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Pope, seated and pictured from behind, surrounded by Cardinals at large U-shaped table, cov

Pope Francis leads the 18th meeting of his Council of Cardinals at the Vatican Feb. 13, 2017. (CNS/L'Osservatore Romano, handout)



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During two days of meetings, Pope Francis and his closest cardinal advisers discussed the relationship between local churches and other institutional church assemblies, a main topic of discussion to come out of the Synod of Bishops on synodality.

The pope and his international Council of Cardinals met Dec. 2-3 in the Domus Sanctae Marthae, the pope's residence, the Vatican press office said in a statement released Dec. 3.

The discussion on collegiality in the church and "the relationship between the particular churches and ecclesial assemblies" was led by Cardinal Marcello Semeraro, prefect of the Dicastery for the Causes of Saints, who is not a member of the council, but served as its secretary from 2013 to 2020.

The council also discussed the recently concluded Synod of Bishops on synodality, the Vatican said. "In addition, the theme of the role of women in the church was explored, seeking a synthesis of the issues that emerged during the last four council sessions," the statement added.

At their meetings in December 2023 and February, April and June 2024, the pope and cardinals invited women experts — including religious sisters, a consecrated virgin and an Anglican bishop — to their meetings to continue conversations on the role of women in the church.

The council also dedicated time at their December meeting to discussing the implementation of Francis' 2022 apostolic constitution "Praedicate Evangelium" ("Preach the Gospel") in dioceses.

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The pope and cardinals discussed the work of a study group on the role of nuncios and other representatives "in a synodal perspective," the statement said. The study group, one of 10 established by Francis to explore topics raised at the synod, is being led by Cardinal Oswald Gracias of Mumbai, India, a council member.

In the final document of the synod on synodality, assembly members suggested the church needs to find ways to evaluate the work of papal nuncios and officials of the Roman Curia to promote transparency and accountability.

"As always, the council was an opportunity for an overall reflection on the situation of the church and the world in the cardinals' various areas of origin, to share concerns and hopes about the current conditions of conflict and crisis," the Vatican statement said.

The council currently has one member each from South America, Asia and Africa, two from North America and five from Europe including the pope, who is bishop of Rome.

In addition to Cardinal Gracias, the members of the council are: Cardinals Gérald C. Lacroix of Québec; Juan José Omella Omella of Barcelona; Seán P. O'Malley of Boston; Fridolin Ambongo Besungu of Kinshasa, Congo; Pietro Parolin, Vatican secretary of state; Sérgio da Rocha of São Salvador da Bahia, Brazil; Fernando Vérgez Alzaga, president of the commission governing Vatican City State; and Jean-Claude Hollerich of Luxembourg.

The next meeting of the council is scheduled for April 2025.