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Pope Francis leads a meeting with the presidents and coordinators of the regional assemblies of the Synod of Bishops at the Vatican Nov. 28, 2022. Archbishop Timothy P. Broglio, president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, attended the meeting. The Holy See requested further consultation of the faithful ahead of October's second, and final, meeting of the Synod on Synodality. (CNS/Vatican Media)

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The General Secretariat for the Synod of Bishops released the names of members of two sets of study groups that have been conducting an in-depth look into several themes that emerged during the first assembly of the synod on synodality in 2023.

The groups are made up of top officials of the Roman Curia, bishops, men and women religious and lay experts from different parts of the world.

The Vatican made the list of names public July 9 along with the working document for the second session of the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, which will be held in Rome Oct. 2-27.

Seven members of the groups are from the United States, including Cardinal Joseph W. Tobin of Newark, New Jersey, Archbishop Borys A. Gudziak of the Ukrainian Catholic Archeparchy of Philadelphia, and Kim Daniels, director of Georgetown's Initiative on Catholic Social Thought and Public Life.

In response to a formal call by members of the first synod assembly in Oct. 2023, Pope Francis agreed to establish "study groups that will initiate, with a synodal method, the in-depth study of some of the themes that emerged" from the assembly's synthesis report.

He said in February that the study groups were to be established "by mutual agreement between the competent dicasteries of the Roman Curia and the General Secretariat of the Synod, which is entrusted with coordination." The topics of the groups, but not the members, were published in March.

Studying the topics, particularly their theological implications, was seen by synod members as an important part of responding to questions and concerns raised by Catholics in listening sessions prior to the assembly.

While each study group was already dedicated to a specific theme, the working document released July 9 gave more detailed examples of the kind of questions and proposals each of the study groups has been exploring.

Tobin is coordinator of the group dedicated to "The revision, in a synodal missionary perspective, of the documents touching on the relationship between Bishops, consecrated life, and ecclesial associations."

That group includes U.S. Cardinal Robert F. Prevost, prefect of the Dicastery for Bishops, and Cardinal Kevin J. Farrell, prefect of the Dicastery for Laity, the Family and Life. Farrell, a naturalized U.S. citizen born in Ireland, served as auxiliary bishop of the Archdiocese of Washington from 2002 to 2007 and bishop of Dallas from 2007 to 2016.

Prevost is also part of a 12-member group dedicated to "Some aspects of the person and ministry of the Bishop from a missionary synodal perspective." That group, which is looking at criteria for selecting candidates to the episcopacy and the nature of ad limina visits, also includes a six-person subgroup charged with studying the judicial function of the bishop in his particular church.

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Gudziak is part of the 13-member group dedicated to "Some aspects of the relationship between the Eastern Catholic churches and the Latin Church."

Daniels is the coordinator of the eight-member group dedicated to "The mission in the digital environment. That group includes:

— Archbishop Rino Fisichella, pro-prefect of the Dicastery for Evangelization's section for new evangelization

— Paolo Ruffini, prefect of Vatican's Dicastery for Communication; Msgr. Lucio Adrián Ruiz, dicastery secretary

— Bishop Paul Tighe, secretary of the Dicastery for Culture and Education

— Jesuit Father Antonio Spadaro, dicastery undersecretary

— Xavière Missionary Sister Nathalie Becquart, undersecretary of the Synod of Bishops.

The eight-member group dedicated to "Listening to the cry of the poor" includes U.S. Sister Maria Cimperman, a member of the Society of the Sacred Heart and professor of Catholic theological ethics at Chicago's Catholic Theological Union, and Léocadie Lushombo, a consecrated woman with the Teresian Association and assistant professor of theological ethics at the Jesuit School of Theology in Berkeley, California.

Other groups are dedicated to: "The revision of the 'Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis' in a missionary synodal perspective" — a document that establishes general norms for the formation and function of priests; "The role of Papal Representatives in a missionary synodal perspective"; "Theological criteria and synodal methodologies for shared discernment of controversial doctrinal, pastoral, and ethical issues"; and "The reception of the fruits of the ecumenical journey in ecclesial practices."

The group studying "Some theological and canonical matters regarding specific ministerial forms," which includes the question of "the necessary participation of women in the life and leadership of the Church," has no outside experts listed. The topic was entrusted to the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith to be studied in dialogue with the general secretariat of the synod.

The general secretariat created an additional set of study groups made up of noted theologians in response to requests by synod participants to conduct an in-depth theological exploration of "five perspectives" related to the missionary synodal church ahead of the synod's second session.

Sister Cimperman, whose work focuses on offering theological grounding for concretely engaging with various social challenges, is part of the group dedicated to "The synodal missionary face of the local Church."

Daniels, who is also an adjunct professor in Georgetown’s department of theology and religious studies, is part of the group dedicated to "The 'place' of the synodal Church on mission."

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