



AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC BISHOPS CONFERENCE

Media Release

September 27, 2024

Synod assembly gets underway in Rome

Fourteen Australian Catholics will enter a retreat on Monday ahead of a month-long global event in Rome aimed at shaping the future of the Church.

The Second Assembly of the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops will bring together 368 bishops, priests, religious and lay people from around the world. There will also be 90 non-voting members.

As well, Pope Francis has invited 16 representatives of non-Catholic Christian faiths.

The two-day retreat's meditation sessions will be led by English Catholic priest and Dominican friar, Father Timothy Radcliffe, and Benedictine nun, Mother Ignazia Angelini.

A Penitential Vigil with Pope Francis – expected to be broadcast via Vatican Media - will be held on Tuesday, October 1, before the synod working sessions begin. During the service, three people will speak about their experiences of being harmed by sexual abuse, war, and indifference toward migrants, and there will be what has been described as a “confession of various types of sins”.

Also new for the 2024 session of the synod will be four public forums on October 9 and 16 in Rome.

The forums will be on the topics of: “The People of God, Subject of the Mission,” “The Role and Authority of the Bishop in a Synodal Church,” “The Mutual Relationship Between the Local Church and the Universal Church,” and “The Exercise of Primacy in the Synod of Bishops”.

In each forum, four or five theologians, canonists, and bishops will introduce the topics - focusing on different perspectives - before questions are invited from the floor.

A second retreat will be held on October 21 to help participants spiritually prepare for the presentation of the draft final document.

Catholics around Australia have been asked to pray that the continuing journey of the faithful together in the synod be a time of grace and that active listening, dialogue and discernment strengthen the dynamic relationships between the People of God and the Risen Lord.

Australian Catholic Bishops Conference President and Archbishop of Perth, Timothy Costelloe SDB, said there was a fundamental question behind the synod.

“How can I, in the concrete reality of my own life and circumstances, play my part in keeping alive and effective the presence of Jesus Christ in that part of the world and Church in which I find myself?” he said.

“And because each Christian, and certainly each Catholic Christian, is by very definition a member of the Church which is the community of the disciples of Christ, the question really becomes a ‘we’ question rather than an ‘I’ question.”

He said the whole Church was being called to walk the synodal path in a way that “sustains, supports and encourages each other”.

The synod’s outcomes, he said, were in no way predetermined.

“It is important to stress that, whatever the outcomes, they will be offered to the Holy Father in a spirit of freedom and trust, fully respecting the right and duty of the Holy Father to make whatever decisions he believes are right and proper for the good of the Church at this time as it seeks to be faithful to its Lord.”

Synod of Bishops national coordinator Dr Trudy Dantis said much had been learned about what it means to be a synodal Church on mission.

“The second assembly will allow us to expand our understanding while also learning how to implement some of these practices in our local churches,” Dr Dantis said.

“For the Australian Church, this is an opportunity to build on the outcomes of the plenary council and the synodal journey we have been on.

“It's a time for us to learn about and celebrate our unique roles as baptised people of God, both lay and ordained alike, to implant synodal practices into our ways of working at all levels in the Church, and to enhance mutual cooperation and co-responsibility in bringing the Good News to all.”

The theme of the event is “For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation and Mission”.

The process began in October 2021, inviting people all over the world to express their understanding of a “synodal” Church and provide input into priority issues. After several rounds of global consultations, a “synthesis report” was then produced following the first session held in Rome in October 2023.

The task of the second session is to complete the discernment begun at the first session and offer the result of this discernment to Pope Francis in a final document.

The second session will be guided by a document known as the *Instrumentum laboris*, which summarises the “fruit” of the consultation.



Australia and other countries provided a “[national contribution](#)” ahead of the second session. This document brought together the thoughts of hundreds of Catholics on how to improve the way the Church practices synodality and co-responsibility in mission.

Social media, liturgy and faith, reaching out to families and young people, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ministry, the equal dignity of women and men, working with other churches and encouraging the use of peoples’ unique gifts were themes from the consultations.

The work of the synodal assembly - through plenary sessions known as “general congregations” and working groups - will be divided into five “modules” which mirror the sections of the *Instrumentum laboris*: Foundations, Relations, Pathways, Places and Conclusion.

The concluding module will be devoted to the discussion and approval of the final document which will go to Pope Francis, who is responsible under the Apostolic Constitution *Episcopalis communio* for its implementation.

The Australian participants are:

- Australian Catholic Bishops Conference President and Archbishop of Perth, Timothy Costelloe SDB
- Member of the Council of the Synod of Bishops and Archbishop of Sydney, Anthony Fisher OP
- Archbishop of Adelaide Patrick O'Regan
- Bishop of Sandhurst Shane Mackinlay
- President of the Federation of Catholic Bishops Conferences of Oceania and Bishop of Broken Bay, Anthony Randazzo
- Mr John Lochowiak
- Ms Kelly Paget
- Fr Sijeesh Pullenkunnel
- Professor Renee Kohler-Ryan
- Dr Trudy Dantis

Australian facilitators and experts include:

- Dr Sandie Cornish

- Br Ian Cribb SJ
- Adjunct Professor Susan Pascoe
- Fr Ormond Rush

Media Resources:

Live transmissions of some events will be available at www.vaticannews.va

The Australian Catholic Bishops Conference has a [synod web page](#)

The Vatican synod website can be found at www.synod.va

More information about the details of the General Assembly can be found here:

<https://www.vaticannews.va/en/vatican-city/news/2024-09/synod-presentation-2nd-session-grech-hollerich-ruffini.html>