

Your Church Wants to Hear from You

What Is the Synod on Synodality?

Michael J. Sanem



LITURGICAL PRESS
Collegeville, Minnesota

www.litpress.org

Cover design by Monica Bokinskie.

Art courtesy of Getty Images.

ISBN 978-0-8146-6816-0 978-0-8146-6817-7 (e-book)

© 2022 by Michael J. Sanem

Published by Liturgical Press, Collegeville, Minnesota. All rights reserved. No part of this book may be used or reproduced in any manner whatsoever, except brief quotations in reviews, without written permission of Liturgical Press, Saint John's Abbey, PO Box 7500, Collegeville, MN 56321-7500. Printed in the United States of America.

*For Megan, who holds it all together,
and William, George, and Nicholas,
who teach us about love.*



Introduction

Your Church Wants to Hear from You

In October 2021, the Catholic Church officially began the largest consultative process in human history. The entire people of God, some 1.34 billion Catholics worldwide, were asked to participate in a process of listening and engagement together over the course of two years. Why embark on this incredibly novel, time-consuming, and expensive task? Because your church wants to hear from you.

Pope Francis, in union with the bishops of the church, have discerned that “it is precisely this path of synodality which God expects of the Church of the third millennium.”¹ While in the past a synod was

1. Synod of Bishops, *For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, and Mission*, Preparatory Document for the Synod 2021–2023 (hereafter, Preparatory Document), para. 1, quoting

reserved only for bishops, this “Synod on Synodality” consults the entire people of God: lay and ordained, religious and nonreligious, Catholic and beyond. This marks a new and more expansive understanding of synodality. It is a recovery of a way of being church that is deeply embedded in our ecclesiology, theology, and history. God, through the workings of the Holy Spirit, is doing something new in this moment. We are responding by recovering an ancient and fruitful way of being church together: the synodal way.

Think of all the changes in culture and society that have happened in the past few decades, years, or even months! We’ve experienced a global pandemic, widespread political and social upheaval, and deep divisions in our church, culture, and society. Even families and friends are struggling with polarization and division. The church continues to grapple with the sex abuse crisis, and the cultural history of clericalism has made it difficult to institute greater transparency and accountability. In many parts of the world, Christians are being violently persecuted. There are deeply divisive debates about the role of religion in society and political life.²

Pope Francis’s address for the Ceremony Commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the Institution of the Synod of Bishops (17 October 2015), <https://www.synod.va/en/documents/english-version-of-the-preparatory-document.html>.

2. Preparatory Document, para. 4–8.