OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

15 October 2021

Dear Brothers & Sisters in Christ,

On Sunday, 11 October, the 28th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Pope Francis celebrated the opening Mass in St. Peter's Basilica to open the XVI Ordinary Synod of Bishops. The Synod is titled, "For A Synodal Church: Communion, Participation and Mission."

In its present form, the Synod of Bishops was established by Pope St Paul VI urging greater involvement of the Bishops with the Pope in matters that concern the universal Church. Beginning this October, Pope Francis has invited not just the bishops, but the entire Church into the synodal process through a sharing of prayer, dialogue, and discernment that is attentive to the Holy Spirit and engaging all the faithful as responsible missionary disciples of Christ. The aim of the synod is to gather together as the faithful to hear as many voices in the Catholic Church as possible to guide us forward. Pope Francis states, "It is precisely this path of synodality which God expects of the Church of the third millennium. What the Lord is asking of us is already in some sense present in the very word 'synod.' [That is], Journeying Together."
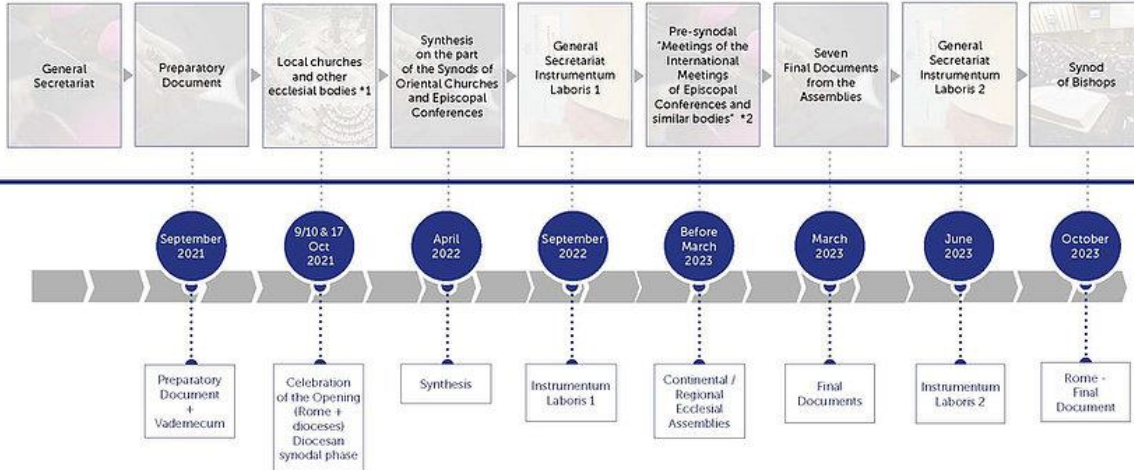
Pope Francis in his homily celebrating the opening of the synod laid out how he sees the process working throughout the world and offers us three key points to keep in mind while thinking about the synod:

> "The Gospels frequently show us Jesus 'on a journey'; he walks alongside people and listens to the questions and concerns lurking in their hearts. He shows us that God is not found in neat and orderly places, distant from reality, but walks ever at our side. He meets us where we are, on the often rocky roads of life. Today, as we begin this synodal process, let us begin by asking ourselves – all of us, pope, bishops, priests, religious and laity – whether we, the Christian community, embody this "style" of God, who travels the paths of history and shares in the life of humanity. Are we prepared for the adventure of this journey? Or are we fearful of the unknown, preferring to take refuge in the usual excuses: 'It's useless' or 'We've always done it this way'? Celebrating a Synod means walking on the same road, walking together. Let us look at Jesus. First, he *encounters* the rich man on the road; he then *listens* to his questions, and finally he helps him *discern* what he must do to inherit eternal life. *Encounter, listen* and *discern."*

A synod focuses on these three points, encountering, listening, and discerning. It is these three things in which we are being asked to do as members of the Catholic Church. In participating in these three things, we the faithful will fulfill the duty Pope Francis calls us to through this synod. The following is a timeline of significant parts of the synodal process.

FOR A SYNODAL CHURCH: COMMUNION, PARTICIPATION AND MISSION
XVI ORDINARY GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE SYNOD OF BISHOPS

General Secretariat	Preparatory Document	Local churches and other ecclesial bodies *1	Synthesis on the part of the Synods of Oriental Churches and Episcopal Conferences	General Secretariat Instrumentum Laboris 1	Pre-synodal "Meetings of the International Meetings of Episcopal Conferences and similar bodies" *2	Seven Final Documents from the Assemblies	General Secretariat Instrumentum Laboris 2	Synod of Bishops
	September 2021	9/10 & 17 Oct 2021	April 2022	September 2022	Before March 2023	March 2023	June 2023	October 2023
	Preparatory Document + Vademecum	Celebration of the Opening (Rome + dioceses) Diocesan synodal phase	Synthesis	Instrumentum Laboris 1	Continental / Regional Ecclesial Assemblies	Final Documents	Instrumentum Laboris 2	Rome - Final Document

*1 Dicasteries, Consecrated Life (UISG-USG UNIONS & FEDERATIONS), Associations of the Faithful, Institutions of Higher Education
*2 Africa (SECAM), Oceania (FCBCO), Asia (FABC), Middle East (CPCO), Europa (CCEE), Latin America (CELAM), North America (USCCB+CCCB)

On Sunday, 17 Oct, I will celebrate a Mass at Sacred Heart Cathedral joining our Holy Father in opening the Synod for the Diocese of Fairbanks. Materials will be sent out to Regional Coordinators, pastors and parish administrators outlining participation in the synodal process for the Diocese of Fairbanks.

This is a most unique opportunity for us to join in prayer as we are called to share the movement of the Holy Spirit in our individual lives, families and parishes within the long-standing Tradition of the Roman Catholic Church. This is a time in the history of the Church that Pope Francis sees the Holy Spirit calling us to turn more deeply to Christ as a source of strength to grow in our vocational call to holiness. I thank you for your prayer, time and participation in this synodal process. May the Holy Spirit burn with greater fervor, strength and clarity as we say "yes", Christ.

Sincerely in Christ,

†Most Reverend Chad W. Zielinski
Catholic Bishop of Northern Alaska
Diocese of Fairbanks

CWZ/bc