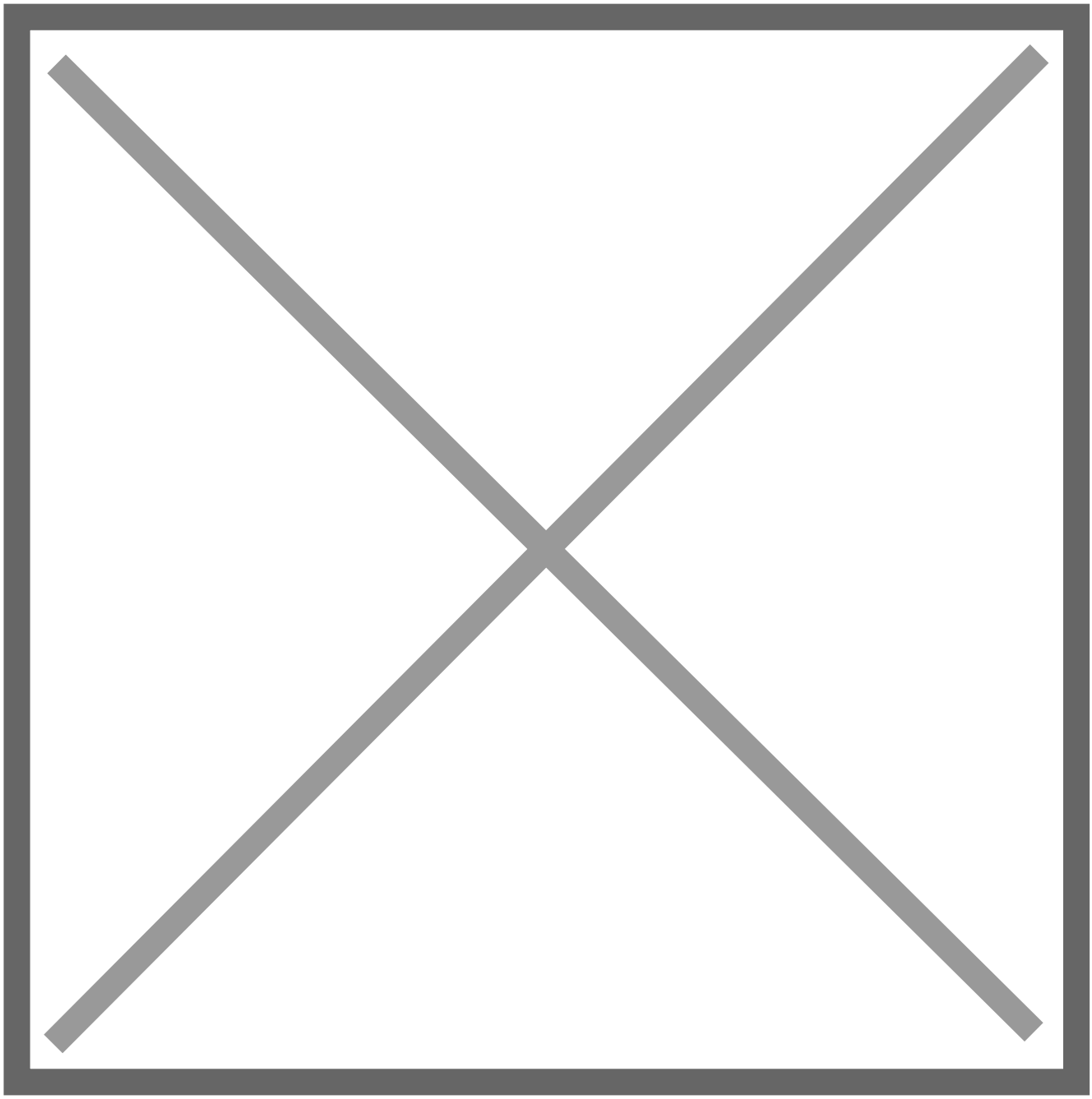
Vatican
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Pope Leo XIV, with regional representatives of synod teams, listens to and answers questions from participants in the Jubilee of Synodal Teams and Participatory Bodies in the Vatican audience hall Oct. 24, 2025. (CNS/Vatican Media)

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A Synod on Synodality study group has recommended the creation of a new "Pontifical Commission for Digital Culture and New Technologies" in the first of 15 synod study group reports expected in the coming weeks.

The Vatican published the first two final reports from its Synod on Synodality study groups on March 3.

The first report contains recommendations on navigating the Church's presence in digital spaces, including a proposal for a Vatican office or commission to monitor emerging theological, pastoral and canonical questions; prepare guidelines and training strategies for bishops, priests, religious and laypeople; and support bishops' conferences in integrating digital mission into their pastoral plans.

