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Pope Francis sits at his desk opposite four light-skinned men wearing black clerical garb

Pope Francis meets with officials of the upcoming assembly of the Synod of Bishops in the library of the Vatican's Apostolic Palace Sept. 18, 2023. From the left are: Fr. Riccardo Battocchio, one of the synod's special secretaries; Cardinal Jean-Claude Hollerich, relator general; Cardinal Mario Grech, secretary-general of the synod secretariat; and Jesuit Fr. Giacomo Costa, the other special secretary of the synod assembly scheduled for Oct. 4-19. (CNS photo/Vatican Media)

Cindy Wooden

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On the recommendation of the Catholic bishops of mainland China in consultation with the Chinese government, Pope Francis has named two bishops from the country's mainland as members of the assembly of the Synod of Bishops.

Bishop Joseph Yang Yongqiang of Zhoucun, who has served as vice president of the government-related Council of Chinese Bishops, and Bishop Anthony Yao Shun of Jining, the first bishop ordained after the Vatican and China signed a provisional agreement on the nomination of bishops in 2018, will be among the 365 synod

members, a number which includes the pope, the Vatican said.

The Vatican released an updated list Sept. 21 of people expected to participate in the assembly of the Synod of Bishops Oct. 4-19.

A list released in July included Cardinal-designate Stephen Chow Sau-Yan of Hong Kong, but no bishop from the Chinese mainland.

Bishop Luis Marín de San Martín, undersecretary of the synod, told reporters that 464 people are expected to be involved in the synod, including 54 women participating as full members and 27 women joining as experts, facilitators or special guests.

The updated membership list, he said, also includes Francis' appointment of Archbishop Vincenzo Paglia, president of the Pontifical Academy for Life, as a synod member, the substitution of members who were elected but then retired or, in one case, died, and the addition of several bishops elected by their national bishops' conferences but whose names either did not arrive in time to be included in the July list or were accidentally omitted.

The list also included the names of the 12 "fraternal delegates" from other Christian churches and communities, who will follow the synod's work. They represent a variety of Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox churches as well as the Anglican Communion, World Methodist Council, the World Communion of Reformed Churches, the World Baptist Alliance, the World Pentecostal Fellowship and the Disciples of Christ.

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Asked if synod members will be told their discussions are covered by "pontifical secret," Paolo Ruffini, prefect of the Dicastery for Communication and chair of the synod communication committee, said the specific regulations for synod members had not been finalized.

However, he said, "from a general point of view, what the pope told you (reporters) and has told us does not fit the definition of 'secret,' but rather the definition of confidentiality or discretion" because the synod is not about the opinions of individual members but of the discernment that the "college" of members are

attempting.

On his flight back to Rome from Mongolia in early September, Francis told reporters, "One thing that must be safeguarded is the synodal atmosphere. It is not a TV show where people discuss anything and everything. No! It is a religious moment, a moment of religious exchange."

Along with the updated list of participants, the Vatican released a daily schedule for the synod sessions Monday through Saturday, which demonstrates most of the work is expected to take place in small groups. The "general congregations" of the assembly will be occasions for introducing the themes to be focused on, reports from the small groups and some regular "free discussion."

Jesuit Fr. Giacomo Costa, special secretary of the assembly, said there will be 35 working groups of about a dozen people each, formed based on the languages participants indicated they preferred. Fourteen groups will work in English, eight in Italian, seven in Spanish, five in French and one in Portuguese.

Synod members will go to a retreat center outside of Rome from the evening of Sept. 30 to the afternoon of Oct. 3 for a retreat before the synod's opening Mass and first session Oct. 4. In addition, they will celebrate Mass at the Altar of the Chair in St. Peter's Basilica Oct. 9, Oct. 13, Oct. 18 and Oct. 23 before beginning to address a new section of the synod's working document.

A "pilgrimage" is scheduled for the afternoon and evening of Oct. 12, but organizers said they are still working on details so they would not say where the pilgrimage was headed.

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