News

Philadelphia Archbishop Nelson Pérez joins college students, other young adults and ministry

Philadelphia Archbishop Nelson Pérez joins college students, other young adults and ministry leaders during a synodal listening session at La Salle University April 4, 2022. (OSV News photo/CNS file, Sarah Webb, CatholicPhilly.com)

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The latest phase of the 2021-24 Synod on Synodality is coming to a close, with a final document to be written over the next six weeks and submitted to the Vatican by March 31.

On Feb. 17, the North American Synod Team, led by bishops from Canada and the United States, wrapped up a weeklong retreat in Orlando, Florida, to synthesize the results of synod listening sessions throughout the two countries. (According to the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, the Catholic Church in Mexico is participating in the synod with the Latin American bishops' council, or CELAM, given its long partnership with that council.)

The team -- eight bishops, three laywomen, two priests, two laymen and two women religious -- spent time in prayer, discernment and discussion to distill responses for

inclusion in the text, which forms a response to the Document for the Continental Stage issued by the Vatican's general secretariat of the synod in October 2022.

The final document for the continental stage from North America, along with the contributions of the six other continental assemblies, will form the basis of the "instrumentum laboris," or working document, to be released by the general secretariat in June 2023.

The synod itself -- the theme of which is "Communion, Mission, Participation" -- has been "a tremendous grace," Bishop Daniel Flores of Brownsville, Texas, chairman of the U.S. bishops' Committee on Doctrine, said in a Feb. 21 statement issued by the USCCB.

In particular, "a deep love for Jesus Christ and the church animated the continental assemblies, and the participants expressed a great desire to pray and work for a more synodal style in the church going forward," said Bishop Flores, who has been overseeing the synodal process in the U.S. "The synodal way has focused more attention on the baptismal dignity and mission of Christ's members, and has brought great hope that we can, by the grace of the Holy Spirit, strengthen our communion with one another and with the Lord."

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Bishop Raymond Poisson of Saint-Jérôme and of Mont-Laurier, Quebec, president of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops (CCCB), said he was grateful for a renewed sense of mission and kinship among the church in North America.

"Deepening relationships between the church in Canada and the U.S. is invaluable for the ongoing synodal path," he said. "Bringing our two countries together in a meaningful way will serve to form the foundation for greater unity among the people of God in North America."

Launched by Pope Francis in October 2021, the multi-year synod seeks to cultivate an ongoing dynamic of discernment, listening, humility and engagement within the church.

The word "synod" itself derives from the Greek for "with" and "path," signifying a way in which "the people of God walk together," according to a 2018 document by

the International Theological Commission.

Initially scheduled to culminate at the 15th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops at the Vatican in October 2023, the synod was extended by Pope Francis to include a second session in October 2024, allowing for what he called "a more relaxed period of discernment."

Throughout its three stages -- diocesan, continental and universal -- the synod has solicited the insights of all the baptized, as well as those who have left the faith and those of other faith traditions.

Marginalized communities have been especially encouraged to participate in the listening sessions, which have taken place in Catholic churches, schools and pastoral spaces throughout the world.

The continental phase gathered the USCCB and the CCCB and more than 900 bishop-selected delegates in 12 virtual sessions -- variously conducted in English, Spanish and French -- at which listening session reports from 236 U.S. and Canadian dioceses were presented and discussed.