

What is a Synod?

Although many Catholics are familiar with synods convened in Rome, some are unfamiliar with those held at the archdiocesan level. Pope Francis has directed the bishops in Rome that a “Synodality should be lived at various levels.” Synods offer a way the Church can renew herself, encouraging ongoing institutional and personal renewal. Through them, we learn that “we must walk together: the people, the bishops and the pope.”

But what happens at a synod? The Second Vatican Council’s “Decree Concerning the Pastoral Office of Bishops in the Church” suggests an answer. There, the Council expressed an “earnest desire” to reinvigorate structures at the service of ecclesial communion and mission (36). Pope Paul VI instituted the permanent structure of the World Synod of Bishops on Sept. 15, 1965, as a privileged sign of the participation of bishops in the office and ministry of the pope.

At the archdiocesan level—referred to as the local church—The Code of Canon Law defines synods as “an assembly of selected priests and other members of Christ’s faithful” of a local Church, such as a diocese or archdiocese, that “assists the ... bishop” in ministering to the “whole diocesan community.” As such, the bishop is the one who is tasked with calling and presiding over a synod, which he can do only after he consults his priest council. The synod “consists properly of the synodal sessions,” spread “over a period of time, so as to permit sufficient time to study the questions raised during the sessions, as well as to make interventions during the discussions.” And so...

Upcoming Synod of the Archdiocese of Hartford

Last year the Presbyteral Council, a council of priests who advise the Archbishop, was asked by Archbishop Blair for discussion on the need and role of an archdiocesan synod at this time here in the Archdiocese of Hartford (AOH), as part of our on-going Pastoral Planning efforts. In preparation for our AOH Synod in 2020, the Archbishop has met with all his priests at their respective Deanery Meetings to hear their desires and concerns for the AOH as she continues to meet the spiritual and corporal needs of the Church in the modern world.

To that end and to continue the consultation process, Archbishop Blair has directed all pastors to hold “listening sessions” in every parish during the summer months. This is to hear from the lay faithful and to enlist their experiences and their knowledge of the parish in which they practice their faith and the interrelationship with the AOH. In fact, the Archbishop asks us to consider three (3) questions during these listening sessions: (1) What are we (as an Archdiocese) doing well? (2) What are we (as an Archdiocese) not doing so well? And, (3) What are we (as an Archdiocese) not doing that we should be doing?

As one might imagine, there are specific requirements to build the process of the synod. The Parish Listening Session can either be a Town Hall Style—open to all parishioners or it can be comprised of the members of the Parish Council and the Finance Council, and leaders of various committees, programs and ministries. We are opening this session to all parishioners.

The meeting is to be led by a facilitator. The pastor may welcome everyone and offer an opening prayer but then is required to leave so that all will be free to speak without hesitation. Two or three people will be asked to take notes without attribution (just a listing of issues raised, no names mentioned) which will then be given to the AOH Synod committee. These notes will be part of the Synod 2020 planning. In addition, each pastor will provide two or three representatives who will meet with the Archbishop in person to discuss the concerns. Once this is completed, then the outline for the AOH 2020 Synod will be prepared.

Our parish will have a Parish Listening Session on August 1st at 6:30 p.m. in the Franciscan Center for Urban Ministry. Please RSVP so that we can plan for the simple supper.

