

LET HER VOICE

CARRY



A Synod Toolkit  
For Ordination Justice Advocates

**WOMEN'S ORDINATION CONFERENCE**



# OVERVIEW

In mid-October 2021, the global Catholic Church began what is arguably its most important initiative since Vatican II — the **Synod on Synodality**. This two-year process will explore what it means to "journey together" as the People of God in a local and global Church. Pope Francis is inviting us to what he describes as an inclusive, participative process of engaging all voices in the Church, including those that have been marginalized.

We at the Women's Ordination Conference see this as a moment of **holy possibility**. This is an opportunity to use our unique position to raise our voices, amplify our ministries, and call for the changes we long to see in our Church. We believe in the ongoing movement of the Spirit.



# LET HER VOICE CARRY

## Throughout the entire process, we commit to:

- Amplifying the voices of the People of God who long for and support women's ordination and gender equity in all ministries of the Church.
- Providing tools, guides, and lay-led spaces to engage with the Synodal process in a way that feels authentic to you;
- Holding the bishops and Vatican accountable to inclusive vision of the working document of the Synod;
- Calling it like it is. We know and share the pain of hopes raised and dashed, and like you, share a well-earned distrust of Vatican processes.

We will, as we have named our efforts, "Let Her Voice Carry"—carry through parish halls and the halls of the Vatican; carry outside the walls of the institution as a voice for justice and change; carry the hopes of all who long for an equitable, reformed Church more aligned to the heart of the Gospel.

With your help, we will insist at every level that ordination justice is a vital part of the conversation and the future of the global Church. **Together, we will ensure that there will be no synod about us without us.**

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# WAYS TO PARTICIPATE

## Through Your Parish or Diocese

Currently, the diocesan phase in the U.S. is a patchwork of efforts. Some dioceses have outlined their plans on their websites or social media, but many—approximately half, as of late October 2021—do not have information readily available. Because of this, you may need to be a voice speaking up to say that the regular faithful of your diocese want to participate meaningfully in the synodal process.

If you have a parish you regularly attend, contact your pastor or parish council and find out what kind of listening sessions they will be offering. Contact your diocese if nothing is happening at your local parish. Diocesan websites and social media can be useful sources of information, but you may also need to pick up the phone and call your diocesan office. Once you have found a listening session to attend, consider looking at our [Talking Points](#) for ways to speak about ordination justice in the Church.

## Use Our Independent Feedback Form

We know that the consultation process outlined by the synod documents leaves open the strong possibility that feminist voices, or voices that challenge current Church teaching, will be left out of the documents that are produced by each diocese. Ultimately, bishops have the final say on what moves forward to the next stages of the synodal process. Therefore, we are creating an independent mechanism for you to share your honest input, with the promise that we will share, without censorship, the views that are expressed. (We will not attach anyone's name to a particular sentiment.)

Whether you attend a local listening session or not, we encourage you to use the form to share your thoughts. We believe it is vital to have an independent record of what Catholics are thinking, without interference from the bishops.

Access the form here: [Independent Feedback Form](#)



# WAYS TO PARTICIPATE

## With the Women's Ordination Conference

Join those who are working to "Let Her Voice Carry" for regular Zoom meetings to debrief on local activities, share resources and insights, and organize as a larger movement as we embark on this journey together. Mark your calendars and register for the conversations by clicking the links below:

[December 1 @ 7pm EST](#)

[February 1 @ 7pm EST](#)

[March 1 @ 7pm EST](#)

[April 4 @ 7pm EDT](#)

## "Let Her Voice Carry" Facebook Group

This group is meant to support those who long for their voices to carry throughout the Synodal Process, to share resources to amplify the calls for inclusion in the Church, and support one another as we engage with this process (or not!). Use the group to report on what's happening in your diocese and connect with other supporters in your area. We are stronger together!

