

What do I need to know to prepare for the Upcoming Synodal Assembly which will meet in Rome, October 4-29, 2023?

1. The Instrumentum Laboris (Working Document) was just released on June 20, and it is as user friendly as anyone could wish!
2. The Working Document is a tool for discernment for participants preparing for the Synodal Assembly. It can help all of us know just where the synod process is at this point, and what will be discussed his October.
3. The Working Document is framed around the three principles which have been at the heart of the Synodal Journey since it was first announced on March 7, 2020: A Communion that Radiates, Co-Responsibility in Mission and Participation, Governance and Authority.
4. The Working Document emphasizes key concepts that have guided the synodal process thus far, and which will be developed and deepened at both the 2023 and 2024 Assemblies, and during the year between them: Discernment, Journeying Together, Listening, and The Holy Spirit-the Protagonist of the Synod.
5. The Working Document consists of 24 pages of text and 15 worksheets which respond boldly to the fundamental guiding question introducing the Synod's Preparatory Document (July 9, 2021): "How does the 'journeying together' which takes place today on different levels (from the local level to the universal one) allow the Church to proclaim the Gospel in accordance with the mission entrusted to Her, and what steps does the Spirit invite us to take in order to grow as a Synodal Church"? (PD #2)
6. The Working Document does not develop a theoretical understanding of the term "Synodality" but rather brings out a dynamic vision, articulating the various ways that synodality is experienced and understood in different parts of the world, and which requires further study.
7. The richest part for me in the first section (pp. 1-21) is the section describing the characteristic signs of a synodal Church. Aspirational and inspirational, here is what listening sessions around the globe describe the synodal church as:

- a. A Church founded on the recognition of a common dignity deriving from Baptism (IL#20)
- b. A Church that listens (IL#22)
- c. A Church that is humble, knowing it must ask forgiveness and has much to learn (IL#23)
- d. A Church of Encounter and Dialogue (IL#24)
- e. A Church Promoting the passage from “I” to “we” (IL#25)
- f. A Church that is Open, Welcoming and Embraces all (IL#26)
- g. A Church which confronts honestly and fearlessly the call to a deeper understanding of the relationship between love and truth (IL#27)
- h. A Church able to manage tensions without being crushed by them (IL#28)
- i. A Church trying to walk together aware of the healthy restlessness of incompleteness (IL#29)
- j. A Church unceasingly nourishing itself at the source of the mystery it celebrates in the liturgy (IL#30)
- k. A Church of Discernment (IL#31)
- l.

8. The Working Document doesn't call for a change of doctrine, but a change of attitude. It doesn't offer answers but the worksheets offer a total of 233 questions instead!

9. Each of the 3 priority issues (Communion, Mission, and Participation) come with 5 main questions (and 75 sub-questions!) and these will be the questions/topics/issues which the 370 participants will discuss in small groups and then plenary sessions from October 4-29, 2023.

10. Joining the 300 Bishops this October as full, voting participants, there will be 70 lay people (half of them women) at this year's Synod!

11. They will not meet in the New Synod Hall (usual setting for synodal meetings) because it will not comfortably accommodate the 370 expected participants. Instead, round tables which will seat 12 have been installed in the Pope Paul VI Hall to create a much better opportunity for encounter and dialogue (IL #24), and for being a “listening Church” (IL #22).

12. There will be an emphasis “on the presence of young people”, so there is much to hope for and pray for in the upcoming Synodal Assembly.

13. The conversational setting ( #11 above) for the Synodal Assembly is very significant, but even more important is the “Conversation in the Spirit” Methodology which is described and illustrated in depth in the Working Document (IL #32-42). This process is powerfully illustrated in the Encounter of the Risen Lord with the Disciples on the Road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-35), The Joy of the Gospel #272 ,and Les Misérables (“To love another person is to see the face of God”. The “Conversation in the Spirit” methodology has worked powerfully in Australia and hopefully will be adopted by the whole Church, and not just during synods.
14. Topics that came up often in the text, and in the worksheets, include, but are not limited to, women (mentioned 45 times), the marginalized, immigration, the environment, ecumenism, interfaith collaboration, the abuse crisis, greater participation in decision-making by the “people of God”. Women deacons, priestly celibacy, and LGBTQ+ outreach are covered as well.
15. Conclusions will be reached only after the second session in October 2024, but the process will continue between the two Assemblies (Just as the Vatican Council continued its work between the yearly sessions in Rome- 1962-1965)
16. If you want to help the St. Paul Catholic Newman Center to become engaged with the ongoing synodal process, please contact me.  
(Jim Grant: [jimgrantbc@gmail.com](mailto:jimgrantbc@gmail.com)) We don't need to wait for the sessions in Rome in this October but can become informed and engaged with it over the summer.
17. If you find any resources that can help us engage with the synodal process in our personal lives and parish communities. Along with this introduction to the Working Document, I will be sending you resources I find useful myself to better appreciate how historic, monumental, and positive this synodal journey we are on really is.
18. For an excellent weekly podcast on all things Vatican, check out America Media's “Inside the Vatican”. This week's topic is “Unpacking the Synod's Working Document”, and as always, it is insightful, positive, and timely. It's also free!