which takes place today on different levels (from the local level to the universal one), allow the Church to proclaim the Gospel in accordance with the mission entrusted to Her; and what steps does the Spirit invite us to take in order to grow as a synodal Church?" (*Preparatory Document*, no. 2).

The consultation and listening phase, which began at the local level in October 2021 and continued up to the Continental Assemblies, allowed the People of God to express their own "lived" or "grassroots" understanding of what a synodal Church is, and to formulate some priority issues to be submitted to the discernment of the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, in the two Sessions or periods into which it is divided. As foreseen by the Apostolic Constitution *Episcopalis communio* (Art. 18), the fruit of this discernment, gathered in the final document at the end of the two Sessions, will be offered to the Holy Father.

The *Instrumentum laboris* (IL) prepared for the First Session collects and synthetically presents the fruit of the consultation during the listening phase and priority issues for discernment. The task of the First Session is precisely to begin this discernment, which will be concluded in the Second Session. These pages offer a first descriptive presentation of the working method that the First Session will follow, pending the publication of the *Regulations* that will govern it more precisely. Their aim is to help Members, Fraternal Delegates and Special Invitees prepare more carefully, enabling the Assembly, which will be dealing with substantial issues in a very short time relative to their prominence, to work in a more focused and fruitful manner. More specific directions on the role of the Experts and the ways in which they can contribute, based on their different disciplinary and facilitating skills, will be provided later.

The subdivision into modules

The work of the Synodal Assembly will be divided into five Modules, each of which will consist of plenary sessions (known as General Congregations) and Working Groups (known as *Circuli Minores*). Each of the first four Modules will have a thematic focus corresponding to a specific section of the IL, and will be named after it.

- The first Module will be devoted to the subject matter proposed in Section A of the IL.
- The next three Modules will respectively address the subject matter proposed in Sections B 1 - B 2 - B 3 of the IL, using the relevant Worksheets.

The Concluding Module will be dedicated to the discussion and approval of the Synthesis Report of the First Session of the Assembly.

The relationship between General Congregations and Small Groups

In each Module, the work alternates between General Congregations and Working Groups, articulating the in-depth study that is possible in a numerically smaller group with the universal outlook proper to the Plenary Assembly. The same subject matter is therefore addressed in different ways, which are interwoven for the purpose of greater fruitfulness, in an atmosphere of prayer and listening.

The first four Modules (A, B 1, B 2, B 3) will be structured in the following way:

- a General Congregation for the presentation of the topic by the General Relator and some other introductory interventions;
- two meetings of the Working Groups dedicated to an in-depth study of the assigned topic, according to a method that will be explained later;
- three General Congregations (only two for Module A) to listen to the contributions of the Working Groups and for an open discussion on the topic;
- a meeting of the Working Groups to finalize their Report, to be approved by the group and then delivered to the General Secretariat.

The work of the Concluding Module will begin with the presentation of a draft of the Synthesis Report, which will be discussed at a General Congregation and to which Working Groups will formulate amendments (or *modi*). The amended text will be submitted to the Plenary Assembly for approval.

Work in the Small Groups

The Working Groups, composed of 10/12 people each, will be formed by the General Secretariat on the basis of the linguistic and thematic preferences indicated by each Participant in the appropriate form to be completed online. Their makeup will vary with each module, thus allowing each to interact with a larger number of Participants, and will be communicated in advance so as to allow for more thorough preparation.

Regarding content, during the first module all the Working Groups will work on the same topic, that is, Section A of the IL. During the next three modules, each Working Group will utilize and address only one of the Worksheets corresponding to the Section of the IL being discussed (B 1, B 2 and B 3). As there are five Worksheets for Section of the IL, each of them will be tackled by several groups in different languages.

The Working Groups will proceed to a common discernment of the issues addressed with the active participation of each member, who brings a particular point of view, anchored in a specific local Church. For this reason, Participants are invited to indicate in which languages they feel they can express their own point of view, and not merely follow the interventions of others. They are also invited to choose those topics on which the experience of the Church from which they come can offer a significant contribution.

The results of the discernment completed by the Working Group will be expressed in a written Report that will collect points of convergence and divergence, tensions that have emerged and questions that remain open. Above all, this Report will contain insights and proposals for concrete steps to be taken in relation to the issues addressed. Finally, it will include a brief evaluation of the dynamic and climate in which the work was carried out.

Throughout each Module, group work will be structured by drawing inspiration from the method of Conversation in the Spirit (cf. nos. 32-42 of the IL). In order to facilitate its more fruitful application, each Working Group will include an Expert skilled in facilitating Conversation in the Spirit, who will accompany the exchange from a methodological point of view.

In each Module, groups will meet a first time to address the assigned topic according to the following three steps.

- In a first round, each member of the group will take the floor, bringing his or her own contribution with a verbal contribution of no more than four minutes. This contribution may also be delivered to the General Secretariat preferably in electronic format (avoiding the extensive use of paper during the Synod is a deliberate choice - alongside

other initiatives – meant to promote the care of creation). Each participant is invited to devote time, reflection and prayer to the preparation of his or her opening address in the Working Group.

- In a second round, each member of the group will express "what from their listening has touched them most deeply and what they feel challenged by most strongly" (IL, n. 38), opening himself/herself to a common listening to the voice of the Spirit.
- A third round will be devoted to gathering the fruits of the conversation by drawing up a first draft of the group Report. In addition, each Working Group will be asked to identify the most significant points in the Report and, above all, the questions and proposals to submit to the Assembly by way of a speech that one of the members will deliver in the ensuing General Congregation.