Access the group here: [Let Her Voice Carry: For a Synodal Church](#)



# TALKING POINTS FOR LISTENING SESSIONS

We believe that for the synod to succeed, it must center the voices of women and those who feel marginalized in the Church, and recognize the ways that it has historically failed to do so. Your experiences and insights are an essential part of this discernment process, and you should feel empowered to share what is on your heart and mind. To prepare yourself to participate, or to submit an independent statement to your diocese, you may want to recall:

- Experiences in your local church where you felt supported, seen, and valued;
- Experiences that brought pain or exclusion, and what it means to bear those wounds;
- Ways you feel the Spirit calling you and calling the church;
- Your worries or concerns about the path ahead of the church, if it continues as it has.

We've prepared some talking points to help articulate the importance of ordination justice in the synod and the future of the church. **Feel free to rephrase these into your own authentic witness for greater inclusion and equality for women and all genders.**

- Jesus included and entrusted women as partners in ministry. The claims of women today who seek justice and equality in ministry are legitimate, and must be attended to in a spirit of courage.

*(continued on next page)*

- The majority of Catholics worldwide would like to see women have equal standing in ordained ministry, according to a 2014 Univision poll: Argentina, 60%; Brazil, 54%; France, 83%; Italy, 59%; Spain, 78%. In the United States, 88% of Catholics would be "comfortable" with the ordination of women as priests (2015 Shriver report).
- The Church has changed before, and it can change again. The Church's stance on many issues — including slavery, religious freedom, the salvation of non-Christians, and whether women are "misbegotten men" and "the gateway to the Devil: — has changed. Doctrine and practices must develop to meet the needs of the Church today.
- It is wrong for the hierarchy to attempt to put limits on God's will and claim that women and those of marginalized genders cannot discern a call to priesthood. The institutional church's repeated attempts to limit God's priestly call to celibate men causes great pain to the women who have discerned their vocation to the priesthood, as well as to the people of God who are deprived of women's gifts and sacramental leadership.
- So many Catholic women are educated, trained, and long to share their gifts with the church, but feel that our gifts are not encouraged or respected in the same way as men's. Women who pursue a career in ministry make many sacrifices to do so, because the path is simply not sustainable financially or spiritually.
- I wish you could hear my call to priesthood like I can. It comes from God, and it is seen, welcomed and confirmed by so many parishioners in this parish. My vocation is valid and is rooted in my love of the Gospel. There is no vocational crisis, but an unwillingness to recognize women as the priests they are and can be.

- For centuries, women have served in the tradition of Phoebe (Rm 16:1) and our parish and community is blessed by their gifts. Women are called to be deacons — by God and their communities — and model diaconal service for the Church.
- I long for a church community that upholds the equality of all of its members, without qualification.
- The exclusion of women from ordination and decision-making deprives our Church of women's gifts and preserves a patriarchal culture that subordinates and oppresses those outside of the clerical caste.

# TWEETS AND QUICK MESSAGING

We encourage you to use the following hashtags on Twitter when you tweet about the synod:

**#Synod2023 #Synodality #ListeningChurch #OrdainWomen**



**Here are some tweets you can copy and paste or adapt for your own use:**

As the Synod on Synodality opens, we will make our voices heard from the parish hall to the synod hall: The People of God long for all genders to be included in all ordained ministries in the Church. #OrdainWomen  
#Synod2023 #Synodality @synod\_va

As #Synod2023 opens, let her voice carry: carry through parish halls and the halls of the Vatican; carry outside the walls of the institution as a voice for justice and change; carry the hopes of all who long for an equitable Church more aligned to the heart of the Gospel. #OrdainWomen

As the Synod on Synodality begins at the parish level, we will insist that ordination justice is a vital part of the conversation and the future of the global Church. #OrdainWomen #Synod2023 #Synodality @synod\_va

Women are more than half the church – there will be no synod about us without us. #OrdainWomen #Synod2023 #Synodality @synod\_va

The dialogue called for by the synodal process must include open conversation about women's ordination. #OrdainWomen #Synod2023  
#Synodality @synod\_va

# BACKGROUND: WHAT IS A SYNOD?

A synod is, in its simplest sense, a meeting: It comes from the Greek words "syn" (together) and "hodos" (way or journey). For Catholics, it typically means a gathering of the bishops worldwide to discuss and vote upon proposals regarding church teaching and governance. Those proposals are then sent to the Pope, who writes a document with teaching authority that should synthesize their ideas.

