

Collegiality Characterizes Synodal Process

Participation Encouraged From All Levels

VATICAN CITY, OCT. 2, 2005 ([Zenit.org](http://www.zenit.org)).- The Synod of Bishops works according to a methodology based on collegiality, a concept which characterizes each stage of the synodal process from start to finish.

In choosing the topic of the synod, synod fathers, at the end of each ordinary general assembly, are asked to make proposals for the next meeting.

Possible topics must be of a universal character, have the ability to stir new energies and movement in the Church towards growth, have a pastoral focus and application as well as a firm doctrinal basis, and have the potential to be actually accomplished.

The suggestions are then studied by the General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops, which in turn recommends a short list of topics to the Holy Father, who makes the final decision.

The next step is to develop a foundational document, or "lineamenta," that outlines the topic to be discussed and its major parts.

The document is prepared by the council of the General Secretariat, with the help of theologians who are experts in the particular area.

The Pope approves the final version of the text, which is then translated and sent to the bishops for the purpose of generating at the local level study, discussion and prayer.

After gathering and summarizing suggestions, reactions and responses to the various aspects of the topic, the bishops respond to the synod's secretariat with an official response to the proposed document.

Working document

The Council of the General Secretariat, with the help of specialists on the subject, then gathers all the information and drafts the "instrumentum laboris," a working document which will serve as the basis and reference-point used to help focus discussion during the synod.

The document is then submitted to the Holy Father for approval, translated, and sent to the bishops and all those who will participate in the General Assembly.

The working documents have often been made available to the public, as is the case for the current [synod](#) on the Eucharist.

Three phases characterize the synod's working sessions.

During the first phase, each member makes a presentation of the situation in his particular Church.

In light of these presentations, the relator of the synod formulates a series of points for discussion during the second phase, when all the synodal members divide into small groups according to the various languages spoken.

The reports of each one of these groups are read in the plenary session. At this time, the synod fathers are given the opportunity to pose questions to clarify the subjects expressed and are able to make comments.

In the third phase, work proceeds in the small groups toward formulating suggestions and observations in a more precise and definite form, so that in the final days of the assembly a vote can be taken on concrete propositions.

The synod fathers work in small groups to formulate proposals based on what was discussed in the synod hall and on the reports of the small groups.

The proposals of the small groups are then taken by the general relator and special secretary and combined into an integrated list of propositions, which is presented by the general rapporteur in the plenary session.

Amendments

The small groups meet once again to discuss the propositions. At this time, the synod fathers can submit individual amendments for consideration by the group, which will be used in composing collective amendments that can be submitted only by the groups.

The general rapporteur and the special secretary may refuse to include the group amendments in the final document. In this case, a reason for the decision must be given in a document called the "expensio modorum."

The final list of propositions is then presented in plenary session, after which the booklet becomes the ballot where each synod father can vote for or against the proposition.

At the end of a synodal assembly, the general secretary oversees the work of archiving the material and drafting the report on the work of the synod for submission to the Holy Father.

No established norm exists concerning the final document from the synodal assembly.

At the conclusion of the first three synodal assemblies (1967, 1971, 1969) the conclusions were simply submitted to the Pope.

After the 1974 synod, Pope Paul VI drafted the apostolic exhortation "Evangelii Nuntiandi" on the basis of the conclusions of the meeting.

A similar process has been followed ever since, with postsynodal apostolic exhortations being the final product of every synod.

Various councils

An advisory council for the General Secretariat was formed after the second synod, and was made up of 12 elected bishops and three papal appointees.

Such a council was intended to facilitate communication with episcopal conferences and the formulation of the agenda for the subsequent assembly.

After this meeting, a general consultation of the bishops worldwide was begun for suggested topics for future assemblies (such consultation now begins in the final days of an ordinary general assembly).

Since that time the ordinary councils of the General Secretariat, elected from each synod in light of preparation for the following one, have become a permanent feature of the General Secretariat.

With the advent of continental or regional synodal assemblies, the Holy Father chose to form during the special assemblies a postsynodal councils through election and papal appointment, which exist in addition to the ordinary council.

Similarly, in the preparation of a special assembly the Holy Father has appointed a group of bishops, primarily from the continent and region under consideration, to form a pre-synodal councils.

These councils endure from the date of appointment until the first day of the synodal assembly.

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Why the Synod of Bishops Came About

An Extension of Conciliar Collegiality

VATICAN CITY, OCT. 2, 2005 ([Zenit.org](http://www.zenit.org)).- The Synod of Bishops as an institution was a response to the desire of the Second Vatican Council fathers to keep alive the positive spirit of the conciliar experience.

A synod, a Greek word meaning "coming together," is a religious meeting or assembly at which bishops, representing the Catholic episcopate, have the task of helping the Pope in the governing the universal Church by rendering their counsel.

The idea of the Synod of Bishops grew from a need to provide the bishops with a way to assist the Pope in his governing of the universal Church.

Pope Paul VI, while he was still archbishop of Milan, in a talk commemorating the death of John XXIII, made reference to an "ongoing collaboration of the episcopate that is not yet in effect, which would remain personal and in union, but given the responsibility of governing the whole Church."

As Pope Paul VI, he then established the Synod of Bishops at the end of Vatican II.

Church's well-being

Announcing the news to the council fathers, the Pope said: "We intend to give you some institution, called for by this council, a 'Synod of Bishops,' which will be made up of bishops nominated for the most part by the episcopal conferences with our approval and called by the Pope according to the needs of the Church, for his consultation and collaboration, when for the well-being of the Church it might seem to him opportune.

"It goes without saying that this collaboration of the episcopate ought to bring the greatest joy to the Holy See and to the whole Church."

The Synod of Bishops was officially instituted Sept. 15, 1965.

The principal characteristic of the synod is service to the communion and collegiality of the world's bishops with the Holy Father.

The Synod of Bishops has a permanent General Secretariat located in Rome, but is not part of the Roman Curia. It is subject directly and solely to the Holy Father.

Though the institution of the synod is permanent in character, its actual functioning and concrete collaboration are not. That is, the synod meets and operates only when the Pope considers it necessary or opportune to consult the episcopate.

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