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Pope Francis meets with members of the preparatory commission for the general assembly of the Synod of Bishops, March 16 at the Vatican. Pictured third from the right of Pope Francis is Mercedarian Sr. Shizue "Filo" Hirota from Tokyo. Sr. Filo Hirota speaks to NCR in Episode 2 of "The Vatican Briefing" podcast. (CNS/Vatican Media)

by NCR Staff

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October 10, 2023

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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 presiding over the hotly anticipated 2023 Synod of Bishops, McElwee and White offer analysis and news updates, and interview some of the assembly's key decision-makers.

In their second episode, McElwee and White discuss Dominican Fr. Timothy Radcliffe's widely praised reflections for the retreat before the opening of the synod, Pope Francis' public suggestion that the Catholic Church may one day bless same-sex unions, and the difficult-to-navigate rules for press outlets covering the assembly.



Mercedarian Sr. Filo Hirota (NCR photo/Joshua J. McElwee)

They also interview Mercedarian Sr. Filo Hirota, one of seven members of the high-level commission that organized the ongoing synod. Hirota says the assembly, which Pope Francis has asked to confront big topics such as women's ordination, is helping the church towards "becoming normal" and "really touching the depths of our humanity."

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 however you listen to podcasts.

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Relevant links for this week's episode:

- An earlier interview of Sr. Filo Hirota by Christopher White: Synodality is 'radically inclusive,' says Vatican committee member Sr. Filo Hirota;
- Christopher White's coverage of Pope Francis' new apostolic exhortation *Laudate Deum*: Pope Francis takes on climate deniers, 'irresponsible' Americans in new climate letter;
- Joshua McElwee and Christopher White's coverage of Pope Francis' opening message to the October 2023 synod: Opening momentous Vatican summit, Pope Francis begs church to 'not impose burdens';
- Joshua McElwee and Christopher White's coverage of Pope Francis' letter suggesting the Catholic Church might bless same-sex unions: Pope signals openness to blessings for gay couples, study of women's ordination;
- Joshua McElwee and Christopher White's coverage of Dominican Fr. Timothy Radcliffe's retreat reflections for the October 2023 synod: 'Orthodoxy is spacious': At retreat, synod members hear about women's hopes, LGBTQ issues .

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