It is helpful here to distinguish between the idea of a synod in a general sense and the specific office of the Synod of Bishops, which was created by Pope Paul VI at the final session of Vatican II in 1965. The Synod of Bishops acts in an advisory role to the Pope, consulting on questions of governance and teaching while still preserving the authority of the Pontiff.

Pope Francis has brought renewed energy and attention to the synod of bishops as a model of discernment and dialogue, rather than a group of "yes-men" confirming a preordained outcome. The process is messy, and still excludes women and others, but the Pope has made progress toward greater inclusion and involvement, perhaps preparing us for this unique synod.

In his papacy Pope Francis has called synods on the family, on youth and vocation, and on the pan-Amazonian region. While the synods include non-ordained people in advisory or consulting roles, at this point only men (mostly bishops, but also a few non-ordained religious brothers in 2015 and 2018) have been allowed to vote on the final documents created during a synod.

After significant advocacy and grassroots campaigning by the Women's Ordination Conference and others, the question of women voting at synods became more mainstream, and the synod fathers began to support the calls for women religious to vote during synods.

In 2021 Pope Francis named Xaviere Missionary Sr. Nathalie Becquart an undersecretary of the Office of the Synod, a role that typically comes with voting rights at the synod. A scholar in synodality, she is one of the main orchestrators of the synod. It is as yet unclear whether she will have a vote at the 2023 gathering of the Synod on Synodality.

We know that the phrase "Synod on Synodality" is not an exciting one. But the concept underneath it is: The Church purports to take into account the voices of faithful Catholics around the world in a comprehensive way as it discerns what it means to be the Catholic Church in the third millennium. As the preparatory document of the synod puts it:

"While the Synod of Bishops has taken place up until now as a gathering of bishops with and under the authority of the Pope, the Church increasingly realizes that synodality is the path for the entire People of God."

# VATICAN TIMELINE FOR DISCERNMENT AND LISTENING

- Listening and consultations within local dioceses from October 2021 – August 2022.
- Listening and consultation held at the continental level from September 2022 – March 2023.
- The discerning, synod phase with the gathering of bishops, appointed religious, and auditors in Rome in October 2023.



# ENGAGING WITH THE SYNOD DOCUMENTS

The main question being asked of the People of God (that is, you!) is this:

*A synodal Church, in announcing the Gospel, “journeys together:” 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”?*

The Vatican has released two documents as the diocesan phase of the synod begins: a "preparatory document," and a "Vademecum" (Latin for "go with me"), or diocesan handbook.

The preparatory document lays out a beautiful, hopeful vision of a people walking together on the journey of being the global Catholic church in the twenty-first century. It envisions a process of prayerful discernment and honest dialogue, "remaining open to the surprises that the Spirit will certainly prepare for us along the way."

The document describes two themes from Scripture that guide the vision of the synodal process: One is the relationship of evangelization that repeatedly takes place in the Gospels, with three main "characters" — Jesus, the crowd



(symbolizing the wide reach of the Gospel message), and the apostles, who are called to "an inclusive ministry of blessing and fellowship." The second is what they describe as the mutual conversion of Cornelius and Peter in the Acts of the Apostles — a story not just of Cornelius' conversion to following Jesus; but Peter's conversion to a wider understanding of who is included in the community of faith.

The "fundamental question" and process posed by the preparatory document is important enough to be quoted in full:

*The fundamental question that guides this consultation of the People of God, as mentioned at the beginning, is the following:*

*A synodal Church, in announcing the Gospel, "journeys together:" 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"?*

*In order to respond, you are invited to:*

*a) ask yourselves what experiences in your particular Church the fundamental question calls to mind;*

*b) reread these experiences in greater depth: What joys did they provoke? What difficulties and obstacles have they encountered? What wounds have they brought to light? What insights have they elicited?*

*c) gather the fruits to share: Where, in these experiences, does the voice of the Spirit resound? What is he [sic] asking of us? What are the points to be confirmed, the prospects for change, the steps to be taken? Where do we register a consensus? What paths are opening up for our particular Church?*

The document also makes particular mention of listening to women:

*How are the Laity, especially young people and women, listened to? How do we integrate the contribution of Consecrated Men and Women? What space is there for the voice of minorities, the discarded, and the excluded? Do we identify prejudices and stereotypes that hinder our listening? How do we listen to the social and cultural context in which we live? (30, II)*

Along with the preparatory document, the Synod Office also released a handbook called a "Vademecum" to guide parishes and dioceses through the first phase of the synodal process. It includes details on selecting coordinators to lead the process at the diocesan level, how to engage participants in a variety of ways, and the guidelines for creating a diocesan report to be submitted to the continental gathering of bishops. In addition, it states clearly:

"Genuine efforts must be made to ensure the inclusion of those at the margins or who feel excluded."

And:

"We must make a special effort to listen to those we may be tempted to see as unimportant and those who force us to consider new points of view that may change our way of thinking."

We know that the real test will be how closely the beautiful and inclusive principles outlined in these two documents are lived out on the ground in actual dioceses and parishes. In addition, the process still suffers from the clericalism so ingrained in the Church: It is organized so that all of the input gathered from the diocese will be processed and synthesized by a coordinator appointed by the bishop, and then approved by the bishop himself before moving further in the synodal process. Because of that, we are creating alternative methods for you to have your say if you find yourself being excluded or silenced by the process your diocese is using. Find out more in our ["Ways to Participate"](#) section of this toolkit.



# NOTABLE QUOTES FROM THE SYNOD DOCUMENTS

*Even the most beautiful language is hollow if it is not backed up by concrete action. We must hold our leaders and institutions accountable for the words put forth in these initial synod documents, which is why we offer some of the important quotes here.*

## Preparatory Document

"The whole Church is called to deal with the weight of a culture imbued with clericalism that she inherits from her history, and with those forms of exercising authority on which the different types of abuse (power, economic, conscience, sexual) are grafted. It is impossible to think of 'a conversion of our activity as a Church that does not include the active participation of all the members of God's People.'" (6)

"The Spirit, according to the Lord's promise, does not limit [herself] to confirming the continuity of the Gospel of Jesus, but will illuminate the ever-new depths of his Revelation and inspire the decisions necessary to sustain the Church's journey." (16)

"Listening is the first step, but it requires having an open mind and heart, without prejudices. To whom does our particular Church 'need to listen to'? How are the Laity, especially young people and women, listened to? How do we integrate the contribution of Consecrated Men and Women? What space is there for the voice of minorities, the discarded, and the excluded? Do we identify prejudices and stereotypes that hinder our listening? How do we listen to the social and cultural context in which we live?" (30, II)



## Vademecum

"The purpose of this Synod is not to produce more documents. Rather, it is intended to inspire people to dream about the Church we are called to be, to make people's hopes flourish, to stimulate trust, to bind up wounds, to weave new and deeper relationships, to learn from one another, to build bridges, to enlighten minds, warm hearts, and restore strength to our hands for our common mission." (1.3)

"If listening is the method of the Synodal Process, and discerning is the aim, then participation is the path. Fostering participation leads us out of ourselves to involve others who hold different views than we do. Listening to those who have the same views as we do bears no fruit. Dialogue involves coming together across diverse opinions. Indeed, God often speaks through the voices of those that we can easily exclude, cast aside, or discount. We must make a special effort to listen to those we may be tempted to see as unimportant and those who force us to consider new points of view that may change our way of thinking." (2.2)

"We are called to abandon attitudes of complacency and comfort that lead us to make decisions purely on the basis of how things have been done in the past." (2.3)

"The heart of the synodal experience is listening to God through listening to one another, inspired by the Word of God. We listen to each other in order to better hear the voice of Holy Spirit speaking in our world today." (4.1)

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"Let Her Voice Carry" is an effort of the Women's Ordination Conference, the oldest and largest organization advocating for the ordination of women as deacons, priests, and bishops into an inclusive and accountable Roman Catholic Church.

A feminist voice for women in the Roman Catholic Church, WOC is a grassroots-driven movement that promotes activism, dialogue, and prayerful witness to call for women's full equality in the Church.

To learn more, or to join our movement, visit [womensordination.org](http://womensordination.org).