Listening to the contributions of the other Working Groups and to the open discussion in Plenary Sessions will allow each group to articulate their perspective with all the others in an atmosphere of prayer. Then, at the third meeting of the Working Group, the draft Report will be reread and amended in the light of the exchange in plenary, so as to provide a complete representation of the work done. The Report will thus record the points and proposals on which there is substantial agreement, but also those of disagreement, indicating the different positions and their reasons. The members of the Working Group will be asked to express their consensus regarding the adequacy of the Report as representative of the work accomplished in common and not regarding whether or not they all agree on every single point. After approval, the Report will be submitted to the General Secretariat with an indication of the number of votes for and against, along with any abstentions.

The importance of the General Congregations

Within the process of discernment carried out by the Assembly, the General Congregations are the moments that best represent an experience of the Church's universality and catholicity, within which the different perspectives that are rooted in local contexts are called to find their place and enter into dialogue. The General Congregations receive and listen to the contributions of the Working Groups, encouraging dialogue between them and the emergence of commonalities and tensions. By way of the free interventions made in Plenary Assembly, they contribute to discernment through the discussion of what has emerged from the Working Groups. In this way, they enable the Working Groups to reread and modify their conclusions in light of the many other perspectives that emerged during the plenary debate. Finally, the General Congregations have the fundamental task of discussing and then approving the draft Synthesis Report, certifying that it adequately represents the work done by way of expressing areas of agreement, areas of difference, and questions that require continued reflection. The Synthesis Report is not, in fact, a conclusive document, but rather the outline for the work of the whole Church in the time between the two Sessions.

3. Communicating the Synod

How we communicate regarding the synod is very important for the discernment process and for the whole Church. It is important that we give witness to the synod experience as a moment of communion in listening to the Spirit rather than an opportunity for each person to make known what they think, his or her own convictions and/or their own intentions. Every communication regarding the synod assembly should be carefully curated and related in such a way that the work, carried out in prayer and dialogue, generates a common ecclesial feeling with respect to the fundamental issue of the synod (cf. *Preparatory Document*, no. 2).

4. Languages and Small Groups

- The **official languages** of the Assembly are: Italian, English, French, Spanish and Portuguese.
- Simultaneous translation for the official languages will be provided **in the General Congregations**. German translation will also be available.
- **No simultaneous translation will be provided in the Small Groups** because each Small Group, normally, will use only one language. To make this possible, in the composition of the Small Groups the General Secretariat will take into account the language preferences indicated by the Participants, who can choose between Italian, English, French, Spanish and Portuguese. Small Groups will be formed on both a linguistic and thematic basis. It should be noted that, unlike previous Synodal Assemblies, the composition of the Small Groups will vary during the course of the Assembly, allowing for an exchange between a greater number of Participants.

5. *Form to be completed online*

See: → [How we will work together \(methodology\)](#)

- We ask you to fill in the form found at [this link](https://cloud.synod2023.org/cloud-registration/) (<https://cloud.synod2023.org/cloud-registration/>), **by 3 September at the latest**, specifying data necessary for the good coordination of the work. In the event that you experience difficulties in completing the form, please write to: media@synod.va

6. *Personal badge and documentation for the Assembly*

- Each Participant will be given a personal, non-transferable badge to carry with them at all times. A portfolio containing useful documentation for the Assembly will also be provided.
- **Those who are lodged in the residences assigned by the General Secretariat of the Synod** will find their portfolio (with their badge) in their rooms.
- **All other Participants** are kindly requested to collect their portfolio in the Atrium of Paul VI Hall on Friday 29 September, 15-19, or Saturday 30 September, 9-13.
It is recommended to collect the portfolio on the above-mentioned days and times, either personally or through a person with a written proxy and a photocopy of the Participant's identity document.

7. *Ecclesiastical Attire*

- Only during the **Ecumenical Prayer Vigil on 30 September** and during the **plenary sessions** of the Synodal Assembly the afternoons of **4 October** and **28 October** cardinals and bishops are requested to wear "filettata".
- **For the opening liturgy (4 October morning)** and the **closing liturgy (29 October)** vestments (amice, alb, cincture, stole and chasuble) will be provided by the Office for the Liturgical Celebrations of the Supreme Pontiff. Cardinals and bishops are requested to bring their own mitre.
- For the **liturgy on the days of the retreat (1-3 October)**, cardinals, bishops and priests are requested to bring their own alb and white stole.

8. *Other logistical information*

Transport

- For all of the official functions during the work of Synod (Opening and Closing Liturgy, working sessions, etc), those who are hosted by the General Secretariat of the Synod in accommodations that are close to the Vatican are asked to arrive and leave on foot.
- The General Secretariat of the Synod will provide transportation to and from the Vatican for all those who are hosted by the General Secretariat of the Synod in accommodations that are further away from the Vatican.
- Those residing in religious or private homes must arrange for their own transportation.
- For the spiritual retreat, transportation to and from the Vatican to Sacrofano (and back to the Vatican) is provided for all by the General Secretariat of the Synod.
- Any other transportation (within or beyond the city) is the responsibility of the individual Synod Participants.

Transport to and from the airport

- Detailed information will be provided in September.

Medical Emergencies

- Participants in the Synod Assembly, especially those with medical needs, are requested to bring their health booklet / necessary medical records with them.
- In addition, those who habitually follow a particular medical treatment should ensure that they bring a sufficient quantity of medicine for the duration of the Assembly.

Climate

- In autumn, the temperature in Rome is mild during the day and cool at night. It can also rain.

Electrical Outlets

- Please provide yourself with an adapter for electric outlets which, in Italy, are 220v.