



Pope Francis participates in morning prayer during a session of the Synod of Bishops on young people in this file photo from 2018. The first of two synods on synodality will convene in Rome on Oct. 4. (CNS/Vatican Media)



by Joe Ferullo

[View Author Profile](#)

[**Join the Conversation**](#)

September 20, 2023

[Share on Facebook](#)[Share on Twitter](#)[Email to a friend](#)[Print](#)

One of the most important gatherings in the long history of the Catholic Church will begin in just a few days. The first of two synods on synodality will convene in Rome on Oct. 4, and consider questions that have the potential to change the course of Catholicism.

NCR will be there in strength to report on this momentous event, with a focus on detail and context — in keeping with our mission to report on the church truthfully and reliably.

The synods, gatherings of bishops from around the world, are the final stage of a [process](#) initiated by Pope Francis two years ago. It began from the bottom up, with listening sessions in parishes, and continued through national and continental conferences that synthesized the issues and topics which emerged from voices in the pews.

The goal [announced](#) by the Vatican [at the start of all this](#): "To enable the Church to better witness to the Gospel, especially with those who live on the spiritual, social, economic, political, geographical, and existential peripheries of our world."

That was certainly ambitious. But the synodal process has, so far, stayed true to the spirit of that mission, thanks to persistent "encouragement" from the pope. Under his guidance, women religious will participate in the synod — and get a vote. Lay women and men will also take part — and get a vote. Under his direction, this October's meeting will consider, among other issues, priestly celibacy, the role of women in the church, and the status of LGBTQ Catholics.

Vatican documents [assert](#) "we should not be frightened" by internal tensions that may arise when considering these topics. But "frightened" describes well the reaction by some in the U.S. hierarchy. Words like "[schism](#)" seem to get tossed around freely by conservative leaders who insist the synodality process will erode long-held Catholic traditions. Those voices can have an outsized global influence, given the outsized support they receive — as NCR has often [reported](#) — from some wealthy American conservatives.

Advertisement

Francis broke his silence about this recently, [telling a group of Jesuits](#) in Lisbon that some U.S. Catholics have a "very strong, organized, reactionary attitude."

All these forces will come together in Rome during the month of October. NCR will be there with four reporters to provide deep detail and analysis: Vatican correspondent Christopher White; news editor Joshua McElwee, who covered Francis' papacy from 2014 to 2021; NCR senior correspondent Heidi Schlumpf; and Rhina Guidos, Latin America regional correspondent for Global Sisters Report.

Here at home, NCR columnist Michael Sean Winters will offer perspective and context as the synod takes up its far-reaching agenda.

NCR will also produce a weekly podcast from Rome, examining and interpreting what's going on inside the meeting hall, and looking at issues that still lie ahead.

Our social media feeds — including Facebook, Instagram, Threads and X (formerly Twitter) — will give readers our most up-to-the-minute information and analysis.

It is an enormous undertaking for NCR, equal to the importance of this event. We can only do this because many of our readers are also donors or members. As a nonprofit company, we rely on you to help us, year after year — this year, this October, more than most.

Thanks to all of you who are part of our community of support. To join us, if you haven't already, [click here](#) to find out how you can help.

Thank you for being here with us during this exciting point in time for the church. Thank you for trusting us and reading NCR.

This story appears in the **Synod on Synodality** feature series. [View the full series](#). A version of this story appeared in the **Sept 29-Oct 12, 2023** print issue under the headline: Follow NCR as we report on Pope Francis' momentous Synod of Bishops.