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An older white man in a suit speaks into a microphone while seated at a table where an older

Paolo Ruffini, prefect of the Dicastery for Communication, speaks during a news conference at the Vatican Sept. 8, 2023. To the left is Xavière Missionary Sr. Nathalie Becquart, undersecretary of the synod. (CNS photo/Justin McLellan)

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Any limitations and rules regarding media access and communications during the upcoming Synod of Bishops are rooted in the "essence" of a synod and meant to help participants in their process of discernment, said the head of the synod's communication committee.

"The way in which we are going to share information about the synod is very important for the discernment process and for the entire church," Paolo Ruffini, prefect of the Vatican Dicastery for Communication, told reporters at a Vatican news conference Sept. 8.

Some of the "few rules regarding communication" stem from "the essence of the synod," he said, which Pope Francis has repeatedly underlined is not a "parliament"

or convention but a journey of listening and walking together in accordance with the Holy Spirit.

"Maintaining the confidentiality, the privacy, and, I would say, the sacredness of certain places for conversation in the Spirit, is part and parcel of the desire to make these moments a true opportunity for listening, discernment and prayer rooted in communion," he said.

The news conference with updates about the synod -- how it will work and what reporters can expect -- came just a few days after Francis had told journalists aboard his flight from Mongolia that the discussions at the assembly of the Synod of Bishops Oct. 4-29 will not be open to the public or to reporters to "safeguard the synodal climate."

However, Ruffini said, some portions of the synod will be livestreamed and open to Vatican accredited reporters:

-- Mass in St. Peter's Square Oct. 4 to open the assembly of the Synod of Bishops.

-- The first general congregation, which begins that afternoon with remarks by Cardinal Mario Grech, secretary-general of the synod, Cardinal Jean-Claude Hollerich, relator general of the synod, and Francis.

-- The moment of prayer beginning each general congregation to facilitate "communion from around the world of all God's people."

-- The opening sessions of each of the five segments or "modules" into which the synod will be divided.

The segments will be dedicated to synodality, communion, mission and participation and each will include plenary assembly sessions called general congregations as well as working groups.

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A concluding segment will focus on approving a synthesis report that will be discussed in a general congregation, followed by working groups adding their observations and then a summary text will be drafted to "record the points and proposals on which there is substantial agreement, but also those of disagreement,

indicating the different positions and their reasons," Ruffini said.

"Members of the group will be asked to agree on whether the report adequately represents the work done together and not on whether they all agree on every single point," he said. It will then be submitted to the plenary assembly for approval and then handed over to the general secretariat.

A final document from the synod will not be formulated and presented to the pope until after the second session of the synodal assembly in October 2024.

Working groups will be made up of 10-12 people who will change over the course of the session to encourage greater interaction with more people, Ruffini said.

The groups will also be divided by language, and one reporter noted German was missing as a working group language, while Italian, English, French, Spanish and Portuguese remained.

Ruffini said that was so that German-speakers would not be just "talking amongst themselves" and to get them actively contributing in the other groups "since we know they can speak other languages."

Each working group will also have an expert for facilitating conversation "in the Spirit, who will accompany the exchange from a methodological point of view," he said.

The detailed calendar and rules for the synod were still being finalized, Ruffini said.

Xavière Missionary Sister Nathalie Becquart, undersecretary of the synod, told reporters about the ecumenical prayer vigil for the synod to be held Sept. 30 in St. Peter's Square.

Francis has emphasized there can be no synodality without ecumenism and no ecumenism without synodality, she said. Young people, members and leaders of different Christian communities and churches will be present, she said. The leaders include Orthodox Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople, Anglican Archbishop Justin Welby of Canterbury and William Wilson, chair of the Pentecostal World Fellowship and president of Oral Roberts University in Tulsa, Oklahoma.

St. Peter's Square will also be decorated with shrubs, trees and flowers to feel like a large garden and symbolize creation and with the San Damiano crucifix of Assisi. It was in front of this crucifix that St. Francis felt called by God to "go and repair my

house."