

Dear Parishioners,

This Sunday, October 10, Pope Francis will officially open not a synod, but a synodal process, leading to a Synod on Synodality in 2023.

I realize this probably sounds like total gibberish if you are not familiar with the term “synod” – and even if you are, still you might wonder what this talk about this particular type of synod is all about.

From the similarly sounding Greek word *synodos*, the term “synod” simply means “assembly” or “meeting”. The analogous Latin term is *concilium* meaning “council”.

Traditionally in the Church, synods have been composed of various groupings of bishops all heading to Rome to see the Pope to advise him on matters of doctrine and practice. This synod, however, hopes to be different. Rather than various bishops assembling to give their opinion, Pope Francis has asked them to first engage in a synodal process, a process of listening. So, just as popes have listened to bishops in the past to solicit their advice, now bishops are asked to listen to and consult with the People of God in their dioceses.

Yet, there is an even more significant difference. The two-year process leading to the 2023 synod on synodality is not about merely “gathering opinions,” but rather “listening to the Holy Spirit.”

For this process of listening to work, we must do that through our own personal and communal prayer but also by our challenging engagement with one another in open, frank spiritual conversation.

The hope for this process is that “by walking together, and together reflecting on the journey made, the Church will be able to learn from what it will experience which processes can help it to live communion, to achieve participation, to open itself to mission.”

To that end, the Vatican has prepared an extensive website to help us along this journey <https://www.synod.va/en.html>

In the weeks and months ahead the Pastoral Council and Parish Staff will be exploring how we, as a parish faith community, might engage our own synodal process. We will be guided by the two questions suggested by the synod preparation documents: “How is this ‘journeying together’ happening today in your particular Church? What steps does the Spirit invite us to take in order to grow in our ‘journeying together’?”

We certainly invite your ideas and input. You may contact the Pastoral Council at pastoralcouncil@bc.edu or parish staff at ignatius@bc.edu.

Finally, being called to embrace this synodal path, we are invited to pray an adapted version of the *Adsumus Sancte Spiritus* (*We stand before You, Holy Spirit*). This prayer was used to begin every session of the Second Vatican Council and has been historically used at Councils, Synods and other Church gatherings for hundreds of years. So let us pray:

We stand before You, Holy Spirit, as we gather together in Your name.

With You alone to guide us, make Yourself at home in our hearts; Teach us the way we must go and how we are to pursue it.

We are weak and sinful; do not let us promote disorder.

Do not let ignorance lead us down the wrong path nor partiality influence our actions.

Let us find in You our unity so that we may journey together to eternal life and not stray from the way of truth and what is right.

All this we ask of You, who are at work in every place and time, in the communion of the Father and the Son, forever and ever.

Amen.

With hopes that we grow as a synodal parish,

Fr. Joe

Dear Parishioners,

As I mentioned in last weekend's bulletin, Pope Francis formally launched the preparatory phase for the next ordinary assembly of the Synod on Synodality with a Mass on October 10th in St. Peter's Basilica.

In meeting with our Parish Pastoral Council on the Wednesday before this official opening, we discussed the synododal process and how our parish might begin to engage in it.

The first concern raised was that this entire 2-year process, which involves broad based listening and sharing, disappointingly seems to simply end with yet another Synod of (only) Bishops. So, ultimately, what has really changed?

This question sparked a lively discussion around synodality.

One of the important points raised was that, although this synod, similar to other synods, will result in a meeting of bishops, not only bishops will be in attendance. At the Synod on Youth, for example, it was pointed out, youth were present and they so to speak "kept the bishops' feet to the fire" – the assembled youth helped focus attention on their issues rather than simply those the bishops wanted to raise and discuss. The hope is that the broad representation from around the world at this synod will serve the same purpose: to keep the assembled listening and sharing. Also, something special for the process leading up to this synod is the fact that there is now, in addition to the women appointed in 2019 as consultors to the Synod of Bishops, a newly appointed under-secretary, who, for the first time, is not a bishop or priest, but a woman religious – Sr. Nathalie Becquart. Our Pastoral Council chair, Theresa O'Keefe, summed up well this part of our discussion by noting that what Pope Francis is ultimately doing is "using a historical modality to move the Church to a new vision."

Other concerns raised centered around institutional change and how organizations sometimes lose sight of their mission. Many organizations, then, often simply strive to keep themselves alive. Change, it was also pointed out, needs to involve a sharing of power. Unfortunately, and not just in the Church, those in power are reluctant to share their power. For that reason, one council member added, organizations [qua organizations] probably don't change, people do and only then can there be change. It surely seems reasonable to hope that the process of listening to the Holy Spirit in and through our prayer and listening to one another will help foster some needed changes in our Church.

We also discussed how the theme of this synodal process – "for a synodal church: communion, participation and mission" – dovetails well with the theme of our Ignatian Year: "seeing all things new in Christ." Our engagement with the synodal process, we believe, might aid us as a parish to enter more fully into this Ignatian Year and to grow more fully in the years ahead in our understanding of the implications for us of the four Jesuit Universal Preferences: Showing the Way to God; Walking with the Excluded; Caring for our Common Home; Journeying with Youth.

As the only Jesuit parish in the Boston Archdiocese, we realize our responsibility to be a leader in this synodal process. Our Pastoral Council's Bylaws [<https://www.stignatiuschestnuthill.org/parish-pastoral-council>] actually set the stage for us to engage an essential feature of the synodal process: Communal Apostolic Discernment. Please take a moment to read about that process in our Bylaws. We will surely need to tap into that way of proceeding even more broadly moving forward into the synodal process.

In his homily last Sunday, Pope Francis said that three verbs characterize the Synod: *encounter*, *listen*, and *discern*. Please also take a moment to read a summary of his beautiful homily last weekend where he explores each of these verbs. I guarantee you will not be disappointed and find real fruit in what he says. [<https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2021-10/pope-celebrating-synod-means-walking-together-on-the-same-road.html>].

There is certainly so much more to learn about synodality and about how to implement it to become a Synodal Church. But as the term synod implies, it is a journey together and as such it may take time to unfold. Let us in the meantime, then, continue to accept Pope Francis's invitation to "have a good journey together" as "pilgrims in love with the Gospel and open to the surprises of the Spirit."

In a spirit of encountering, listening and discerning,
Fr. Joe