The second report focuses on guidelines for the formation of future priests and includes a call for more women to play a role in aiding the formation of seminarians for the priesthood. The report also lists 26 real world examples of "best practices" from seminaries around the world.

In one of the examples, the report points to how almost all seminaries in France now include at least one woman on their seminary council with voting rights, after a 2021 directive from the country's bishops. In one French seminary, a married couple, a marriage counselor and her retired husband, married 39 years with six children, lives in the seminary as an integral part of its formation team alongside six priests.

Pope Leo XIV directed that the study group reports be made public, according to the General Secretariat of the Synod, "in order to share with the entire People of God the fruit of the reflection and discernment undertaken, thereby giving concrete expression to one of the essential characteristics of the synodal Church: transparency and accountability."

Cardinal Mario Grech, the secretary general of the Synod of Bishops, noted the final reports "are to be understood as working documents, a point of departure rather than arrival," but said they "already contain valuable indications … from which local Churches and various ecclesial realities may draw inspiration from this very moment."

The General Secretariat of the Synod will publish 13 more study group final reports, according to its website, with the next batch expected March 10.

The study groups were established by Pope Francis following the first session of the Synod on Synodality in October 2023. Twelve groups were originally formed to examine issues raised at that assembly, including women’s participation in the Church, the role of papal nuncios and the liturgy in a synodal perspective.

The groups, composed of cardinals, bishops, priests and lay experts from both inside and outside the Vatican, had originally been asked to submit their conclusions by June 2025. After the death of Francis and the election of Leo last year, the new pope extended the deadline, requesting final reports be delivered "insofar as possible" by Dec. 31, 2025.

The proposals drawn from all of the final reports will be submitted to Leo, who will evaluate and may approve them, the secretariat said.

The 26-page final report from the study group on the Church's mission in the digital environment provided recommendations both at the diocesan level and for the bishops' conferences and Roman Curia to better serve the needs of people online.

The report reflected on feedback gathered from Catholics throughout the global synod process, citing clergy who said they felt "ill-equipped to navigate digital spaces."

The report called on appropriate Vatican bodies to study potential canonical adaptations to accommodate what it termed "supraterritorial digital realities,"

acknowledging that online ministry often goes beyond traditional geographic diocesan boundaries. The group noted that "much more consultation and discernment remains to be done regarding jurisdictional issues."

Additional Vatican-level proposals included developing guidelines on digital risks such as polarization and manipulation, fostering international networks of those engaged in digital mission, and creating a Church-wide digital resource hub.

The group's recommendations emphasized that digital spaces represent genuine terrain for evangelization. Local churches, it said, should affirm digital culture as "a real space for mission, where true human relationships occur." The report also cautioned that "mainstream digital platforms are not neutral but have algorithms that may hinder the spread of positive messages."

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The second report, a 24-page document, provided guidelines and recommendations for how seminarians are formed, including closer immersion in parish life, the inclusion of women in the process of formation, and greater lay involvement in decisions about priestly candidates.

Rather than issuing a wholesale revision of the 2016 *Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis*, a document from the Congregation for the Clergy on priestly formation, which the synod secretariat said the group judged as "still valid in its fundamental principles," the study group produced a guiding document for its implementation in a "missionary synodal key."

Among its key guidelines, the report called for priestly formation to be immersed in the life of the Christian community, with the possibility of alternating traditional seminary residence with periods living in parish communities or other ecclesial environments, particularly during later stages of formation. The document specified this should not prolong the overall formation period.

The report called on seminaries to include "well-prepared and competent women as co-responsible at all levels of formation, also within the formation team, in order to benefit from their indispensable contribution to vocational discernment and to the accompaniment of candidates to the priesthood."

Responsibility for the formation of future priests, the document said, "cannot remain limited to the Bishop and those directly given the task of formation, but requires the contribution of the entire People of God." It called for bishops to promote listening and interaction among people of different vocations in drafting national formation plans, and said the People of God should be "truly listened to" before the conferral of Holy Orders.

The document includes 26 real-world best practice examples from seminaries around the world. Among those highlighted: a program in eight U.S. dioceses focused on healing wounds caused by the excessive use of technology and family breakdown, centered on an eight-day silent retreat and a small-group chastity program; and a Nigerian seminary that requires seminarians to perform all maintenance work and cleaning of their seminary building to "experience the dignity of human labor."

The report also outlined a three-year action plan under the supervision of the Dicastery for the Clergy, in which each episcopal conference could establish a working group to oversee implementation of synodal elements in its seminaries. Comprehensive reports would be submitted to the dicastery at the end of the three-year period, which would compile a summary report for the pope.

With the submission of their final reports, both study groups have concluded their mandates and are considered dissolved. The General Secretariat of the Synod and the competent Vatican dicasteries will now work to translate the findings into proposals to be submitted to the pope.