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Pope Francis leads a meeting with representatives of bishops' conferences from around the w

Pope Francis leads a meeting with representatives of bishops' conferences from around the world at the Vatican Oct. 9, 2021. (CNS photo/Paul Haring)



by Catholic News Service

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To ensure all Catholics have an opportunity to share and to listen as part of the initial process leading up to the Synod of Bishops in 2023, the Vatican has extended the local phase by more than three months.

Pope Francis officially opened the process Oct. 10 and bishops were to do the same in their dioceses a week later, opening a six-month period of prayer and discussion with the aim of involving any Catholic who wanted to participate as well as reaching out to people who no longer practice their faith and to the Catholic Church's ecumenical partners.

"During this period, we have heard, over and over again and from many quarters, the request to extend the duration of the first phase of the synodal process in order to provide a greater opportunity for the people of God to have an authentic experience of listening and dialogue," the synod office said in a note Oct. 29.

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"Aware that a synodal church is a church that listens, considering that this first phase is essential for this synodal path and evaluating these requests, and always seeking the good of the church, the Ordinary Council of the Synod of Bishops has decided to extend until Aug. 15, 2022, the deadline for the presentation of the summaries of the consultations" by bishops' conferences and the Eastern Catholic churches, it said.

In the initial process, members of parishes, dioceses, religious orders and Catholic movements are asked to consider the ways in which they currently experience the church as "synodal," that is, as a community that walks together and to suggest ways to strengthen that in practice.

The dioceses and local groups originally were asked to send a synthesis of what they heard to their bishops' conferences so that a national summary could be prepared by April 2022. The synod office in Rome was hoping to prepare an initial working document for the synod by September 2022.

This story appears in the **Synod on Synodality** feature series. View the full series.