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Pope Francis and other Christian leaders give their blessing at the end of an ecumenical prayer vigil in St. Peter's Square Sept. 30, ahead of the Synod of Bishops assembly: from left, are the Rev. Ann Burghardt, general secretary of the Lutheran World Federation; Anglican Archbishop Justin Welby of Canterbury; Francis; Orthodox Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople and Syriac Orthodox Patriarch Ignatius Aphrem II. (CNS/Lola Gomez)

by NCR Staff

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"The Vatican Briefing" is a new podcast from the National Catholic Reporter, featuring two respected Vatican journalists and experts: Joshua J. McElwee and Christopher White. As Pope Francis is opening the hotly anticipated 2023 Synod of Bishops, they offer analysis and news updates, and interview some of the assembly's key decision-makers.

In their first episode, McElwee and White discuss the pope's creation of 21 new cardinals of the Catholic Church, the Sept. 30 ecumenical prayer vigil for the synod in St. Peter's Square, and some of the hot-button issues, such as women's ordination and LGBTQ ministry, that the synod is expected to discuss.



Catherine Clifford, church historian and theologian (Courtesy of Catherine Clifford)

They also interview Catherine Clifford, a renowned church historian and theologian, who is part of the first group of laypeople ever appointed as full members of the synod. Clifford called the synod a "huge" and "remarkable" experiment.

Each week during the synod, The Vatican Briefing will release an episode featuring both the latest updates from the gathering and an exclusive interview with one of the assembly's members. Be sure to subscribe on Apple Podcasts, Spotify, or

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Pope Francis waves to the crowd at the end of a consistory for the creation of 21 new cardinals in St. Peter's Square at the Vatican Sept. 30. (CNS/Lola Gomez)

*Relevant links for this week's episode:*

- An earlier interview of Catherine Clifford by Brian Fraga: Lay synod member Catherine Clifford praises Pope Francis' method of dialogue, participation;
- Christopher White's profile of the secretary-general of the Synod of Bishops: Cardinal Mario Grech: Central figure in pope's plan to change Catholic Church;
- Christopher White's interview with new Cardinal Christophe Pierre: New Cardinal Pierre's suggestion for US bishops: 'Always listen' to the pope;
- Christopher White's coverage of the Sept. 30 consistory: Pope encourages new cardinals to resemble a symphony: Diverse, but harmonious;
- Catholic News Service coverage of Pope Francis' ecumenical prayer vigil ahead of the opening of the synod: Before synod retreat, pope prays for listening instead of polarization.

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This story appears in the **Synod on Synodality** and **The Vatican Briefing** feature series.